

“It’s just the matter of semantics”. But is it really? A close look at the semantics-pragmatics interface in intercultural interactions.

Istvan Kecskes, State University of New York, Albany

The presentation aims to contribute to the semantics-pragmatics interface debate from the perspective of intercultural pragmatics. Several studies on intercultural interactions (e.g. Cieslicka 2006; House 2003; Howarth 1998; Kecskes 2007, 2015; Metsä-Ketelä 2016; Ortactepe 2012; Philip 2005) concluded that interlocutors prefer semantic transparency to pragmatic inference and rely mainly on literal meaning of expressions in their language production and comprehension. The findings of these studies can be summarized as follows:

- Linguistic code seems to play the role of core common ground.
- Literal semantic content and compositionality dominates both expressing intention and recognizing it.
- Contextual support is not significant.
- Pragmatic intrusion is minimal and represents general rather than language specific features.
- What is said is usually equals or close to what is communicated.

This significantly differs from what happens in L1 communication on which current pragmatic theories are based on. The findings suggest that interlocutors may rely more on semantics than pragmatics in conveying and interpreting meaning, and they can do so without decreasing the effectiveness of their communication. The presentation will discuss whether these findings should change in any way our thinking about the semantics-pragmatics division.