

April 21, 2004

CLASS 18: CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES

SAYING AND MEANING

What is said... and what is meant

- **not always the same** (cf. speech acts next class)
- in fact, what is said is **rarely all that is meant**
 - *the reasons why we say what we say matter*
 - *the implications of what we say matter*
 - *what we say is often ambiguous, over-general or uninformative, out of particular contexts*
- so **understanding utterances** involves much more than understanding the language used
 - *how do we even know to look for meanings that aren't given by the linguistic forms used?*

and it's not only speech acts...

- (1) A: *Has John got a girlfriend?*
B: *He's been making a lot of trips to Paphos lately.*
- (2) *I've read some of those books.*
- (3) A: *I've run out of petrol.*
B: *There's a garage just round the corner.*

Semantics ≈ what linguistic expressions mean out of context (cf. truth conditions)

Pragmatics ≈ how meaning arises from interaction of linguistic meaning with contextual factors

➤ *the physical situation; general 'world knowledge'; the speaker's apparent intentions, etc.*

IMPLICATURES

H.P. Grice coined the term **implicature** for **communicated non-truth-conditional** meaning

- a **conventional implicature** is non-truth-conditional meaning associated with a particular linguistic expression — E.g.: *Even John couldn't eat the quince and locust fritters.*
- a **conversational implicature** is not intrinsically associated with any expression; it is inferred from the use of some utterance in context

- (4) *John's been making a lot of trips to Paphos lately.*

What is said: 'John's been making a lot of trips to Paphos lately'

What is implicated: 'The speaker believes that John may have a girlfriend in Paphos'

PROPERTIES OF IMPLICATURES

❶ Context-dependent:

- (5) A: *Has John got a girlfriend? / Has John started his Christmas shopping yet?*
B: *He's been making a lot of trips to Paphos lately.*
- (6) A: *I've run out of petrol. / Damn; it's midnight already and I'm starving.*
B: *There's a garage just round the corner.*

❷ Cancellable (or defeasible; see also *inferential pragmatics* below):

- (7) A: *Has John got a girlfriend?*
B: *He's been making a lot of trips to Paphos lately.*
...That usually means he's on the pull, so I don't suppose he has a girlfriend.
- (8) *I've read some of those books.*
... In fact, unlike you, I've read them all.
- (9) A: *I've run out of petrol.*
B: *There's a garage just round the corner.*
...They've run out of petrol, but might be able to call someone who could help.

❸ Non-detachable (usually), i.e. you don't lose the implicature by substituting synonyms:

- (10) A: *Has John got a girlfriend?*
B: *He's been a regular visitor to the east of the Akamas peninsula recently.*
- (11) *I've completed a number of those tomes.*
- (12) A: *I've run out of petrol.*
B: *You'll find a filling station just beyond that bend.*

• but note that certain implicatures *are* detachable (because they depend on the manner in which the utterance is phrased) — these will also be addressed under *flouting* below:

- (13) *She produced a series of sounds that roughly corresponded to the score of I am alive.*
- (14) *She sang I am alive.*

❹ Non-conventional (as different from cancellability or non-detachability):

- (15) John's a machine.

❺ Calculable:

Conversational implicatures should be calculable from the meaning of what is said plus identifiable aspects of the context — But how?

GRICE'S THEORY OF IMPLICATURE

Grice: conversational implicatures arise because **we tend to be co-operative**.

ⓐ The Co-operative 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 in which you are engaged.”

More specifically, **follow certain conversational maxims...**

① The maxim of Quality

Supermaxim: Try to make your contribution one that is true.

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

② The maxim of Quantity

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

③ The maxim of Relevance

Make your contributions relevant.

④ The maxim of Manner

Supermaxim: Be perspicuous.

1. Avoid obscurity.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief.
4. Be orderly.

USING THE MAXIMS TO GENERATE IMPLICATURES

Overview: three ways to generate conversational implicatures:

1. Observe the maxims —
2. Violate the maxims —
3. Flout the maxims

1. Observing the maxims

- (16) A: *I've run out of petrol.*
B: *There's a garage just round the corner.*

If B's answer is *relevant* and *informative*, but not *too informative* (i.e. with useless, misleading information), **it must connect to A's statement**.

2. Violating a maxim

- (17) A: *Where does Gérard live?*
B: *Somewhere in the South of France.*

B violates Quantity (less information than ‘required’). So how is this co-operative?

Answer:

This way B adheres to Quality (don’t say what you know to be false/lack evidence for).

So the implicature is: B doesn’t know exactly where Gérard lives.

3. Flouting maxims (exploitation)

Violating a maxim is enforced (usually by **clashing maxims**).

