



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI  
**PARthenope**

# Pragmatics

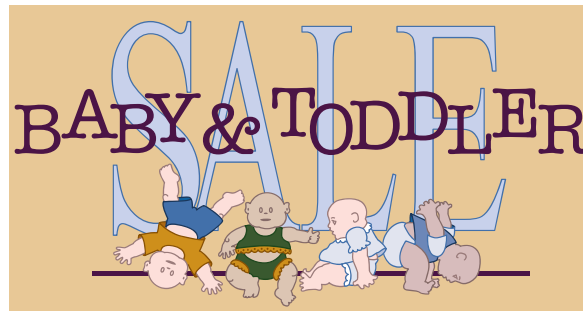
# Pragmatics

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- Communication depends on also recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances in a particular context
- The study of what speakers mean or “speaker meaning” is called **pragmatics**
  - In some sense, is the study of invisible meaning or how we recognize what is meant even when it is not actually said or written
- This means that speakers (or writers) must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations when they try to communicate
  - Investigating on that provide us some insight into how we understand more than just the linguistic content of utterances

# Context

- The meaning of the text is not in the words alone, but in what we think the writer intended to communicate in that context
- Let's consider the advertisement in the figure
  - We may think that someone is announcing the sale of some very young children
  - But we refuse that interpretation and assume that it is **clothes** for those children that are on sale
    - Yet the word **clothes** is nowhere in the message



- The influence of the context is crucial, here it is the **physical context**, the location where we encounter words and phrase
- Differently, in the **linguistic context**, the surrounding words, also known as co-text helps to understand what is meant

# Reference

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- Reference is an act by which a speaker (or writer) uses language to enable a listener (or reader) to identify something
  - Words themselves don't refer to anything, people refer
- To this aim, we can use proper nouns (*Chomsky, Jennifer, Ciro*), other nouns in phrases (*a writer, my friend, the cat*) or pronouns (*he, she, it*)
- These words identify someone or something uniquely, or for each word or phrase there is a “**range of reference**”
  - *Jennifer*, or *friend* or *she* can be used to refer to many entities in the world
- An expression such as *The war* doesn't directly identify anything by itself, because its reference depends on who is using it
- We can also refer to things when we are not sure what to call them
  - *The blue thing, that icky stuff*

# Reference

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- A successful act of reference depend also on the listener/reader's ability to recognize what the speaker/writer means
- The key process here is called **inference**
- Examples
  - **Where's the spinach salad sitting?** (ask a waiter), **He's sitting by the door** (replies a second waiter)
  - **Can I look at your Chomsky?** **Sure, it's on the shelf over there!**
  - **Jennifer is wearing Calvin Klein!**
- An inference is additional information used by the listener to create a connection between **what is said** and **what must be meant**

# Reference

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- We usually make a distinction between how we introduce new referents (*a puppy*) and how we refer back to them (*the puppy, it*)

*We saw a funny home video about a boy washing a puppy in a small bath.*

*The puppy started struggling and shaking and the boy got really wet.*

*When he let go, it jumped out of the bath and ran away.*

- The second (or subsequent) referring expression is an example of **anaphora** ("referring back")
  - The first mention is the **antecedent**
- **Anaphora**: a subsequent reference to an already introduced entity

# Reference

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- The connection between antecedents and anaphoric expressions is often based on inference

*We found a house to rent, but the kitchen was very small.*

*I got on a bus and asked the driver if it went near the downtown area.*

- First example: "*If X is a house, then X has a kitchen*"
- Second example: "*If X is a bus, then X has a driver*"
- In some case, the antecedent can be a verb
  - *The victim was **shot** twice, but **the gun** was never recovered*
    - Any "shooting" an event must involve a gun

# Presuppositions

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- When we talk about an assumption made by the speaker (or writer), we talk about **presupposition**
- In general, we design our linguistic messages based on large-scale assumptions about what our listeners already know
  - *What a speaker (or writer) assumes is true or known by a listener (or reader) is a **presupposition***
- Example:
  - *"Hey, your brother is looking for you"*
    - There is a presupposition that you have a brother
  - *"When did you stop smoking?"*
    - Two presuppositions: (1) you used to smoke; (2) you no longer do so



# Pragmatic markers

- Pragmatic markers are used to mark a speaker's attitude to the listener or to what is being said
    - Short forms such as *you know, well, I mean, I don't know*
      - *You know* -> used to indicate that the knowledge is being treated as shared
      - *I mean* -> used to self-correct or to mark an attempt to clarify something
- They had been reading something by Charles Wright, **you know**, the famous poet and **well, I mean**, he's famous in America at least, but em they didn't really understand it.*
- *I don't know* has evolved to become a marker of hesitation or uncertainty when a speaker is about to say something potentially in disagreement with another speaker
- LEE: *I'm not very fond of Edinburgh it's so drab and it's always cold there.*  
JEN: ***Oh, I don't know**, I really enjoyed going to the Festival there last year.*
- The speaker can signal a desire not to challenge the other speaker by appearing hesitant about disagreeing

# Speech acts

- The term speech act describes an action that involves language such as “requesting”, “commanding”, “questioning”, or “informing”
- Example: *I'll be there at six*
  - It's a kind of performing the speech act of *promising*
- **Speech act**: the action performed by a speaker with an utterance
- To understand how utterances can be used to perform actions we need to visualize a relationship between the structure of an utterance and the normal function of that utterance

	Structures	Functions
<i>Did you eat the pizza?</i>	Interrogative	Question
<i>Eat the pizza (please)!</i>	Imperative	Command (Request)
<i>You ate the pizza.</i>	Declarative	Statement