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## CLASSIFICATION OF PRAGMATIC MEANING IN CONTEXT

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**Mirzayeva Nigorakhon Anvarovna**

Master degree student of Uzbekistan

State World Languages University

The Faculty of Linguistics, Uzbekistan

Scientific advisor: **Ismailov Turgun Salakhiddinovich**

Doctor of philosophy (PhD) in

philological sciences, docent

**ABSTRACT:** The article deals with the classification of pragmatic meaning in a certain context. In pragmatic meaning, words have meanings that go beyond their literal meaning. This study examines imitative meaning, opposite meaning, broadened or narrowed meaning, and distortional meaning as approaches to classifying pragmatic meaning, also the impact of context on pragmatic meaning, as well as the obstacles and limitations associated with defining such meaning. Through the investigation of examples in everyday language, we can gain a deeper understanding of how pragmatic meaning is constructed and interpreted across different contexts.

**Key words:** pragmatic meaning, imitative meaning, opposite meaning, broadened or narrowed meaning, distortional meaning, context.



## Introduction

Pragmatics is a new branch of linguistics and studies the speaker meaning. The speaker meaning is often distinguished as pragmatic meaning. Pragmatic meaning plays an essential role in communication and besides their literal meaning, it encompasses various connotations that give language depth and richness. Context – the basis in the production of pragmatic meaning. The four primary categories of pragmatic meaning that will be analyzed in this article are imitative meaning, opposite meaning, broadened or narrowed meaning, and distortional meaning. In pragmatics, **imitative meaning** refers to the use of signs or language with a literal meaning to create a new, ideal intentional structure or paradigm that has no literal meaning.<sup>1</sup> This concept is particularly relevant when discussing metaphors. Metaphors involve the use of words or phrases with their standard literal meanings to convey a different meaning or to create a new way of understanding something.<sup>2</sup>

The connection of meaning between the speaker and the audience is analyzed, with consideration given to factors such as social circumstances, shared beliefs, and intentions. Imitative meaning is used in this way to create new ways of interpreting and experiencing the world, as seen through metaphors. Imitative meaning is the process by which language is used to imitate or simulate specific actions, emotions, or events to convey a specific message or provoke a specific response. Several factors influence the forming of imitative meaning and they are variable and dynamic. Through these factors, metaphors are constructed and interpreted to enable speakers to convey deeper meanings and express emotions. Here are some key factors: **context, cultural and social factors, cognitive processes, figurative language competence, emotional and aesthetic appeal** and others.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260123041\\_A\\_Pragmatic\\_Theory\\_of\\_Metaphor](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260123041_A_Pragmatic_Theory_of_Metaphor)

<sup>2</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/metaphor/>



*“Love is a battlefield”* is formed as an imitative meaning in making a connection between the concept of love and the experience of a battlefield. It depicts “love” as challenging, intense, and conflict-filled.

In the statement *“Time is money”* time is equated with money in order to emphasize its value and importance. It expresses the importance of using time wisely and efficiently. *“She is a shining star.”* The imitative meaning is given as the traits of brightness, brilliance, and prominence associated with stars to describe someone who stands out, excels in a specific field, and has a positive disposition.

The imitative meaning of the sentence *“I am a moth and you are a flame”* can be understood by examining the characteristics and associations typically associated with moths and flames. Moths are often drawn to flames due to their attraction to light. Imitation is expressed as a relationship or dynamic where one person is drawn to another with intensity and fascination, much like a moth to a flame. There is an implied sense of vulnerability and a willingness to take risks, even if it means being consumed or adversely affected. The imitative meaning of this sentence emphasizes the intense and sometimes risky nature of the relationship, highlighting potential consequences that can arise when two people meet together.

Here are some more examples with imitative meaning: *“She was a graceful swan, gliding effortlessly across the stage.”* We can describe the person who displays the elegance, poise, and beauty commonly associated with swans. *“His words were daggers, piercing through my heart.”* This statement highlights the effect of someone's hurtful words, comparing them to sharp, objects that cause emotional pain. The imitative meaning is that the words spoken were so sharp and hurtful that they felt like actual daggers piercing through the speaker's heart.



