

C2.1 – MTSL

(Week 10)

PRAGMATIC FACTORS

TASK 1: INTRODUCTION TO TEXT TYPES

Worksheet 1:

The introductory block of text below(What he says...) has been taken from a feature article in Cosmopolitan magazine. Beneath it, some examples of “malespeak” from the magazine have been written out for you. Next to each example, two different situations in which the sentence might be spoken are given. In the spaces provided, write your “translation” of what a man might actually mean in each case.

what he says **(what he really thinks)**

It's been puzzling women for centuries — the unfathomable gulf between what he says and what he means. Now, after a lifetime of study, our linguistic experts have managed to decode some common examples of malespeak.

1. He says, “Your mother’s a real character.”

a) He’s just received a \$1000 college graduation present from her.

He means: _____

b) He’s just spent the entire evening listening to her criticize men.

He means: _____

2. He says, "We can still be friends."

- a) He's talking to you, his girlfriend, about his future relationship with you.

He means: _____

- b) He's talking to you about his current relationship with his ex-girlfriend.

He means: _____

3. He says, "I admire your honesty."

- a) You've just told him that you found an un marked envelope on the street with \$500 dollars in it and turned it into the police.

He means: _____

- b) You've just confessed to him that when you first met him you didn't find him attractive at all.

He means: _____

4. He says, "You don't need to come all the way over here."

- a) He's ill and has nobody to take care of him.

He means: _____

- b) He's planning to watch a football match and you've just offered to go over to his place and make him dinner.

He means: _____

5. He says, "Is there any beer in the fridge?"

- a) He's sprawled out on your couch watching a football match.

He means: _____

- b) His brother, an alcoholic who is trying to kick the habit, is coming over for dinner.

He means: _____

6. He says, "I'll do it later."

- a) You've just asked him for the fourth time to take the dog out for a walk.

He means: _____

- b) He's taking you out for your birthday. You have just expressed your concern that the evening out is going to take valuable time away from the project he's in a rush to complete for work.

He means: _____

TASK 2: HIDDEN MESSAGES



Text 1:

Imagine that you have just received a parcel with the letter below attached to it. The parcel contained a delicate porcelain vase which belonged to your recently deceased grandmother. It was of great sentimental value to you. Attached to the parcel was the following letter. Read the letter and then go on to Worksheet 2, below.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Dear Postal Customer:

The enclosed has been damaged in handling by the Postal Service.

We are fully aware that the mail you receive is important to you. Realizing this, each employee in the Postal Service is making every effort to expeditiously handle, without damage, each piece of mail with which USPS is entrusted. Nevertheless, an occasional mishap will occur.

The Postal Service handles approximately 177 billion pieces of mail each year. It is necessary, therefore, that highly sophisticated mechanical/electrical systems be utilized by the Postal Service to insure our customers prompt delivery of their mail. At times a malfunction will occur, the result of which is a damaged piece of mail.

We are constantly working to improve our processing methods so that these incidences will be eliminated. You can help us greatly in our efforts if you will continue to properly prepare and address each letter or parcel that you enter into the mail stream.

We appreciate your cooperation and understanding and sincerely regret any inconvenience you have experienced.

Your Postmaster



Worksheet 2:

Questions 1-4 are for discussion. Question 5 is to be written.

1. What would your initial reaction to the circumstances be, before reading the letter? How would you be feeling? Would you be contemplating taking any kind of action? If so, what kind of action?
2. If you had been contemplating taking some kind of action before reading the letter, how might your feelings change after reading it? If you still planned to take action, would you feel that you were more or less likely to succeed in achieving some kind of satisfaction or retribution? Why?
3. Is the Postal Service being as apologetic as you would like, under the circumstances? What image does the Postal Service seek to convey of itself? How does it do this? Underline any specific parts of the letter which contribute to building the desired image.
4. What does the letter imply about whose fault the damages are? What part or parts of the letter implicitly refer to fault?
5. In 30-40 words, restate the underlying message of this letter in plain, direct language.

