
Week 15: Semantics & Pragmatics

Solutions

- (1) For each of the following sentences, state the implicature that it gives rise to, and name one maxim that plays a role in giving rise to this implicature, describing its effect in 1-2 sentences.

(a) Mary did well on some of her assignments

Implicature: Mary didn't do well on all of her assignments

This depends on the maxim of quantity. If the speaker had meant "all", they would have said "all"; so they probably meant "some but not all".

(b) (A: Have you finished grading the exam?)
B: I've finished grading the homework

Implicature: I haven't finished grading the exam

This depends on the maxim of relevance. If the speaker is cooperative, they wouldn't be providing irrelevant information. By saying something entirely irrelevant, B is indicating she doesn't want to talk about this.

Note: for these there are other acceptable answers! You'd just need to provide a convincing argument.

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- (2) In B's contribution to the fragment of dialogue below, how is the "speaker meaning" different from the "sentence meaning", and (briefly) why?

A: What is your evaluation of X as a programmer?

B: They always come to work on time, and keep their desk neat and clean

B's sentence meaning is that X comes to work on time and keeps their desk neat and clean. B's speaker meaning, conveyed by implicature, is that X is a bad programmer.

Principle of Relevance.

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- (3) Which of the following is true of Grice's maxims?

- (a) They are based on the assumption that speakers are cooperative
- (b) They are best understood as advice for good communication
- (c) They are never flouted
- (d) None of the above

(a) – Grice’s maxims are statements about how cooperative speakers behave.

Grice’s theory is not meant prescriptively as a guide to communicating (b) or as a statement about how speakers always behave (c). Maxims are violated when people lie or tell jokes, for example.

(4) Ambiguity

- (a) Provide an example of an ambiguous word and describe two of its meanings

**e.g. bank ‘financial institution’ vs bank ‘side of a river’
window ‘pane of glass’ vs window ‘opening in which the pane of glass sits’**

- (b) State whether this is a case of polysemy or homophony

In this case, bank/bank is homophony (the words accidentally sound the same but are not related) and window/window is polysemy (the words are related in meaning).

(5) Provide a hyponym of the noun **fruit**

e.g. apple, banana, orange...

(6) For each of the following pairs of sentences, indicate which of the specified semantic relations hold (this could be none, one, or more in any given case):

- (a) i. No linguistics student got an F (i) entails (ii) (ii) entails (i) contradictory
- ii. Every student got an F

If every student got an F, there are no linguistics students who didn’t get an F.

- (b) i. Every professor likes books (i) entails (ii) (ii) entails (i) contradictory
- ii. Every professor likes long books

If every professor likes long books, and long books are examples of books, every professor must like books.

- (c) i. Most breads contain wheat (i) entails (ii) (ii) entails (i) contradictory
 ii. Most baked goods contain wheat

None; it could be true that most baked goods contain wheat, but most breads are part of the set of baked goods that don't contain wheat.

- (d) i. John didn't leave the room (i) entails (ii) (ii) entails (i) contradictory
 ii. John stayed in the room

If John didn't leave the room, he stayed in the room, and vice versa.

- (7) For each meaning paraphrase below, write in the first blank word that has that meaning and in the second (and third if present) a differently spelled homophone that has a different meaning. The first line is filled in for illustration.

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|---------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| (a) 'A pair' | two | too | to |
| (b) 'Naked' | bare | bear | |
| (c) 'Eight bits' | byte | bite | |
| (d) 'A horse's coiffure' | mane | main | Maine |
| (e) 'Purity of gold unit' | karat | carrot | (caret) |
| (f) 'One of five senses' | sight | site | cite |