Mohammed Kheidher University of Biskra

Faculty of Arabic Language Arts & Foreign Languages

Division of Foreign Languages

Department of English Studies

(**Major**) Sciences of Language (**Module**) Pragmatics

(**Class**) First Year Master (**Instructor**) Dr. Lamri Segueni

**Conversational Implicature**

#### Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,

#### Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

#### *(Alexander Pope.An essay on criticism,309-10)*

#### Outcomes of the tutorial: *By the completion of this tutorial students will be able to :*

#### 1. Get acquainted with implicatures

#### 2. Distinguish between the different types of implicatures

#### 3. Develop awareness toward the use of implied meaning in conversation

#### 4. Identify the different types of implicature

#### Terminology used in this tutorial: conversational implicature, maxims, hedging, flouting, the cooperative principle, inference, generalized and particularized implicature conventional and conversational implicature. C:\Users\GIBINFO\Desktop\deskt\Nouveau dossier (2)\IMPLICATURE\implicature-5-638.jpg

#### 1. Definition

In a series of lectures at Harvard University in 1967, the English language philosopher H.P. (Paul) Grice outlined an approach to what he termed conversational implicature - how hearers manage to work out the complete message when speakers mean more than they say. An example of what Grice meant by conversational implicature is the utterance:

“Have you got any cash on you?”

where the speaker really wants the hearer to understand the meaning:

“Can you lend me some money? I don't have much on me.”

The conversational implicature is a message that is not found in the plain sense of the sentence. The speaker implies it. The hearer is able to infer (work out, read between the lines) this message in the utterance, by appealing to the rules governing successful conversational interaction. Grice proposed that implicature like the second sentence can be calculated from the first, by understanding three things:

* The usual linguistic meaning of what is said.
* Contextual information (shared or general knowledge).
* The assumption that the speaker is obeying what Grice calls the cooperative principle.

**2. Classical Gricean theory of conversational implicature**

On a general Gricean account of meaning and communication, there are two theories :a theory of meaning and a theory of conversational implicature .In his theory of meaning Grice (1957,1969,1989)emphasized the conceptual relation between natural meaning in the external world and non-natural, linguistic meaning of utterances. He proposed a reductive analysis of meaning in terms of the speaker’s intentions

**Grice’s theory of meaning**

S means p by uttering U to A if and any if S intends:

1. A to think p,

2. A to recognize that S intends (1), and

3. A’s recognition of S’s intending (1) to be the prim art reason for A thinking P.

(**S** stands for the speaker, **A** for the audience for the **U** utterance, and **P** for proposition)

Defined in this way, the essence of meaning is that it is communication which is intended to be recognized as having been intended. In other words, meaning or speaker –meaning is a matter of expressing and recognizing intention.

##### **3. Conversational maxims and the cooperative principle**

The success of a conversation depends upon the various speakers' approach to the interaction. The way in which people try to make conversations work is sometimes called the cooperative principle. Grice formalized his observation that when we talk we try to be cooperative by elevating this notion into what he called 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”*.** We can understand it partly by noting those people who are exceptions to the rule, and are not capable of making the conversation work. We may also, sometimes, find it useful deliberately to infringe or disregard it - as when we receive an unwelcome call from a telephone salesperson, or where we are being interviewed by a police officer on suspicion of some terrible crime.

Paul Grice proposes that in ordinary conversation, speakers and hearers share a cooperative principle. Speakers shape their utterances to be understood by hearers. The principle can be explained by four underlying rules or maxims. (David Crystal calls them conversational maxims. They are also sometimes named Grice's or Gricean maxims.)

They are the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner.

* **Quality**: speakers should be truthful. They should not say what they think is false, or make statements for which they have no evidence.

- Try to make your contribution one that is true

* Do not say what you believe to be false
* Do not say that for which you lack evidence
* **Quantity:** a contribution should be as informative as is required for the conversation to proceed. It should be neither too little, nor too much. (It is not clear how one can decide what quantity of information satisfies the maxim in a given case.)