*“The waves crashed against the shore like thunderous applause.”* The intensity of the crashing waves is emphasized by this statement, which compares the sound of the waves smashing the shore to the thundering and forceful sound of a round of clapping.

*“Her laughter was music to my ears”* This sentence imitates someone’s laughter to the beauty and joy of music, suggesting that it brings immense happiness and pleasure.

*“The city was a jungle, with towering skyscrapers as its mighty trees.”* This statement compares the urban atmosphere of a city to the wildness of a jungle, evoking the bustling nature and immensity of the cityscape.

A: *“I’m swamped with work this week.”*

B: *“Hang in there, you’ll get through it.”*

When A says *“I’m swamped with work this week”* they are using the term “swamped” imitatively to describe being overwhelmed by a large volume of tasks or responsibilities. In this context we express the heavy workload to being immersed in a swamp, where one can feel trapped or suffocated by the sheer amount of work.

From analyzing the examples, we can observe that the imitative meaning of a statement lies in the associations and characteristics it evokes, creating a vivid and impactful image or comparison. Imitative meaning in pragmatics using metaphors, expressions imply the use of signs or language with a literal meaning to convey a non-literal meaning, allowing speakers to express complex ideas in an imaginative way.

One of the types of pragmatic meaning distinguishes as **opposite meaning**, where a word has contradictory meanings depending on the context in which it is used. This deliberate incongruity often leads to humorous, sarcastic, or satirical effect, allowing for a deeper layer of communication. Opposite meaning can be found in various forms, such as sarcasm, paradox, understatement, and overstatement, all of which contribute to the



richness of language. These words can be confusing for native speakers and language learners alike, as they seem to contradict the traditional rules of language. Examples of opposite meaning words include “*cleave*” which can mean both to cut apart and to stick together, and “*sanction*” which can mean both to approve and to impose a penalty on. This linguistic phenomenon adds complexity to language, showcasing its versatility and implicitness. Opposite meaning, involves saying the opposite of what is meant for rhetorical effect. This type of pragmatic meaning adds layers of complexity to language, challenging the reader or listener to understand the intended message. When we encounter opposite meanings in language, it can often lead to confusion or misinterpretation. Regardless of the intensity of conflict, the presence of two separate meanings improves and deepens our communication. One characteristic of opposite meaning is that it is not always explicit or easy to recognize. Sometimes, opposite meanings are conveyed through the context in which a word is used, or through the tone and inflection of a speaker’s voice. This complexity adds variety to words, allowing for more in-depth communication. In literature and poetry, opposite meanings are often used to create contrast and tension. By contrasting words or sentences with opposing meanings, authors can elicit strong emotions and generate imagery. The examples of opposite meaning:

Sarcasm is likely the most well-known example of opposing meaning. It entails employing words to convey the opposite of what is genuinely intended, frequently with a mocking or scornful tone. For example, saying “*Great job!*” when someone has clearly made a mistake conveys sarcasm.

Paradoxical statements convey an apparent contradiction that differentiates common thinking. They entail utilizing contradictory meanings to emphasize a deeper truth or irony. A paradox is the statement “*Less is more.*”



Understatement happens when something is consciously reduced, result in an ironic effect. For instance, expressing *“It’s just a flesh wound”* in regard to a severe injury is an understatement that adds irony to the context.

*“It is very considerate of you to sing so loudly while I was asleep.”* By using the phrase *“very considerate”* which typically denotes thoughtfulness and sensitivity towards others, the speaker employs opposite meaning to convey the opposite sentiment. The exaggerated insistence on singing *“loudly”* while the speaker was asleep further emphasizes the sarcasm. This pragmatic use of opposite meaning in the sentence expresses disappointment or criticism of the person’s actions rather than genuine gratitude. It adds a layer of irony and humor to the situation, highlighting the speaker’s annoyance in a subtly indirect manner.

*“I was so happy that you forgot our anniversary.”* By stating that they were *“so happy”* about the forgotten anniversary, the speaker employs opposite meaning to convey the opposite sentiment. Using the opposite meaning in this context emphasizes the speaker’s disappointment or frustration with the forgetfulness of the other person. The irony and humor were used to convey their dissatisfaction without being confrontational. The ability to understand opposite meanings in pragmatic contexts is essential in analyzing the intended emotions and underlying messages behind seemingly explicit statements.

