

Pragmatics in English

Pragmatics – the study of language in context, and of how we understand what other people say – is a core subject in English language, linguistics, and communication studies. This textbook introduces the key topics in this fast-moving field, including metaphor, irony, politeness, disambiguation, and reference assignment. It walks the reader through the essential theories in pragmatics, including Grice, relevance theory, speech act theory, and politeness theory. Each chapter includes a range of illustrative examples, guiding readers from the basic principles to a thorough understanding of the topics. A dedicated chapter examines how research is conducted in pragmatics, providing students with resources and ideas for developing their own projects. Featuring exercises, a comprehensive glossary, and suggestions for further reading, this book is accessible to beginner undergraduates, including those with no prior knowledge of linguistics. It is an essential resource for courses in English language, English studies, and linguistics.

Kate Scott is an associate professor and school director of research at Kingston University, London, and has over ten years' experience of teaching English language, linguistics, and pragmatics at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She is the author of *Pragmatics Online* (2022) and *Referring Expressions, Pragmatics, and Style* (2019), and co-editor of *Relevance, Pragmatics and Interpretation* (2019, with Robyn Carston and Billy Clark).

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Pragmatics in English

An Introduction

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Kingston University

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For Deirdre

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Preface

I was introduced to the field of pragmatics whilst studying for my MA in linguistics at University College London (UCL) in 2003. I have been learning and teaching pragmatics ever since. Over that time, I've taught pragmatics at undergraduate and postgraduate levels across three different institutions. My aim in writing this book has always been to create a learning and teaching resource that I would have found most helpful as a teacher. The explanations, discussions, and questions in this book have been developed out of my teaching experiences. I have done my best to pre-empt common misunderstandings and confusions, and I have used the analogies and examples that I have found to work most effectively in the classroom.

Pragmatics is a wide field, and no one textbook will ever be able to cover all the ideas that fall under the broad pragmatics umbrella. This book's focus on theoretical pragmatics reflects my background as a relevance-theorist. I have, however, tried to include a range of approaches that students and other interested readers can use to think about and analyse language in context. The book is designed to accompany a ten-to-twelve-week university module in pragmatics. I have presented the topics in the order that I would teach them, and many of the examples and exercises are taken directly from my own teaching materials. The chapters can be followed in the order in which they appear, and this should provide an overview of issues and approaches in theoretical pragmatics. However, I have also tried to make each chapter useful as a standalone discussion of a topic, and readers are encouraged to dip in and out, as they find most useful. The final chapter is designed to support students who are conducting projects in pragmatics.

Finally, following a convention from the pragmatics literature, I refer to speakers as 'she' and hearers as 'he'. This is simply to help track referents through a discussion, and no further significance is intended.

Acknowledgements

I have been incredibly lucky to have been taught pragmatics by some wonderful teachers over the years. My thanks go to Robyn Carston, Tim Wharton, and, of course, Deirdre Wilson for their knowledge, insights, and patience.

I also owe a huge debt of thanks to the students that I've taught over the years at UCL, Middlesex University, and Kingston University. Many of their names appear in the examples in this book. It may be a cliché to say that you don't really know a subject until you have taught it, but I find it to be true, and my students have been invaluable in helping me to truly know, understand, and love pragmatics.

I feel incredibly lucky to be part of a network of amazing linguists, researchers, and educators, many of whom have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the materials in this book. Particular thanks go to Ryoko Sasamoto and Billy Clark who have always been so generous with their ideas, time, and feedback.

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