

Pragmatic

From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

pragmatics (*noun*), **pragmatic** (*adjective*) — from Greek *pragma* (πράγμα), "deed, act, thing done" (< *prassein*, "to do, to act")

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In rhetoric and linguistics, relating to the real-world effects of language on an audience, as distinct from its literal or grammatical meaning.

The *pragmatic effects* of a rhetorical device are what it *does* — how it shapes the listener's beliefs, emotions, attitudes, or actions in a concrete communicative situation. Underpinned by the concept of language as action (see: *speech act theory*; Austin, 1962), and by the philosophical tradition of *pragmatism* (Peirce, 19th c.), which holds that the meaning of any expression lies in its practical consequences.

For example, a rhetorical question such as "*Are we really going to let this happen?*" has a literal meaning as a binary yes/no question. However, its pragmatic effect is to create a sense of urgency and shared responsibility in the audience — it is not genuinely seeking an answer, but implicating the listener in a shared moral obligation.

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