**Broadening** is related to pragmatic meaning in that it includes expanding the meaning of a word beyond its original context. As a word’s meaning expands, it includes a broader range of referents or concepts, allowing for greater flexibility and adaptability in communication. “Broadening Metaphorical extension is not the only mechanism by which already existing words can be put to new uses. Sometimes the use of existing words can become broader. For example, the slang word cool was originally part of the professional jargon of jazz musicians and referred to a specific artistic style of jazz (a use that was itself an extension). With the passage of time, the word has come to be applied to almost anything



conceivable, not just music; and it no longer refers just to a certain genre or style, but is a general term indicating approval of the thing in question”.<sup>3</sup> It happens when a word takes on new meanings or implications as a result of how it is used in different situations. We can call it as generalization process. For example: “*She has a lot of things to do.*” “*Thing*” relates to a wide range of items, demonstrating its broadened meaning. “*To feel blue.*” In this expression the word “*blue*” has broadened meaning “sadness.”

For example, the word “*business*” originally meant being busy or occupied. However, over time, its meaning has broadened to refer to any type of work or job.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the word “*cool*” was originally used in jazz to describe a specific style of music but has since been applied more widely to indicate something fashionable or impressive.<sup>5</sup>

“**Narrowing** conversely, the use of a word can narrow as well. A typical example is the word “*meat*”. At one time in English, it meant any solid consumable food (a meaning that persists in the word nutmeat), but now it is used to refer only to the edible solid flesh of animals.”<sup>6</sup> Broadening makes a word's meaning more general or comprehensive, whereas narrowing makes it more specific or restricted. “*Evidently he had the first quality of an angler, which is not to measure the pleasure by the catch.*”<sup>7</sup> The word “catch” emphasizes the process of fishing and the pragmatic meaning is narrowing, which means that all doctors are drowning in work and devoting themselves to their profession. The implication is that doctors are extremely dedicated to their work and are always involved in it.

“**Distortional meaning**” refers to a new meaning created by similarity in form, pronunciation, or referent. It entails changing the original meaning of a word, phrase, or

<sup>3</sup> “LINGUISTICS: An Introduction to Language and Communication Sixth Edition. Adrian Akmajian, Richard A. Demers, Ann K. Farmer, Robert M. Harnis. P. 47

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english/lexis-and-semantics/broadening/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english/lexis-and-semantics/broadening/>

<sup>6</sup> “LINGUISTICS: An Introduction to Language and Communication” Sixth Edition. Adrian Akmajian, Richard A. Demers, Ann K. Farmer, Robert M. Harnish p.48

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/25592.The\\_Hinge\\_of\\_Fate](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/25592.The_Hinge_of_Fate)



utterance to produce a new interpretation. Words, phrases, or utterances can be interpreted in a new way. This can happen either intentionally or unintentionally during communication. It is important to note that distortional meaning is context-dependent and is based on the speaker and listener's shared knowledge and understanding. The intended meaning may not always be immediately apparent and can require further context or inference.

*“Why is a marathoner a good student? Because education pays in the long run.”* In this context, *“in the long run”* means over a long period of time or in the future. It implies that the benefits of education will become evident and valuable over time, just like the rewards of running a marathon are experienced at the end of the race.

*“What is the best month for a parade? March.”* There is a distortion of meaning in this sentence when *“March”* is interpreted as an instruction to march in a parade rather than as a month name. This produces a humorous effect by distorting the intended meaning of the question. It is essential to note that a single sentence might have various pragmatic meanings depending on the situation. We can ensure that our message is correctly communicated to our audience by taking into account the context in which our sentences are presented.

## Conclusion

Some basic types of pragmatic meaning as imitative, opposite, broadened or narrowed, and distortional demonstrate the various ways in which language can convey complex layers of meaning. Understanding and appreciating these meanings allow speakers to create more engaging and impactful texts that connect with their listeners. The classification of pragmatic meaning enables us to identify and avoid misunderstandings caused by variances in cultural norms, social settings, and individual viewpoints. By discovering and



comprehending the various ways in which language can be used to convey diverse meanings, we can improve our communication skills and develop relationships.

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