

Lingua Inglese 1

Lecture 4

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Pragmatic Comprehension

- It has to do with the series of processes during which language users assign particular conventional acts to each other's utterances
- How do hearers actually know when the speaker thereby makes a promise or a threat?

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Pragmatic Comprehension (2)

- Properties of the structure of the utterance (as assigned on the basis of grammatical rules)
- Para-linguistic properties, such as speed, stress, pitch, intonation etc. on the one hand and gestures, facial expressions, bodily movements on the other
- Actual observation/perception of the communicative context
- Knowledge/beliefs in memory about the speaker and his properties or about the properties of the current situation
 - Knowledge/beliefs about the type of interaction going on, and the structure of preceding contexts of interaction
 - Knowledge/beliefs derived from previous parts of discourse, both at the micro (or local) level and at the macro (global) level
- General semantic, in particular conventional knowledge about (inter)action rules – esp. those of pragmatics
- World knowledge - Frames

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Context Analysis

- Before language users are able to match incoming information against more general linguistic and other knowledge in memory, they must analyse the **context** against which a certain speech act is performed
- In a pragmatic situation, not only do we establish the context out of the situation, but we also have schemata for the analysis of such context
- Initial context with respect to which a speech act is to be interpreted contains three kinds of information
 - General semantic information (frames, memory)
 - Final state information from immediately preceding events
 - Global (macro-) information about the whole previous interaction structures/processes

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Context Analysis (2)

- Pragmatic contexts are hierarchically structured. More particularly, the hierarchy is defined in social terms > speech acts are an integral part of social interaction
- The hierarchy structure of society allows us to determine which units (institutions, roles, actions) and relations are determined by those of higher level
- In order to determine whether a speech act is appropriate we must first of all be aware of the general social setting in which the interaction takes place and of the more specific or ad hoc particulars of this setting, i.e. actual properties of the speech participants

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Introducing Some Key Notions

- **Context:** a frame surrounding the event under analysis, and providing resources for its interpretation.
- It is a composite notion and can be further subdivided depending on the operative purposes at stake:
 - **Situational (or physical) Context:** what speakers know about the situation, about what is around them
 - **Background Context:** referring to notions such as common ground (Clark 1996), it has to do with the shared assumptions of the speakers, i.e. what they know about each other (**interpersonal**) and the world (**cultural**)
 - The **Cotext**, or linguistic context. It is the most direct manifestation of context in discourse and concerns the language surrounding a given passage

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Introducing Some Key Notions (2)

- The identification of the **cotext** has to do with the disambiguation of references
 - A: I went with Francesca and David.
 - B: Uhuh?
 - A: Francesca's room-mate. And Alice's – a friend of Alice's from London. There were six of us. We did a lot of hill walking.
 - B: Uhm
- *Us* and *we* refer back to Francesca, David, the room-mate and the friend all mentioned elsewhere in the text. The interlocutors assume that everyone in the conversation has enough shared knowledge in order to identify the various participants

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Social Context Analysis

- Social context analysis begins at the level of the general social context, which can be characterised by the following categories
 - **Private**
 - **Public**
 - **Institutional /Formal**
 - **Informal**
- They define different kinds of social context, e.g. public institutions such as court, traffic or hospitals, public 'informal' places such as restaurants or buses, private institutions such as families and private informal settings, such as talking to friends

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Social Context Analysis (2)

- Each category is in turn defined by
 - Positions (roles, status)
 - Properties (sex, age)
 - Relations (dominance, authority)
 - Functions (father, waitress, judge)
- These properties of social context define the possible actions of the social members in their respective contexts
 - In the general institution of court, we have several chronologically ordered frames, such as the charge-frame, the defense-frame, and the judgement-conviction frame, in which members are assigned specific functions/positions, properties and relations

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An Example of Analysis

“May I see your ticket, please?”

- Social Context type: Institutional. Public
- Institution: Public transport
- Frame: Ticket inspection
- Frame Structure
 - Setting: Train (during operation)
 - Functions: F(x) Official ticket inspector, G(y) passenger
- Properties: X has visible signs of being inspector of the company; X actually performs his task of ticket inspection; y is the ticket holder
- Relations: F(x) has authority over G(y)

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An Example of Analysis (2)

- Positions: y is checked by x
- Frame Conventions:
 - Each passenger must have a valid ticket when on means of public transport
 - Each passenger must show his ticket upon request to officials of the railroad company
 - A passenger without ticket will be fined
 - It belongs to the duties of ticket inspector to inspect tickets
- Contextual course of action:
 - Macro-action: y takes train to Z
 - Previous acts: y went to the station, y bought a ticket, y entered carriage, y looks at/hears inspector, y begins search for ticket

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An Example of Analysis (3)

- “Let me carry your suitcase!”**
- Social Context type: Informal. Private
 - Frame: meet somebody (at arrival)
 - Frame Structure
 - Setting: railway station. Platform
 - Functions: x host, y guest
 - Properties: X is strong enough to carry suitcase; Y may be tired or has difficulties;
 - Relations: x knows y; x is there to meet y

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An Example of Analysis (4)

- Positions: y is helper of y
- Frame Conventions:
 - If x meets y at arrival, x should be friendly with y
 - If y has difficulties accomplishing a task, x should offer help
 - Heavy luggage is sufficient reason to offer help
- Contextual course of action:
 - Macro-action: Arrival of y. Y being met by x
 - Previous acts: y prepared for arrival, y got out of the train, y looked for x, y walks to x