

Pragmatic enrichment: Introduction by example

Chris Potts, Ling 390a: Controlling the Discourse, Fall 2007

Sep 10

1 Task

Work through the examples in section 4 that your group was assigned. Each one is accompanied by some questions. Answer those as a group.

2 Goals

- Get better acquainted with pragmatic data.
- Begin thinking about pragmatic enrichment.
- See if we can develop generalizations that get at our implicit knowledge of pragmatics.

This is also a good chance to get a sense for what group work will be like.

3 Final products

- Each group turns in a single completed worksheet with all the group member's names at the top.
- At 10:45, we will go around the room to hear about what the groups discovered. So you should think about what your group will present, and you might designate a spokesperson.

Note Examples (6) and (9) are from LanguageAndLaw.org. Examples (1) and (4) are from the book *Speaking of Crime*, by Lawrence Solan and Peter Tiersma. The transcript of (8) can be found at http://atrios.blogspot.com/2005_03_27_atrios_archive.html#111219748264256220.

4 Examples

Group 1

(1) John and Mary have recently started going together. Valentino is Mary's ex-boyfriend. One evening, John asks Mary, "Have you seen Valentino this week?" Mary answers, "Valentino's been sick with mononucleosis for the past two weeks." Valentino has in fact been sick with mononucleosis for the past two weeks, but it is also the case that Mary had a date with Valentino the night before.

- i. What is your guess about what Mary intended to communicate with her answer?

- ii. Did Mary lie?

(2) A and B are talking about their mutual friend Jones.
A: Does Jones have a new girlfriend?
B: He's been spending a lot of time in New York.

- i. What is your guess about what Speaker B intended to communicate with his answer?

- ii. What might have stopped Speaker B from just replying "Yes" or "No"?

(3) A newspaper review of a newly opened play says that, in the third act, "Soap opera star Rachel Singer produced a series of sounds corresponding closely to the score of an aria from Rigoletto."

- i. What do you conclude from this about Rachel Singer's performance?

- ii. The author of the review seems to deliberately avoid using some form? What form, and how does it compare to the one he actually used?

Group 2

Speakers A and B have the following little conversation:

A: I lost a twenty dollar bill — do you know where it is?

(4)

B: I saw it on the floor somewhere.

Speaker A later discovers that B picked up A's \$20 from the floor and spent the whole of it on gumballs.

i. What is your guess about what Speaker B intended to communicate with her answer?

ii. Did Speaker B lie?

Car Talk (March 31, 2002):

On the radio show *Car Talk*, one of the hosts read the following joke, purportedly taken from an evaluation sheet filled in by students at the end of a college course:

(5)

Q: "How would you describe the quality of the textbook?"

A: "Very high. It is printed on the very best paper and beautifully bound."

i. Is this the sort of information that the evaluation sheet was asking for?

ii. What is your guess about what the student intended to communicate with his answer?

The opening of a Will:

I, HELEN HOOVER, of the Town of Goleta, County of Santa Barbara and State of California, do hereby make, publish and declare this as and for my Last Will and Testament, hereby revoking all wills and codicils thereto heretofore by me made.

(6)

i. Why not just say, "I, Helen Hoover, declare that this is my will and revoke any previous wills." What is the advantage of using such cumbersome prose in this context?

Group 3

From the detective show *Monk* (approximate from ‘Mr. Monk goes to the Carnival’). The subject is whether Mr. Monk, who earlier had a nervous breakdown, is ready to be put back on the police force. Stottlemeyer is Monk’s friend and former captain.

- (7)
- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Commission member | Is Mr. Monk ready to be put back on the force? |
| Stottlemeyer | Mr. Monk has <i>excellent</i> instincts. |
| Commission member | Yes, but is he ready to be reinstated? |
| Stottlemeyer | He is an <i>excellent</i> investigator. |
| Commission member | Captain, please. . . |

- i. Why won’t Stottlemeyer answer the question?

At a May 2004 Senate hearing, this exchange took place:

- (8)
- Senator Jack Reed (D-RI)** General Sanchez, today’s USA Today, sir, reported that you ordered or approved the use of sleep deprivation, intimidation by guard dogs, excessive noise and inducing fear as an interrogation method for a prisoner in Abu Ghraib prison. Is that correct?

General Sanchez Sir, that may be correct that it’s in a news article, but I never approved any of those measures to be used within CJTF-7 at any time in the last year.

- i. Note the final *within* clause of Sanchez’s reply. What does it contribute to the overall message he ends up sending?
- ii. What’s a good, or likely, follow-up question for Senator Reed to ask?

From a deed of trust (mortgage paperwork):

- (9)
- Borrower covenants that Borrower is lawfully seised of the estate hereby conveyed and has the right to grant and convey the Property and that the Property is unencumbered, except of the encumbrances of record. Borrower warrants and will defend generally the title to the Property against all claims and demands, subject to any encumbrances of record.

- i. This text is full of antiquated and obscure prose. Why might such language be used for official documents like this?