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COGNITIVE PRAGMATICS

academic year 2025/2026, summer semester

Lecture 1:

Two Models of Linguistic Communication: The Code Model and Inferentialism;
Coding and Mindreading as Cognitive Skills

What is pragmatics?

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→ indexical reference assignment

→ disambiguation

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→ implied meanings (implicatures)

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→ presuppositions (*background implications*)

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Unlike implicatures, presuppositions survive embedding under negation.

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→ indexical reference;
→ disambiguated meanings;
→ implicatures;
→ presuppositions;
→ …

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Two *mechanisms* or two *cognitive systems*:

- coding,
- inference.

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Wharton 2003: 464-465

- code$_1$ = a **(cognitive) system** which pairs a signal with a message, enabling two information-processing systems [→ the *sender* and the *receiver*] to communicate, i.e., to exchange messages;
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A MESSAGE IN THE SENDER'S DATA STORE

|

[encoding]

↓

A SIGNAL

|

[decoding]

↓

A MESSAGE IN THE RECEIVER'S DATA STORE

Shannon-Weaver (1949) model of communication

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An information source	—	where the message originates;
a transmitter (*encoder*)	—	which converts the message into a signal;
a communication channel	—	the medium through which the signal travels;
receiver (*decoder*)	—	which converts the signal back into the message;
information destination	—	the intended recipient of the message;
noise source	—	potential disturbances that can distort the signal.

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translating a message into a signal → *encoding*

translating the signal back into the message → *decoding*

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- Vervet monkeys' alarm calls;
- tigers' scratches;
- peacocks' tails.

Vervet monkeys and their alarm calls

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what the signaller perceives		***signal***		**predator avoidance behaviour**
a leopard	→	***L_*!!!**	→	running into treetops
an eagle	→	***E_*!!!**	→	looking up
a snake	→	***S_*!!!**	→	looking domw

These calls are *pushmi-pullyu representations* (Millikan 1995);

they are *functionally referential*.

Vervet monkeys and their alarm calls

Sound ***L_!!!*** of loudness X at location P_1 at time T_1

signals

the presence of a **leopard** of size Y at location P_2 at time T_2

Tigers and their scratches

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By marking the tree, it defines its territory boundaries
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Stability of this system?

→ The tiger's scratch marks are *indices*: signals difficult to fake
because of physical limitations on the organism (Green 2009).

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Pragmatics

→ context-dependent **aspects** of utterance meaning

indexical reference

implicatures

presuppositions

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Examples of code-based communication among non-human animals

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→ Peacocks' tails are *handicaps*: signals difficult to fake because of being costly to produce and maintain (Green 2009).

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→ Modular Theory
(Fodor 1983; Carston 2002;)

→ Evolutionary Psychology and Massive Modularity Hypothesis
(Cosmides and Tooby 1994; Pinker 1994; Pinker 1997/1998;
Wilson and Sperber 2012)

[!] Despite its impressive descriptive and explanatory power,
the code model fails to account for human communication.

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$\Rightarrow_1$ B will not go to the cinema with A tomorrow.

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>> B has a sister.

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[*irony*] B's sister is not independent. (⇒ ?)
B is disappointed in B's sister. [→ expression]

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- Human communication consists of *forming*, *expressing* (→ by speakers), and *inferentially recognizing* (→ by hearers) complex communicative intentions.
- Verbal comprehension involves a combination of *coding* and *mindreading* (Wilson & Sperber 2012).