Flouting is deliberate:

- (18) A: *What if the USA block EU-accession of Cyprus?*
B: *Oh come on, Europe has all the power!* (flouts Quality)
- (19) *John is John.* (flouts Quantity)
- (20) A: *I do think Mrs Jenkins is an old windbag, don’t you?*
B: *Huh, lovely weather for March, isn’t it?* (flouts Relevance)
- (21) Johnny: *Hey Sally, let’s play marbles.*
Mother: *How is your homework getting along, Johnny?* (flouts Relevance)
- (22) *She produced a series of sounds that roughly corresponded to the score of I am alive.*
(flouts Manner)

- flouting is effectively an invitation to **find a new meaning**, beyond ‘what is said’ — one that makes the utterance co-operative after all
- flouting is generally associated with particular rhetorical effects

Opting out

A speaker may ‘opt out’ of the Co-operative Principle, i.e. being **openly unco-operative**:

- (23) *My lips are sealed; I can say no more.*

SUMMARY OF GRICE

Assuming co-operation, in line with the maxims, guides the **calculation of implicatures**:

- the assumption that the maxims are adhered to points to certain meanings
- violation of one maxim usually points to the importance of another
- flouting a maxim invites a ‘non-literal’ interpretation

INFERENCEAL PRAGMATICS

What can we do with **inferential pragmatics**?

Inferential pragmatics tells us what *doesn't* need to be accounted for in semantics (i.e. in the lexicon or the grammar)

Take, for example, the case of *some*:

(24) *I've read some of those books.* [Usually: 'some but not all']

But not always...

(25) A: *Have you read some of these books?*

B₁: *Yes — but I couldn't face the others.*

B₂: *Yes — in fact, all of them.*

So how should we deal with *some* ?

- semantically — lexical ambiguity?

*some*₁ = 'some but not all';

*some*₂ = 'at least some (possibly all)'

➤ This adds a complication to the lexicon – is it necessary?

- a Gricean analysis: *some* has one basic meaning, which has no upper bound

- but, because of Quantity and Quality, an upper bound ('less than all') is usually understood:

➤ *the speaker is as usefully informative as possible*

➤ *knowing whether all is true is generally useful information*

➤ *so using some instead of all communicates that the speaker cannot truthfully assert all*

➤ *hence the common meaning 'some but not all', though this isn't lexical meaning of some ('Scalar implicature')*

A similar point can be made with *and*:

(26) a. The lone ranger jumped on his horse and rode into the sunset.

b. ??The lone ranger rode into the sunset and jumped on his horse.

(27) a. Joe taunted Ralph and Ralph hit him.

b. First Joe Taunted Ralph and the Ralph hit him.

c. Joe taunted Ralph and Ralph hit him, but not necessarily in that order.

(28) a. I went to the store and bought whiskey.

b. I bought whiskey and went to the store.

- should we postulate two *and*'s in the lexicon?

*and*₁ = 'logical &'

*and*₂ = 'and then'

Even if we don't go lexically, the issue at hand might still be **ambiguity**...

NB: **Deductive** or logical inferences are *not defeasible*:

- (29) i. If Socrates is a man, he is mortal.
ii. Socrates is a man.

iii. Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

PROBLEMS WITH GRICE

A. What's the **status of the maxims**?

- *social or cognitive? learned or innate? universal or cultural?*
- *different maxims seem different in nature*

B. What are the **criteria for a maxim**?

- *How many do we need? How independent are they? (cf. Quantity and Relation; Manner and Quantity)*

C. Co-operation as the **basis for utterance interpretation**:

- *unco-operative utterances are understood too!*
- *'opting out' is problematic*

DEVELOPMENTS OF GRICE'S APPROACH

Neo-Griceans: attempts to **reduce and refine the maxims** (S. Levinson, L. Horn)

- *generally based on quantity ('informativeness') and quality ('truthfulness')*
- makes for a neater theory, but does it address all the problems?

More problems with Grice:

- we're dealing with context-dependent meaning – so we really need a theory of context :
 - *How do we select useful bits of contextual information?*
 - *How do we access and exploit each other's assumptions and intentions?*
 - *How do we know "the accepted purposes and direction of the talk exchange" and what kind and amount of information is "required" by it?*

SUMMARY

- conversational implicature is meaning that is intentionally communicated, but not explicitly
- it is thought of as context-dependent, cancellable, non-detachable and calculable meaning
- it inferred (on the basis of what is explicitly communicated and contextual factors)
- according to Grice, it follows from the conversational maxims that underlie co-operation

Reading for next class: S.P. Levinson's "Speech Acts" & D. Schiffrin's "Speech Act Theory"