The previous chapter discussed the general knowledge that people have about the language they speak.While semantics is mainly concerned with a speaker's competence to use the language system in order to produce meaningful utterances and to understand the utterances that others produce, the chief focus of pragmatics is a person's ability to get meaning(s) from specific situations – to recognize what a speaker is referring to, to Introducing English Semantics relate new information to what has gone before, to interpret what is being said from background knowledge about the speaker and the topic, and to infer or 'fill in' information that the speaker takes for granted and doesn't bother to say.Robinson Crusoe, to use our first example, walked where the footprint was, looked in the right direction, Introducing English Semantics when there was enough light for visibility and before the print had been obliterated by rain, wind, tide, or the movement of other creatures.Our culture includes, for example, eating with a fork, wearing neckties, knowing at least some of the same proverbs, using at least some of the same gestures for the same purposes, celebrating the arrival of a new year, believing in law and democracy, and hundreds of other major and minor customs and beliefs.The whistle of a policeman directing traffic, the whistle of a hotel doorman summoning a taxi, and the whistle of the referee in a soccer game may all sound exactly the same; their different meanings are due to the context in which the signal occurs.It is easy to illustrate dialect differences: vocabulary differences such as petrol versus gasoline, lift versus elevator; alternative ways of framing certain questions: Have you a pencil?In spoken discourse meanings are partly communicated by emphases and melodies that are called prosody.All sorts of sights, sounds, and smells can be natural signs; they communicate to someone who observes and can interpret, but their messages are unintentional, the natural by-products of various events.Day after day we hear such signals because someone intends for us to hear them: horns, whistles, sirens, buzzers, and bells.We have conventional ways of indicating a slippery road, a bicycle path, the location of men's and women's lavatories, where there is access for the handicapped, where smoking is prohibited, and much more.Native speakers of English belong to the so-called Western culture, which has developed from the Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans of the ancient world.The pop of a gun starts competitive runners, swimmers, and jockeys on their respective races.Observing any such sign and getting information from it seems like a simple matter and can take place in an instant, and yet the process of getting information consists of three steps: Perception The sign and the observer share a context of place and time in which the sign attracts the observer's attention.If it is hard to specify just what constitutes a dialect, it is equally difficult to specify what is included in one culture.Robinson Crusoe, according to Defoe's novel, was walking along the beach one morning and suddenly saw a human footprint in the sand – made by the man who was later to be called Friday, as it turned out.In other people we notice and interpret shivering, perspiration, or a head nodding with drowsiness.The human mind cannot deal with an infinite number of separate things; we classify an entity as a new instance of the class of footprints or trees or sirens or lights.An utterance is typically part of a larger discourse.Pragmatics and semantics can be viewed as different parts, or different aspects, of the same general study.When people who have the same native language can understand one another but notice consistent differences in each other's speech, they speak different dialects of that language.The totality of common activities, institutions, and beliefs make up the culture of that society.Different ringtones,

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different numbers of toots on a whistle or flashes of light can form a repertory of messages.Unlike natural signs, conventional signs have human senders as well as human receivers: each one has an intention and an interpretation.We can even use devices like smoke detectors and burglar alarms to send messages to ourselves at a later time in circumstances that we really do not want to happen.To recognize something means that we match this experience with previous experiences stored in our memory; this new experience is another token of a familiar type.(a) ... pain ... clinic ... doctor ... examine ... surgery ... hospital ... nurses ... surgeon ... successful operation ... quick recovery (b) ... rocket ... preparation ... countdown ... blastoff ... orbit ... splashdown ... quick recovery ... successful operation The term successful operation occurs in both stories.Introducing English Semantics This may look strange on the printed page because in written English we are used to seeing the result of careful planning and polishing but conversational speech is scarcely ever planned and polished.Listeners – and to a lesser extent readers – often have to fill in information that the speaker or writer takes for granted.

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