THEORETICAL NOTIONS:

In considering the pragmatic dimension of context, the text is to be viewed as an act of “doing things with words”, and factors such as 1) speech acts; 2) assumed shared knowledge and 3) implicature, must be taken into account. At the same time, it should be remembered that the overall interest of pragmatics to readers in general and translators in particular is the fact that this branch of linguistics provides a theoretical tool with which to explain that there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between the real meaning of a text and that of its superficial linguistic formulation. In other words, pragmatics explains how and why we “read between the lines”.

Speech Acts

Austin (1962) postulated that language usage is a form of action and that linguistic utterances may be examined in terms of three related aspects or acts, namely:

- 1) **a locutionary act**, or the act of producing the utterance itself, using the necessary lexical, syntactic, and phonetic elements to do so
- 2) **an illocutionary act**, which is to be understood in terms of the illocutionary force or communicative purpose (stating, offering, warning, asking, etc.) of the utterance
- 3) **a perlocutionary act**, or the effect of the utterance on the receiver

Together, these three aspects of a linguistic utterance combine to form a *speech act*.

One of the most well-known attempts to classify the different types of speech acts we perform is that of Searle (1969), who provides the following taxonomy:

- 1) **representative acts**: acts performed when speakers or writers make statements they believe to be truthful representations of reality (stating, informing, diagnosing, predicting, describing, etc.)
- 2) **directive acts**: acts performed when speakers or writers wish to spur the listener or reader to action (requesting, ordering, forbidding, suggesting, asking, etc.)
- 3) **commissive acts**: acts performed when speakers or writers commit themselves to a future course of action (promising, guaranteeing, swearing, warning, offering, etc.)
- 4) **expressive acts**: acts performed when speakers or writers express their psychological point of view or emotional attitude towards a state of affairs (complaining, admiring, thanking, congratulating, wishing, etc.)
- 5) **declarative acts**: acts often performed within an institutional setting and whose very utterance constitutes an action with immediate, often legal consequences (sentencing, absolving, baptizing, nominating, declaring war, etc.)

Most relevant to the subject of text interpretation is the concept of *indirect speech acts*, i.e., when an utterance is presented in the form typical of one type of speech act, while its content or meaning actually corresponds to another. Thus, for example, an apparently expressive speech act reflected in the sentence “Man, it’s freezing in here!” spoken by a teacher in a classroom with an open window in wintertime, may be correctly interpreted as being directive in content (i.e., what is actually meant is “Would someone please close the window?”) Indirect speech acts are one way in which speakers and writers communicate something more than, or other than what their words indicate on the surface.

Implicature

The logician and philosopher Grice (1975) is known for his derivation of the *cooperative principle of communication*, according to which speakers (and writers) conventionally cooperate with their speech partners (or readers) by adhering to the rules outlined in the following maxims:

1. **Maxim of quantity**: Be as informative as necessary (no more, no less).
2. **Maxim of quality**: Tell the truth. Do not give false information or make statements which cannot be backed up with evidence.

3. **Maxim of relevance:** Be relevant.
4. **Maxim of manner:** Be clear, be orderly, avoid unnecessary prolixity and obscurity of expression.

Intentional violations of the maxims outlined here on the part of the speaker or writer lead to what is known as *implicature*, or the conveying of information not to be derived directly from the words used. Thus, irony is an example of implicature resulting from non-adherence to the maxim of quality, tautology an example of implicature resulting from flouting the maxim of quantity, and puns an example of implicature through violation of the maxim of manner. Translators, as critical readers, must be aware of any such apparent deviations from the maxims included in the cooperative principle governing communication in order to be able to “read between the lines” or infer meanings not explicitly formulated in texts. Furthermore, it is especially important to translators to be able to pinpoint the way in which implicatures are created in the source text if they are to have the option of preserving these nuances in translation.

Wrap-up

Same Words, New Intent

Rewrite each of the following utterances three times, keeping the *literal message the same* but changing the **pragmatic intent**:

1. Polite / Mitigated
2. Neutral / Informative
3. Face-threatening / Blunt

Then write one sentence explaining the linguistic strategy you used (e.g., hedging, boosting, indirectness, softeners, modals).

Utterances

1. “Could you send me the report?”
2. “We need to talk.”
3. “You didn’t include the attachment.”
4. “I’m not sure that’s the best idea.”
5. “Can you turn the music down?”
6. “This isn’t what I expected.”
7. “You’re late.”
8. “Let’s try that again.”