The scope of pragmatics

• Morris (1938) divides linguistics into three provinces:
  – syntax or the study of the relation between signs and other signs
  – semantics or the study of signs to their referents
  – pragmatics or the study of the relations of signs to interpreters

• Since then a plethora of definitions of pragmatics have mushroomed, focusing on different aspects such as:
  - the investigation of **speech acts**,  
  - the science of **language in use** (as the status of language users, the context of interactions and the appropriateness of utterances within specific social situations, as well as the communicative goals pursued by communicators).
The scope of pragmatics

• Investigating meaning entails three fundamental ways of viewing the relationship between language and reality:
  • THING theories of meaning, which view language exclusively as a system of symbols designating specific ‘things’ or objects or referents
  • IDEA theories of meaning, which lay emphasis on knowledge, on language being known via the comprehenders’ mental representations
  • USE theories of meaning, which analyze language as social action, used for communicative purposes pursued by historically situated participants, according to their specific intentions
The scope of pragmatics

• Truth-conditional semantics focuses on sentence meaning, and its purpose is to analyse sentence meaning in the light of formal rigour and logical plausibility by assigning truth conditions to sentence meaning in compliance with ongoing states-of-affairs.

• Nevertheless, the analysis of the structure of the sentence and the encoded lexical content in terms of truth-conditions, needs supplementing by inferring information about meaning supplied by other sources (Chapman 2000).

• As Capone (2005) points out, language is both ‘an instrument of thought’ and ‘an instrument of social action’
The utterance

- The *utterance* is the real, physically graspable unit of meaning that carries some informative contribution through
  - the words used,
  - the structure,
  - its location in the conversation setting,
  - the additional senses it triggers within that particular context,
  - the immersion in the overall system of gestures and other ways of conveying meaning.

- The most important of these sources is the context of utterance (the background knowledge of the interlocutors, information conveyed in other parts of the conversation or written text, as well as the baggage of world experience of interlocutors).
Grice

• In analysing meaning in actual communicative situations, the key notions to be looked into are speaker’s meaning and intention and recovery of speaker’s meaning and intentions by the addressee.

• Grice defines this meaning by resorting to speaker’s intentions and the reflexive nature of those intentions, namely their need to be recognised as such by the addressee. Speaker’s REFLEXIVE INTENTION toward Hearer is the intention to have the Hearer recognize that when making an utterance in a specific context, Speaker intends their utterance to have a certain effect on the Hearer.

• In his definition of non-natural or conventional meaning, Grice insists on the crucial role played by intentionality: “A meant something by x’ is roughly equivalent to <A uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention>”
Speech Acts

• The use-centred, social-interactionist view on language discusses linguistic phenomena in terms of *Speech Acts*

• As social actions, Speech Acts involve acts of speaking or writing when someone (the *Speaker*) says (or writes) something to someone else (the *Hearer*) at a specific time in a specific place.

• Engaging in any SA is underlain by the assumption that the Speaker intends to communicate with the Hearer.
Intensions

• There are numberless effects that speakers might attempt to produce, e.g.:
  – persuading the Hearer, intimidating the Hearer, warning the Hearer of danger, getting the Hearer to do something by means of a suggestion, a hint, a request, or a command.

• The Speaker adjusts his/her utterance to suit the Hearer, taking into account the context, the assumed shared background knowledge and what s/he knows or supposes about the Hearer’s ability to understand the message s/he wants to convey.
Direct addressee

• A distinction needs to be made between Hearer as ‘direct addressee’, and Hearer as ‘ratified participant’ (Goffman 1981: 131).

• An Addressee is someone who cannot reject the role of Hearer without serious affront to Speaker.

• Direct address is determined contextually - by direction of gaze, pointing a finger, touching an arm, using a name. In the first example below, there is a change of addressee, while in example 2 there is a non-specific addressee.

• (1) ‘Boss, I can’t tell you how much effort Mark has put into this project, haven’t you, Mark?’

• (2) ‘Congratulations to whoever is going to be the lucky winner of this contest!’
Ratified participant

• A *ratified participant* can more easily reject the Hearer role than an addressee and with less potential affront to the Speaker.

• When the Speaker is speaking, all those who can reasonably consider themselves ratified participants are expected to cooperate in the unfolding of the conversation and appropriately have their own say.

• Typical examples might include round tables, chat-rooms or workshops.
Overhearer

• An *overhearer* may be any other person hearing an utterance, be they a bystander or an eavesdropper.

