Pragmatics: Introduction and definitions

Pragmatics: the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener

- analysis of what people mean
- requires study of circumstances = study of contextual meaning: how more is communicated than what is said

- differentiation of what is said/unsaid involves distance
- closeness implies shared experience

Æ pragmatics: the study of the expression of relative distance (Yule 2002)

Pragmatics investigates the relationship between linguistic forms and their uses (purpose, goal, intention)

- use of language for interaction = the interpersonal function

Æ interaction usually has a communicative intention
- cf. small talk, phatic function of language

Speech acts 1

People perform actions with utterances

You are welcome!

Common label: apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, request

Æ supported by circumstances of utterance = speech event
cf. cold day, speaker sips tea = “That tea is cold” – complaint
cold day, speaker sips (ice-) tea = “That tea is cold” – compliment
Æ no 1:1 correspondence of utterance/action, circumstances are important

Austin 1952: recognized that speakers “perform” when using performatives
Æ but speakers always “perform” => speech act theory
Æ utterance consists of 3 related acts

Speech acts 2

1. locutionary act: basic act of utterance, of producing a meaningful linguistic expression

Æ usually well-formed utterances have a purpose

2. illocutionary act: utterance is produced with some function in mind

Æ utterance has communicative force

Can be: statement/offer/explanation, = its illocutionary force

3. perlocutionary act: utterance should have an effect

Æ illocution; tells what utterance “counts as”

Speech acts 3

Illocutionary force

a.) I’ll see you later
b.) I predict that a.) prediction
c.) I promise you that a.) promise
d.) I warn you that a.) threat

Æ illocutionary force indicating device (IFID)

Æ performative verbs (predict, promise, warn)
Æ sometimes less explicit, sometimes its stress, sometimes low voice for warnings etc.

Felicity conditions

Conditions/circumstances that accompany the performance of a speech act
Æ ensure it is recognized as intended, e.g. courtroom situation, judge says “I sentence you...”

Speech acts 4

General felicity conditions

- participants understand language, don’t “act” like actors or lie permanently

Æ content condition: cf. promise, warning must be about future

Æ reparatory condition: e.g. promise, this means the event will not happen by itself

Æ sincerity condition: promise => speaker really intends to carry it out

Æ essential condition: promise changes state of speaker from obligation to non-obligation

Performative hypothesis

- underlying every utterance is a clause containing a performative that makes illocution explicit
- “I hereby V_perform you that <utterance>”

Æ implicit performatives explicit performatives

Æ performative hypothesis