

# Notes on Implicature

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# Philosophical background

1. Epistemology, foregrounded by Descartes, Hume, Kant; how we know what we know scientifically also in question
2. 19th century problems in “formalizing” 17th and 18th century math
3. Non-Euclidean geometry, Cantor; foundations provided by intuition in serious jeopardy
4. Logicism (logical positivism) and formalism (Carnap 1937)
5. Meaningfulness rests on necessary and sufficient conditions (precise definitions); Frege (truth-conditions)
6. Language reform and/or logical form (revealing the truth beneath, obscured by the crud of imprecise usage)

1. Neither a formalist nor a part of the Ordinary Language reaction (Wittgenstein, Austin, Ryle, Strawson)
2. A new and quite original position
3. At its heart, language has precise truth-conditional meaning (does not entail an endorsement of a formalist program). What is **said** is truth-conditional
4. What is implicated may not be; nevertheless it is computable by rational means

## Cooperative principle

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange.

## Grice

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent at least, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction.

# Maxims

Quantity	Give the most helpful amount of information.
Quality	Do not say what you believe to be false.
Relation	Be relevant.
Manner	Put what you say in the clearest, briefest, and most orderly manner.

# Maxims: Features of rational cooperation

## Not necessarily talk exchanges

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Quantity | If you are assisting me to mend a car, and at some stage I need four screws, I expect you to hand me four, rather than two or six.   |
| Quality  | I expect your contributions to be genuine and not spurious. If I need sugar as an ingredient in a cake you are assisting me to make, I do not expect you to hand me salt; if I need a spoon, I do not expect a trick spoon made of rubber. |
| Relation | I expect a partner's contribution to be appropriate to the immediate needs at each stage of the transaction. If I am mixing ingredients for a cake, I do not expect to be handed a good book . . .   |
| Manner   | I expect each partner to make it clear what contribution he is making and to execute his performance with reasonable dispatch.   |

## How implicatures are generated by maxims

1. Direct application of maxim
2. Conflict between maxims (Violation of one maxim ensues)
3. Flouting
4. Straight-out violation: Spelling out words in front of a child to implicate that the child must not be given this information



# Violating versus flouting

**Violation** This means that we break the maxims, usually covertly. If we violate the maxim of quality, we lie. If we violate the maxim of quantity by not giving enough information, we can be accused of 'being economical with the truth'.

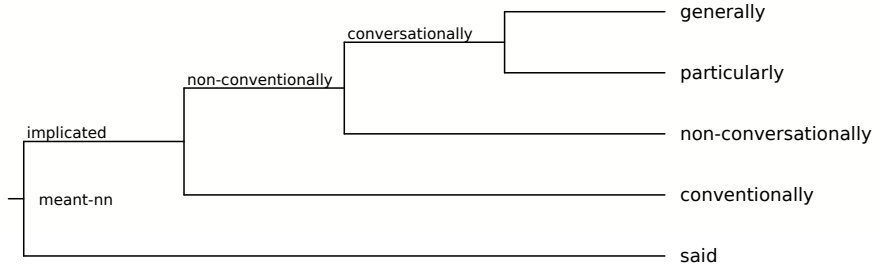
**Flouting** As with laws, some maxim violations can be more more heinous than others. Lying in a court of law is disapproved, but 'white lies', small lies to keep the social peace, are often thought as acceptable.

**Infringing** Used to describe mild or forgivable violations, as when a child violates the maxim

A: Mrs. X is an old bag. (appalled silence)

B: The weather has been quite delightful this summer, hasn't it?

# Components of meaning



# Properties of implicature I

## 1. Cancellability

*He solved some of their problems. In fact, he solved all of them.*

## 2. Non-detachability: Different ways of saying the same thing will have the same implicature

*try to X, endeavor to X, attempt to X, set oneself to manage to X, X*

Two exceptions: manner-related implicature (why?) and conventional implicature. The issue of presupposition (which has been called a kind of conventional implicature) also rears its head with these examples

## 3. Calculable: An argument from the maxims exists

## Properties of implicature II

- 4. Defeasible: Features of context can block an implicature
- 5. Reinforcable (Sadock), *some but not all*, *\*some but not none*

# Communication does not require convention

Grice's influential articles (1957, 1967) ... In the earlier of these papers, Grice promulgated the idea that ordinary communication takes place not directly by means of convention, but in virtue of a speaker's evincing certain intentions and getting his or her audience to recognize those intentions (and to recognize that it was the speaker's intention to secure this recognition). This holds, Grice suggested, both for speech and for other sorts of intentional communicative acts. In his view, the utterance is not in itself communicative, but only provides clues to the intentions of the speaker.

Sadock 2004

# A vision of Meaning<sub>nn</sub>

1. Invented pragmatics as we now understand it
2. Defined one extremely influential understanding of the relation between pragmatics and semantics
3. Made pragmatics an important and challenging area of study, with connections to multiple subfields of linguistics: lexical semantics, discourse, morphology, historical linguistics, psycholinguistics
4. Left open as a viable research path the formalization of pragmatics (Hirschberg 1985, Cohen and Perrault 1979, Blutner 2004)

# Specific phenomena

1. Markedness, stereotypicality
2. Irony
3. Metaphor
4. Polymsemy/ambiguity (Modified Occam's Razor)
5. The relation between the connectives of classical logic and natural language connectives ('and', 'or', 'not')
6. Non truth-conditional aspects of meaning a separable component (conventional implicature): *but, therefore, even, yet, too* (see also Levinson's list on p. 128)

# Neo-Griceans

Challenge or extend Grice's original program

1. Atlas and Levinson
2. Horn
3. Levinson
4. Sperber and Wilson



# Conventional implicature v. presupposition

Question: Presupposition or not?

- (1) a. Even Harry knows that's unethical.
- b. Harry is the least likely member of a contextually salient set of people to perceive the ethical issue here.

To read: Stalnaker 1974. To highlight: accommodation

# Paper topics

1. Look at work on discourse **coherence**, and discuss how specific phenomena of coherence fit (or do not fit) the Gricean program (Kay 1983).
2. Goal understanding: How does this fit in with Grice? (see the cell phone example above) (Hirschberg 1985, Cohen and Perrault 1979, Hobbs et al. 1993).
3. Pragmatic strengthening (R-implicature) of some specific kind. (Neg Raising: I don't think p = I think that not-p, I don't like p = I dislike p).

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