- Make your contribution as informative as required for the current purpose of exchange.

- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

* **Relevance:** speakers' contributions should relate clearly to the purpose of the exchange

- Be relevant

* **Manner:** speakers' contributions should be perspicuous: clear, orderly and brief, avoiding. Obscurity and ambiguity.

- Be perspicuous

- Avoid obscurity

- Avoid ambiguity

- Be brief

- Be orderly

Taken together, the four maxims enjoin speakers to be informative to the expected degree (Quantity, to say things that are well founded(Quality),to be relevant(Relation) and to be clear(Manner).Because these maxims are mutually known to speakers and addressees, addressees infer meanings that are conveyed but not stated.

Grice does not of course prescribe the use of such maxims. Nor does he (I hope) suggest that we use them artificially to construct conversations. But they are useful for analysing and interpreting conversation, and may reveal purposes of which (either as speaker or listener) we were not previously aware. Very often, we communicate particular non-literal meanings by appearing to “violate” or “flout” these maxims. If you were to hear someone described as having “one good eye”, you might well assume the person's other eye was defective, even though nothing had been said about it at all.

**4. The relationship between the speaker and the maxims**

What can a speaker do with regards to the maxims? In the first place he or she can straightforwardly observe the maxims. Second, he or she can violate a maxim. For example he or he may breach the first sub maxim of Quality by telling a deliberate lie.Third,he or she can opt out of a maxim .This can be demonstrated by a speaker’s use of hedges in conversation.

There is thus evidence that speakers are not only aware of the maxims, but they are trying to follow them. Fourthly, a speaker can flout or exploit a maxim.

**4.1. Hedging maxims**

Sometimes when we talk we simply make assertions like

Cigarettes are bad for you

But if you listen carefully when people talk, you notice that speakers are frequently reluctant to make bald statements .Often they prefer utterances like

All I know is, cigarettes are bad for you

In this utterance the speaker is making the assertion that’ cigarettes are bad for you’. But by prefacing it with ‘all I know is’, the speaker simultaneously advises the addressee that the quantity of information being conveyed is limited. So, the speaker makes an assertion and simultaneously advises the addressee of the extent to which they are observing the maxims. Thus the maxim of quantity is ‘hedged’ (Lakoff, 1972) – in the sense that we ‘hedge’ in the sense that we lay off a bet which we feel commits us too far.

If the speaker had said: They say cigarettes are bad for you

‘they say would be understood as a hedge on the maxim of quality and would serve as a warning to the addressee that the speaker’s information might not be as well founded as would normally be expected. So ‘all I know’ and ‘they say’ have a metalingual fuction, that is, they serve as glosses or comments on the extent to which the speaker is abiding by the conversational maxims.

We’ve seen how conversational maxims can be hedged with metalingual glosses. Speakers can also use metalingual glosses to assure their addressees that the maxims are being scrupulously complied with, as the following examples show:

1. Cigarettes are bad for you and that’s all there is to it (Quantity)
2. Cigarettes are bad for you for sure (Quality)
3. The point is that cigarettes are bad for you (Relation)
4. Put plainly, cigarettes are bad for you (Manner)

**4.2 Opting out hedges in English**

1. Quality 2.Quantity

As far as I know As you probably already know,

I’m not if this is true, but… I can’t say anymore,

I may be wrong, but… I probably don’t need to say this, but…

3. Relation 4. Manner

Oh, by the way, I’m not sure ion this is clear, but….

I’m not sure if this is relevant, but… I don’t know if this makes sense, but

I don’t want to change the subject, but… This may be a bit tedious, but…

**4.2. Flouting maxims**

The implicatures that arise from the following examples:

1. Some of the hijackers have been identified

2. Cigarettes are bad for you

3. Don’t forget Mum on Mothers’ Day

4. In creased threat to your security-you can help by keeping your luggage and personal items with you at all times.

In the above examples the speaker is abiding by Grice’s maxims, i.e. (1) is as informative as possible,(2) is well founded and (3) is maximally relevant in its context and (4) is to be read in a way that assumes perspicuity.

