MAE 824 – Topics in Pragmatics

Course Description
Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between an utterance and the context in which the utterance is produced. We normally think of people using language to produce utterances, though the act of production involves not only words and grammar but also vocal prosody, gesture, gaze, and bodily stance. The context of production is also much grander than the time and place of utterance and it includes the physical, spatial, temporal, social, interactional, institutional, political, and historical circumstances in which a person produces an utterance. By ‘utterance’ and ‘context’ we name systems of interconnection among very many features, and the study of the relationship between utterance and context is not to be undertaken lightly. Nonetheless it is a study that for centuries has been of great interest to philosophers, linguistics, semioticians, and psychologists. And even if you don’t want to focus on pragmatics as a field of academic study, it’s worth considering a few questions that we will ask and try to answer in this course:

- I know the kind of actions I can perform with my body and with tools I use, but what kind of actions can I perform with my words?
- Sometimes, I am in conversation with somebody and, although we both know exactly the meaning of every word, I still don’t get what the other person is driving at. What am I missing?
- I know some people who are forever saying please and thank you, just like my mother taught me when I was a child. And then there are some other people I know who rarely say please or thank you, and I know my mother would say they are not being polite, but nobody else seems to bother. Why is that?
- Say “It’s cold in here” and mean “It’s warm in here”. Can you do it?—And what are you doing as you do it? And is there only one way of doing it?

That last question was asked by a philosopher. Asking and answering questions like these is not just what we should do as students and scholars; it is also a matter of practical communication—especially communication among people from different social and cultural backgrounds. If you decide to take this course, I hope it will not only be one more step on the road to an academic qualification, but it should also be a means to make us all better communicators.
Instructor
Prof Richard Young  richard dot young at nie dot edu dot sg  Phone: 6790 3394  Office:3-03-126  Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday 5-6 pm

Required Textbook

Topics and Readings

1. 15 August  Unit A1: The origins of pragmatics

Unit B1 Readings


2. 22 August  Unit A2: Research methods in pragmatics

Unit B2 Readings


3. 29 August  Unit A3: The semantics-pragmatics interface
Team presentation of Exploration C1 by Angeline Seet and Lisa Wah:
Choosing, transcribing, and annotating a dataset

Unit B3 Readings


4. 5 September Unit A4: Speech acts: Doing things with words

Unit B4 Readings


5. 12 September Unit A5: Implicature

Team presentation of Exploration C2 by Howard, Nur, and YC:
Exploring routinized speech acts using corpora

Unit B5 Readings


6. 19 September  Unit A6: Pragmatics and the structure of discourse

Team presentation of Exploration C3 by Daniel and Tian Li:
Testing for implicatures

Unit B6 Readings


7. 26 September  Unit A7: Pragmatic markers

Team presentation of Exploration C4 by Rani, Lai Khar, Xinru, and Adeline:
The organization of discourse structure

Unit B7 Readings


3 October  RECESS

8. 10 October  Unit A8: Pragmatics, facework, and (im)politeness
Team presentation of Exploration C5 by Grace Tham and Kai Sin:
Pragmatic markers: Further explorations

Unit B8 Readings


9. 17 October

Unit A9: Pragmatics, prosody, and gesture

Team presentation of Exploration C6 by Rani, Lai Khar, Xinru, and Adeline:
Facework and im/politeness

Unit B9 Readings


10. 24 October

Unit A10: Cross-cultural pragmatics

Team presentation of Exploration C7 by Nurul Hassan and Karen Chia:
Prosody and non-verbal communication

Unit B10 Readings


**11. 31 October**

**Unit A12: Pragmatics and power**

*Team presentation of Exploration C8 by Wendy Ng and Rita Gupta:*

*Cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics*

**Unit B12 Readings**


**12. 7 November**

**Unit A11: Historical pragmatics**

*Team presentation of Exploration C9 by Li Qi and Daniel:*

*Power*

**Unit B11 Readings**


Assignments

Attendance and Readings. You are expected to attend class regularly and to complete weekly readings from Section A of the textbook and the additional readings listed. You should read the relevant Section A from the textbook before each meeting. I will circulate a roster for you to mark your attendance at each class meeting.

