

## Lecture 7 Utterance Meaning and Speaker's Intentions

1. A: Is Mark a good cook?  
B: He can make scrambled eggs...

Humans conceptualise behaviour in terms of its underlying **intentions**.

2. Sentence meaning vs. speaker's meaning: Paul Grice, 'Meaning'

'A meant<sub>NN</sub> something by x': 'A uttered *x* with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention'. (Grice 1957 in 1989, p. 219)

*Utterance and intending:*

"U meant something by uttering *x*' is true iff, for some audience A, U uttered *x* intending:

- (1) A to produce a particular response *r*
- (2) A to think (recognize) that U intends (1)
- (3) A to fulfil (1) on the basis of his fulfilment of (2)." (Grice 1969 in 1989, p.92)

Example: the use of tautologies ('Boys are boys')

3. **Speakers implicate, hearers infer** (Horn 2004).

Implicature: inferences that are drawn from an utterance. They are seen by the hearer as being intended by the speaker.

*The 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 in which you are engaged." (Grice 1975 in 1989, p.26)

The Maxims 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.

The Maxims of Quality:

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.

The Maxim of Relation (Relevance):  
Be relevant.

The Maxim of Manner:

Be perspicuous:

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

–and one might need others, e.g. ‘Be polite’.

J.S. Mill, 1867, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy*:

“If I say to any one, ‘I saw some of your children to-day’, he might be justified in inferring that I did not see them all, not because the words mean it, but because, if I had seen them all, it is most likely that I should have said so: even though this cannot be presumed unless it is presupposed that I must have known whether the children I saw were all or not.” (1872: 517)

O. Ducrot, 1972, *Dire et ne pas dire: loi d’exhaustivité*

**Quantity:** ‘Some people like classical music.’

The maxim of quantity is the foundation of the theory of **scalar implicature**.  
<all, some>

**Quality:** ‘Max won the race.’

**Relation:** A: Is Tom a good philosopher?  
B: He is always punctual and speaks good English.

**Manner:** ‘He broke his arm and went to the hospital.’

Flouting the maxims:

‘Queen Victoria was made of iron.’

‘Boys will be boys.’  $B(x) \rightarrow B(x)$

‘If he comes, he comes.’  $p \rightarrow p$

‘He will come or he won’t come.’  $p \vee \neg p$

Shared background knowledge is assumed.

Inference in the implicature is **cancellable**:

‘I am going to have apple pie or cheesecake, or perhaps both.’

vs. deductive inference:  $(p \rightarrow q) \wedge p \rightarrow q$

## 4. Properties of conversational implicatures:

- cancellability
- non-detachability
- calculability
- non-conventionality

We often have to understand the structure of the sentence (logical form) before being able to make inferences (recognize the speaker's implicatures):

'Many members of the Union didn't vote.'

$\neg Mx V(x)$

+> 'Few members of the Union voted.'

$Mx \neg V(x)$

?+> 'Few members of the Union voted.'

'It will rain or it will rain.'

$p \vee p$

## 5. Types of implicature according to Grice:

**Generalized Conversational Implicature (GCI):**

derivable without any help of the context

'Somebody came.' +> 'Not all people came.'

Scalar implicatures: <all, most, many, some, few>

<and, or>  $(p \vee q) \wedge \neg(p \wedge q)$

Clausal implicatures: 'I believe that Max won the race.'

+> 'I do not *know* that Max won the race.'

Developed by S. Levinson in *Presumptive Meanings* (2000)

**Particularized Conversational Implicature (PCI):**

dependent on the context

A: What time is it?

B: The milkman has come.

According to some post-Griceans, this is the only type (there are no GCIs), all inferences are context-dependent (e.g. R. Carston)

**Modified Occam's Razor** (Grice (1978 in 1989, p.47):

'Senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity.'

Instead of postulating ambiguities such as the exclusive and inclusive meaning of ‘or’ or various meanings of ‘and’ (temporal, causal), we should classify the pragmatically derived senses as implicatures.

? **Conventional Implicature** (associated with particular words such as: ‘but’, ‘therefore’, ‘manage’). It is *non-cancellable, detachable, not calculable*.

? Should it be called an ‘implicature’?

6. Some post-Gricean revisions:

**Principle of Relevance** (Sperber & Wilson 1986, 1995): interlocutors preserve the balance between the effort and the effect in conversation by minimising the expenditure (the *processing effort*) and at the same time maximising the gain (the contextual implications, *cognitive effect*).

**Levinson’s Q, I and M principles/heuristics** (1987, 1995, 2000)

*Q-principle*: ‘Don’t provide a statement that is informationally weaker than your knowledge of the world allows, unless providing a stronger statement would contravene the I- principle.’

