

Pragmatics (LASC10067, LASC11097)

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Virtual office hours on Learn: Wednesday 4pm, Thursday 10am
These office hours are open to all as an opportunity to talk to the instructor of the week.
To attend, go to Course Activities on Learn, click on “Virtual room for office hours”

Individual meetings: Please contact instructor for appointment

UG course secretary: Chloe Anderson, Chloe.Anderson@ed.ac.uk

PG course secretary: Toni Noble, Toni.noble@ed.ac.uk

What’s this course all about?

People use language in context, so understanding the intended meaning of any utterance requires more than just linguistic models of syntax and semantics (crucial though these are). In this course we study the organization of language both at and above the sentence level (conversational structure, coherence, information structure and so on), and explore how this influences the meaning of language in context (implicature, pronoun interpretation, speech acts, etc.). We will look at philosophical, computational and psycholinguistic approaches to language in context, and discuss their theoretical assumptions, their methodological tools, and their empirical strengths and weaknesses.

Readings

The course uses Cummins’ *Pragmatics* textbook, available online through the library and through the course Resource List on Learn. Other readings will either be available on the Resource List or at <http://blake.ppls.ed.ac.uk/~pling/pragmatics/>.

Aims and objectives

At the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Determine the inferential reasoning that gives rise to implicatures in context (How do people read between the lines?)
- Analyze discourse structure (Do the sentences in a discourse form a tree structure just like the words in a sentence?)
- Classify, for each utterance in a dialogue or a text, what information is given and new (How does the growing common ground between speakers change the forms they use?)
- Identify the pragmatic constraints that license particular syntactic constructions (When is passive voice appropriate?)
- Apply models of coreference and ellipsis to naturally occurring data (How do listeners interpret ambiguous or missing words?)
- Critically discuss psycholinguistic studies of pragmatic phenomena (What predictions emerge from theoretical pragmatics and how do you test them?)

Prerequisites

UG students must have passed LEL2A. The course is open to all PG students.

Assessment

Course Component	% of Final Mark
Homeworks: 3 assignments related to readings and class lectures	30%
Final assignment: short essay questions (and perhaps short answer or multiple choice for UG)	70%

Policies

1. Keep up with class. Participating actively is expected of everyone.
2. Hand in your work on time. Each assignment is due at noon on the day on which it is to be handed in. Submit it via TurnItIn on Learn.
3. Working together on HW is fine/encouraged but final write-ups must be your own. You may discuss assignments together with other students (and certainly solicit acceptability/felicity judgments from native speakers), but you must hand in separate writeups.

Extensions

Students are expected to monitor their workload, be aware of all deadlines and prepare accordingly. Extension requests should be submitted before the submission deadline. They must be submitted to the Teaching Office for approval, and must include details of the assessment(s) affected and length of extension requested, together with supporting evidence if required. Other than in exceptional circumstances, extensions will only be granted in cases of illness or family emergency. If an extension of more than one week is requested, students must provide medical evidence and/or discuss the request with the Student Support Officer.

The Teaching Office will email the student to tell them whether the extension has been granted. If students feel that they have been unfairly denied an extension they should make a case to the special circumstances committee for the removal of late submission penalties at the examination board.

Extension requests due to time mismanagement, personal computing/printing problems or ignorance of deadline will not be accepted. Retrospective extensions will not be granted. For more information, see <https://www.ed.ac.uk/ppls/current/undergraduate/extensions>.

Students with Adjustment Schedules

Extension requests from students with adjustment schedules that allow 'short notice extensions' will be treated sympathetically where possible. Students should however be prepared to give a reason for the extension request; simply citing an adjustment schedule is not an adequate reason. If students are seeking extensions for more than one week, they must provide medical evidence and/or discuss the request with the Student Support Officer.

Any student with a documented disability needing accommodations is requested to speak directly to the Student Disability Service (SDS; 3rd floor, Main Library, 0131 650 6828) and to the instructor as early as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Course schedule

Week 1 Hannah Rohde: What is pragmatics, Speech Acts

Week 2 Wataru Uegaki: Semantics vs Pragmatics

Week 3 Alice Rees: Implicature

Week 4 Alice Rees: Presupposition, HW#1 assigned

Week 5 Alice Rees: Pragmatics in acquisition

HW#1 due noon Thursday 22 October

Week 6 Hannah Rohde: Perspective-taking, Reference

Week 7 Hannah Rohde: Information structure, HW#2 assigned

Week 8 Hannah Rohde: Coherence relations, Ellipsis

HW#2 due Thursday 12 November

Week 9 Sumin Zhao: Coherence in natural discourse, HW#3 assigned

Week 10: no more classes

HW#3 due noon Thursday 26 November

Exam period:

Final Assignment due Thursday 17 December