PRAGMATICS 1
The cats play here. They make a mess.

**PRAGMATICS**

**SYNTAX**

the + cats + play
cats, the, play

**MORPHOLOGY**

cat + s
cat, -s

**PHONOLOGY**

/k + □ + t  // □ + □  // s /
Pragmatics is the study of:

- language in context
- language use
- meaning in communication
- the use of natural language in communication
- the study of the relations between languages and their users


- how...literal and non-literal aspects of ...linguistic meaning are determined by principles that refer to the physical or social context...in which language is used

- the ways in which context contributes to meaning
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragmatics
Pragmatics involves communication between people and, therefore, includes the human element in particular intentions and interpretations.
'We communicate more than we say explicitly.' (Poole 1999: 34)

Central issue in pragmatics

The disparity between:

a) what we intend to communicte and

b) what we actually say
Sentence and utterance

sentence (an abstract entity):
a string of words independent of (non-linguistic) context

utterance: (a concrete entity)
a specific instance of speech in a specific context
abstraction and instantiation

phoneme ↔ phone
morpheme ↔ morph
lexeme ↔ word
sentence ↔ utterance
Grammatical and felicitous/appropriate

Grammatical properties
John places his laptop in the mug and leaves.

1. Correct word order for English (SVO)
*John in the mug his laptop places and leaves.

2. Correct grammatical agreement
*John place his laptop in the mug and leave.
3. Subject of second clause understood as equivalent to subject of first clause, i.e. John.

John places his laptop in the mug and he (John) leaves.
However, although grammatically perfectly correct, we still realise it's a rather odd statement.

Why?

How could we 'repair' it?
What's odd!

Odd because, from what we know about laptops and mugs:

1. laptops are too big to fit in mugs (or, vice-versa, mugs are too small to fit in laptops);
2. we do not usually use mugs to carry laptops in;
3. we usually put liquids in mugs, and laptops are solid.

This is common sense, world knowledge NOT linguistic knowledge.
How could we 'repair' it?

1. By assuming this is a story in a fantasy world.

2. By assuming that the speaker/writer made a mistake ('bag' instead of 'mug'?)

NB. 'Repairing' only makes sense if we assume that the speaker wants to and is able to communicate something reasonable.

We could also assume he/she was just trying to be funny! Or that he/she is mad! Or, perhaps, he/she doesn't know the language well.
Logic and meaning

Harry opened the door and the rat ran into the room.

What happened first?
Does this sentence describe the same situations the following?

The rat ran into the room and Harry opened the door.
Purely formally, however, the two sentences are logically equivalent.

In logic:  \( a \& b \leftrightarrow b \& a \)

**THEREFORE:**

**IF:**

Harry opened the door = \( a \)

the rat ran into the room = \( b \)

**AND**

\( a \& b \leftrightarrow b \& a \)

**THEN:**

Harry opened the door and the rat ran into the room.

**AND**

The rat ran into the room and Harry opened the door.

**ARE EQUIVALENT**
temporal sequence

However, we do not give them the same interpretation.

We assume (by convention) that the linear sequence of the sentences also implies a temporal sequence, such that \(a\) takes place before \(b\).

(see Yule 1996: 6-7)
Pragmatics is the study of:

- speaker meaning
- contextual meaning
- how more gets communicated than is said
- expressions of relative distance

Yule 1996: 3
Speaker meaning

What people mean by their utterance as opposed to what the individual words or phrases mean.
Communication

INTENTION

speaker

utterance

meaning

INTERPRETATION

listener
Contextual meaning

How people: organise what they want to say in accordance with who they are talking to, where, when and under what circumstances.

Yule 1996: 3
The communicative situation

place → utterance → listener

time

speaker

circumstances
How more gets communicated than is said

a lot is unsaid and understood 'from context'

listeners make inferences based on what they know about the speaker, the context, their world knowledge
Look at the following exchange. How do you interpret what's going on?

A: We're off!
B: Yes.

Who are the discourse participants?
Where are they?
What time of day is it?
How can you make sense of their exchange?
Expressions of relative distance

physical,
social,
conceptual
closeness

implies shared experience

The better you know somebody, the more knowledge you share, the less explicit you need to be
Shared social norms

People are social creatures: belong to social group, follow expected patterns of behaviour e.g. saying appropriate things, being polite

email:
Hi there professor! Do we have lecture tomorrow?

Bye XXX

Kirstin
Shared knowledge (and experience)

We do not always need to give all details:
E.g. I wanted to cook a meal but I ran out of gas.
Knowledge:
cooking involves heat
cooking can be done on a cooker;
often in Malta cookers work with gas;
the gas comes in large metal containers;
the amount of gas in a container is limited
etc...
I wanted to cook a meal. You cook meals by heating up the food, i.e. vegetables, or meat etc. You can cook on a gas cooker. A gas cooker runs on gas. The gas comes from a metal container. I had a gas container. I thought it still had gas in it. The gas in a container is limited by space. I ran out of gas. As a result, I couldn't cook the meal.

N.B. The language correct but not meaningful in a 'normal' context.
- Grammatically correct but pragmatically inappropriate.
The communicative situation:

the speaker implies X
the listener infers Z

shared knowledge
shared assumption
context
Implication/implicature

A: John's new car is parked in front of his house

Implies:
(a) John has a car
(b) it is new
(c) it is parked in front of his house
(d) John is at home

(a) – (c) cannot be invalidated, i.e., hold true by virtue of sentence meaning (otherwise we'd have to assume that speaker lied)

However, if B saw that John had left the house: invalidates (d) (speaker did not lie)
Our interpretation of utterances is based on the assumption that, in communicating, people are being helpful.