• An Eavesdropper can only admit to listening at the risk of putting themselves in an unfavourable light and potentially affronting the Speaker. People in earshot are expected to overhear, though not necessarily to listen; only hearers are properly expected to listen.
Overhearer

• The Speaker has a reflexive intention towards the Hearer but not towards an overhearer.
• An overhearer may understand the message the same way the Hearer does because they share some background knowledge; but, for want of appropriate contextual information relevant to the correct interpretation of the utterance, s/he may misinterpret it.
Overhearer - Example

- A Bystander within earshot may not have been originally intended as a Hearer, yet may, depending on circumstances, accept or reject the role of the Hearer without loss of face; consider an occasion where X is arguing with Y in earshot of Z. Below there are some illustrations provided by Allan (1986):
  - X to Y as addressee:
    - Admit it or I’ll smash your face!
    - Y to Z as ratified participant:
      - You heard him threaten me, didn’t you?
    - X to Z as bystander:
      - Buzz off!
    - Z to X and Y, rejecting the role of Hearer:
      - I wasn’t listening.
Locutionary acts

• Whenever humans interactively engage in speech acts, they concomitantly perform three types of acts:

• 1) A *locutionary act*: the act of saying something, which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, according to specific grammatical conventions. A *locutionary act* involves what is known in traditional philosophical semantics as the utterance's *proposition* or its *propositional content*. In performing a locutionary act Speaker uses an identifiable expression, which is usually assessable in terms of its truth value.
Illocutionary acts

2) An *illocutionary act*: the act that the speaker intends to accomplish by means of a certain locution and by the conventional force assigned to the locution. Beyond the *propositional content* of the utterance, the speech act acquire its *performative dimension*. Discrepancy may arise between the *illocutionary force* as conceived by the *speaker* (the speaker’s *intended illocutionary force*), and the *illocutionary force* as conceived by the *hearer* (the *actual illocutionary force* or the *uptake*). Consequently, there may be more than one illocutionary force assignable to an utterance.
Perlocutionary acts

3) A perlocutionary act: the act that is produced as a consequence or effect of uttering a specific locution, what is brought about or achieved by saying something, such as:

– convincing, persuading, deterring, and even surprising or misleading.

– Such an effect may be predictable by the conventional status of most illocutions, but may be equally produced irrespective of the speaker’s intentions and illocutionary force of their speech act.
Illocutionary act - examples

• The most significant constituent of a speech act is, undeniably, the illocutionary act. (Austin 1962), because the illocution signals what the Speaker DOES in uttering that particular utterance to the Hearer in a specific context, namely:

• states a fact or an opinion

(3) ‘IQ tests can be tricky’

• confirms or denies something

(4) ‘It’s not true that Michael Jackson is a paedophiliac’
Illocutionary act - examples

• makes a prediction
  (5) ‘It’ll be a stormy week’
• a promise
  (6) ‘I’ll join you at the country club’
• a request
  (7) ‘Could I use your phone, please?’
• offers thanks
  (8) ‘Thank you all for being here tonight on this very special occasion’
Illocutionary act - examples

• makes an invitation
  (9) ‘Can we do lunch sometime next week?’
• issues an order
  (10) ‘Get out of my face!’
• gives advice or permission
  (11) ‘You may be excused’
• christens a child
  (12) ‘I baptize this child James’
Illocutionary act - examples

• names a ship
  (13) ‘I name this ship Hibernia’
• swears an oath
  (14) ‘I swear loyalty to my master and commander’.
Illocutionary act - examples

• In producing utterance a specific utterance, the Speaker performs an *illocutionary act* whenever that utterance has the *illocutionary force* of a statement, a confirmation, a denial, a prediction, a promise, a request, and so forth. Thus, (15) ‘I’ll make some coffee’ may have the illocutionary force of a statement about a future act, but it usually counts as a promise. If this is the recognized intention of the Speaker, then that promise is the illocutionary point of the utterance.
Perlocutionary act

While considering the following example

(16) I bet you a dollar you can jump that puddle.

The Speaker’s *perlocutionary act* is the act of achieving a particular perlocutionary effect on the Hearer as a result of the Hearer’s recognizing the locutionary and illocutionary forces in the utterance. Thus, an utterance such as

(17) ‘I bet you 100$ Harry will try to cheat on his exam’ may trigger a reply such as (18) ‘You’re on’ or simply a mental or emotional response of some kind.
Perlocutionary act

• Other perlocutions include:
  – alerting the Hearer by warning the Hearer of danger; persuading the Hearer via argumentation; intimidating the Hearer by threatening; getting the Hearer to do something by means of a suggestion, a hint, a request, or a command; and so forth.

• An effect of a specific utterance which does NOT result from the Hearer recognizing the locution and illocutionary point of that utterance is NOT a perlocutionary effect, but some kind of gestural effect (e.g. responding to a raised voice or an angry look).
Perlocutionary act

• Perlocutions are extremely significant for communicative purposes, yet they fall beyond the boundary of linguistics and rather pertain to the investigation of behavioural patterns and/or cognitive representations.

• What pragmatics is concerned with is the intentionality of speakers to produce certain perlocutionary effects by resorting to linguistic tools such as utterances.