

Pragmatics

Languages

How meaning depends on context, and what politeness actually encodes.

The study of meaning in context: what a speaker intends, beyond what the words alone say. It covers implication, politeness, presupposition and indirect speech.

STUDIES

meaning in use

VS SEMANTICS

meaning in words

- 'Can you pass the salt?' is a request, not a question about ability.
- Implicature: 'some students passed' implies not all did.
- Presupposition survives negation: both 'the king is bald' and 'is not bald' presuppose a king.
- Politeness strategies vary enormously between cultures.
- Indirectness is often the polite form in English.
- Directness is the polite form in several other cultures.

LOOK FOR IT

'It's cold in here' is frequently a request to close the window, and is understood as one.

Most cross-cultural miscommunication is pragmatic rather than grammatical: correct sentences, wrong register.