But speakers do not always abide so rigorously by these maxims. Take the headline of the fashion magazine feature article:

Brown is the new black as far as shoes are concerned

This clearly obscures or flouts the maxim of manner. However we don’t have any real difficulty in working out what is meant – we just have to provide a little more context ourselves and do a little more reasoning than would have been necessary had the speaker abide by the maxim.

In the same example, even when the speaker flouts a maxim, there is still implicatures. These arise because the addressee assumes that the speaker is essentially cooperative, despite flouting a maxim, and must therefore be intending to convey an implied meaning. On one occasion I just stopped myself in time from responding to a complaining student with:

Well, it’s a university

In this example the addressee will try to work out what I am intending to convey in addition to the information already known to him. There is an implicature, what is implicit but nowhere explicitly stated.

**5. Types of implicatures**

**5.1. Conversational implicatures**:The basic assumption in a conversation is that participants are adhering to the cooperative principle and its maxims. Take the following example:

*Wife: I hope you brought the bread and the cheese.*

*Husband: I brought the bread.*

In this case, the husband does not mention the cheese. Then, he must intend that the wife infers what is not mentioned was not brought .The husband has conveyed more than he has said via conversational implicature. Through this example, it possible to perceive that there is no special background context required to calculate the additional conveyed meaning. Thus ,it is called generalized conversational implicature.

According to Grice, utterance interpretation is not a matter of decoding messages but rather involves:

1. Taking the meaning of the sentence together with the contextual information.

2. Using inference rules.

3. Working out what the speaker means on the basis of the assumption that the utterance conforms to the maxims. The main advantage of this approach from Grice’s point of view is that it provides a pragmatic explanation for a wide range of phenomena, especially for conversational l implicature — a kind of extra meaning that is not literally contained in the utterance.

**5.2. Conventional implicatures :** These are associated with specific words sand result in additional conveyed meanings when those words are used .The English conjunction ‘but’ is one of them. Look at the following examples:

John is poor **but** happy. (In contrast to what John should feel as a poor person, he is happy)

Dennis isn’t here **yet**.(Dennis is expected to be here later°

Even Mary came to the party.(Contrary to what was expected .Mary came to the party)

**3. Scalar implicatures:** These are given rise by the use of the use of certain scales of value. Thus the use of one expression indicates one point on the scale and cancels the other indicating higher scale points on the scale. (All, some, and few, always never, sometimes, certain, probable possible).look at the following examples:

**Some** of the hijackers have been identified. (not all of them)

The courses are **sometimes** interesting.(not always, not often)

It’s **possible/probable** that they were delayed.

**6. Generalized versus particularized implicature**

A second Gricean dichotomy, independent of the first is between those conventional implicatures which arise without requiring any particular contextual conditions and those which do require such conditions. Grice called the first generalized conversational implicature, and the second particularized conversational implicature (see examples on BB).

**Example 1.** Most of John’s friends believe in marriage.

**Example 2.** Peter: where’s the IHT ( The International Herald Tribune) ?

Mary: John’s been around. (John took the newspaper)

**Example 3.** Kate: Where’s Peter?

Mary: The light of his office is on. ( He may be in his office)

The implicature in the first example has a very general currency. Any utterance of the form ‘Most x are Y’ will have the default interpretation that’ Not all x are Y4The interpretation will go through without needing any particular contexts. By contrast, the implicature in the second examples depend crucially on its linguistic context. Mary’s reply points to the possible connection the light in Peter’s office and his location, namely, if, the light in Peter’s office is on, he may be in his office .Without such specific context, we will not have the implicature under consideration in the second example.