Extension Tasks. You are expected to carry out extension tasks from Section B of the textbook based not only on the short extracts in the textbook but also the complete article or chapter available on Blackboard. Your written responses to the tasks in Section B are due on the week following discussion of that topic. Your responses to all extension tasks should total between two and three single-sided pages in one week’s assignment. All students should complete the extension tasks in Units B1 and B2. After these first two assignments, you can choose to do either the five odd-numbered assignments (B3, B5, B7, B9, B11) or the five even numbered ones (B4, B6, B8, B10, B12). Please submit each assignment in two equivalent forms: a soft copy through Blackboard and a hard copy to me.

Explorations. On nine occasions throughout the course, a team of between two and four students will present a lesson based on a task in Section C (Explorations) in the textbook. This assignment involves conducting your own research and reporting it to the class. You should plan a presentation to the class to last for no more than 45 minutes and make your presentation the week following the lecture of the topic. Make sure that your presentation includes an introduction to the topic of your research, a body in which you describe what you have done and why you did it, and a conclusion in which you describe what you have learned from doing the research. Please make your presentation as effective as possible by good organization, effective use of visual aids, an engaging style of delivery, and meaningful interaction with your audience. The team grade will be determined by the votes of me and the students in your audience on the Presentation Evaluation Form (see below).

Take-Home Tests. Your knowledge and interpretation of the readings and lectures will be assessed by two tests. The tests are in take-home format and each student should write his or her own exam. The midterm test will be available on 26 September and will be based on the topics we have covered in weeks 1-7. Your answers are due on 10 October. The final test will be available on 7 November and will be based on the topics covered in weeks 8-12. Your answers are due on 14 November. Each question will be taken from one of the Explorations sections in the textbook. (Question 1 will be taken from Unit C1; Question 2 will be taken from Unit C2; and so on.) You must choose to answer four questions, each of which will be scored out of 25 points for a maximum of 100 points on each test.
**Authorship.** Some of your assignments for this course involve integrating information from published sources into your own writing and most assignments involve work done on your own. When you are working on your own, you need to be careful to avoid plagiarism, collusion, and complicity. In the ELL Policy on Academic Dishonesty, these terms are defined as follows. 

*Plagiarism* is “passing off someone else’s ideas or work, wittingly or unwittingly, as your own;” *collusion* means “copying from another’s work;” and *complicity* means “allowing another student to practice collusion, i.e., to copy your own work.”

**Assessment**

I will award letter grades for the Extension Tasks and Explorations and percent scores for the two tests. The meanings and equivalencies of the grades follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Name</th>
<th>Grade Point</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>Excellent. Work goes well beyond the requirements of the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>Demonstrates full understanding of all concepts; creatively applies theories and methods to new problems in the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>Intermediate grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of all concepts; can correctly apply theories and methods to new problems in the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Intermediate grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of some but not all concepts; some errors in applying theory and methods to new problems in the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>Intermediate grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of a limited number of concepts; many errors in applying theory and methods to new problems in the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>Lack of understanding of concepts; not capable of applying theories and methods to new problems in the field. Assignment not completed by deadline.</td>
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Your final grade for the course will take into account grades awarded on all assignments in the following proportions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Test</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Test</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Tasks</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explorations</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentation Evaluation Form

Presentation Grade [5 = Excellent (A+); 4 = Good (A); 3 = Satisfactory (B); 2 = Some problems (C); 1 = Many problems (D); 0 = Did not present (F); NA= not applicable].

Presenter(s): _____________________________________________________________

Topic: __________________________________________________________________

___1. Introduction: Did the introduction capture the audience’s interest? Was necessary background given? Was a clear purpose conveyed?

___2. Organization: Was there a clear organization? Were transitions between sections clear and effective? Did the organization lead to a clear conclusion?

___3. Content: Did the speaker support their points? Was the supporting material relevant and up to date?

___4. Visual Aids: Were visual aids used effectively and appropriately, carefully prepared?

___5. Conclusion: Were key points reinforced? Was a sense of closure provided? If appropriate, was a course of action proposed?

___6. Delivery: Was the speaker natural, enthusiastic? Did they speak clearly? Were appropriate gestures, posture, expressions used?

___7. Discussion: Were questions from the audience answered accurately, clearly, effectively?

___8. General Comments (use back of form):