

# Pragmatics

**Pragmatics** is the branch of linguistics that studies those **aspects of meaning** which cannot be captured by **semantic theory**.

In brief, it deals with how speakers **use language** in ways which **cannot be predicted from linguistic knowledge** alone.

In a narrow sense, it deals with how **listeners arrive at the intended meaning of speakers**.

In its broadest sense, it deals with the **general principles followed by human beings when they communicate** with one another.

# Cooperative Principle



An American philosopher, **Paul Grice**, is sometimes regarded as the ‘**father of pragmatics**’. Grice emphasized that **human beings communicate efficiently because they are by nature helpful to one another**. He attempted to specify the **principles** which underlie this **cooperative behaviour**, and proposed four ‘maxims’ or rules of conversation:

1. *Maxim of quantity*
2. *Maxim of quality*
3. *Maxim of relevance*
4. *Maxim of manner*

# Cooperative Principle



**1 Maxim of quantity:** Give the right amount of information when you talk.

If someone at a party asked ‘Who’s that person with Bob?’, a cooperative reply would be ‘That’s his new girlfriend, Alison.’

An uncooperative reply would be an over-brief one, such as ‘A girl’,

An over-long one, such as ‘That’s Alison Margaret Jones, born 20 years ago in Kingston, Surrey, daughter of Peter and Mary Jones ... etc.’

# Cooperative Principle



## 2 Maxim of quality: Be truthful.

For example, if someone asked you the name of an unfamiliar animal, such as a **hippopotamus**, reply truthfully.



Don't say 'It's a **horse**,' or 'It's a **cow**,' if you know it's a hippopotamus.

# Cooperative Principle



## 3. Maxim of relevance: Be relevant.

If someone says, ‘What’s for supper?’, give a reply which fits the question, such as ‘Fish and chips’, and not ‘Tables and chairs’ or ‘Buttercups are yellow.’

# Cooperative Principle



## 4. Maxim of manner: **Be clear and orderly.**

For example, *describe things in the order in which they occurred*: ‘The plane taxied down the runway, and took off to the west’

Not ‘The plane took off to the west and taxied down the runway,’

which might confuse people as to what actually happened.

# Cooperative Principle



The cooperative principle seems like common sense. People sometimes apparently break it, for example: In answer to the question: ‘What’s for supper?’ one is likely to receive a reply such as, ‘Billy fell downstairs,’ which doesn’t answer the query.

People are so convinced that the other person in a conversation is being cooperative, so they would assume that the hearer probably means: ‘Since Billy was supposed to cook the supper, and he’s fallen downstairs, I assume that there isn’t any supper ready.’

# Cooperative Principle



Which maxims of the cooperative principle are broken/flouted in the following dialogues, and which conversational implicatures do they lead to?

1. A: Did you bring the milk and eggs.

B: Well, I brought the eggs!

2. A: Mrs. Johnson is an old witch.

B: It's wonderful weather for this time of year, don't you think?

3. My wife is a flower.

4. A: How can I get to the museum?

B: Take the first turn, it is on the right, go straight, and turn right.



# Cooperative Principle



Which maxims of the cooperative principle are broken/flouted in the following dialogues, and which conversational implicatures do they lead to?

1. A: Did you bring the milk and eggs.

B: Well, I brought the eggs!

Quantity maxim

2. A: Mrs. Johnson is an old witch.

B: It's wonderful weather for this time of year, don't you think?

Relevance or relation maxim

3. My wife is a flower.

Quality maxim

4. A: How can I get to the museum?

B: Take the first turn, it is on the right, go straight, and turn right.

Manner maxim