‘I often take sugar in my coffee.’ +> not always

‘I believe that John is away.’ +> not know

*I-principle* (the maxim of minimization): ‘Say as little as necessary’, i.e. produce the minimal linguistic clues sufficient to achieve your communicational ends, bearing Q in mind.

‘John turned the key and the engine started.’ +> and then

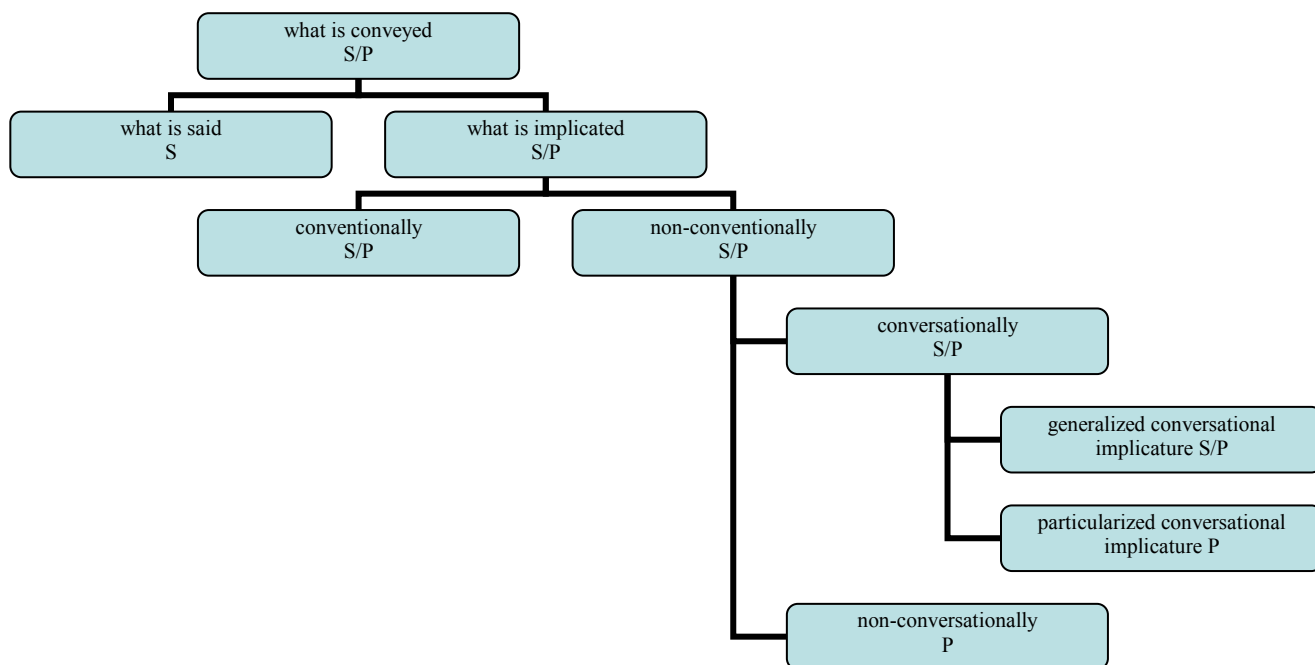
‘Harry and Sue bought a piano.’ +> together

*M-principle*: ‘Do not use a prolix, obscure or marked expression without reason.’

Q > M > I:

‘John caused the car to stop.’ M > I

‘Try letting the I-principle win in the first instance, i.e. go for minimal forms; if that doesn’t work escalate step by step towards a Q-principle solution.’ Levinson (1987, p. 119).

7. Summary: Grice's Meaning<sub>NN</sub>

**Q:** Is there a boundary between semantics and pragmatics? If so, which aspects of utterance meaning belong to semantics and which to pragmatics?

The gist of the current debate:

‘I haven’t eaten.’

**Minimalists:** the semantic content is (or is very close to) the meaning of the sentence (e.g. that the speaker hasn’t eaten ever, or within some contextually salient interval).

**Contextualists:** the semantic content is enriched with the result of inference in the context (e.g. that Kasia hasn’t had lunch yet).

Linguists differ in their views on how much or how little belongs to semantic content (and is assessed for truth conditions) and what should be left in pragmatics.

*Suggested reading*

*Introductory:*

Grice 1989 (especially: **‘Meaning’**; **‘Logic and Conversation’**)

Horn 2004

Jaszczolt 2002, ch 10

Huang 2007, ch 2

from *The Pragmatics Encyclopedia* (2010, edited by L. Cummings, London: Routledge):

Implicature (pp. 205-210)

Grice (pp. 182-183)

Post-Gricean Pragmatics (pp. 332-335)

Relevance Theory (pp. 393-399)

*More advanced/detailed:*

Jaszczolt 2002, ch 11

Huang 2007, ch 7

from *The Pragmatics Encyclopedia* (2010, edited by L. Cummings, London: Routledge):

Semantics-Pragmatics Interface (pp. 428-432)