Grice: The Pragmatics of Inference

Read Portner: pp. 199-205

Definitions of Pragmatics

- Pragmatics involves non-truth-conditional meaning.
- Pragmatics involves context dependency.
- Pragmatics involves the relation between speaker and hearer.
- Pragmatics involves inference as opposed to linguistic code.

Conversational Implicature

- Speaker's meaning:
  - I'm not hungry.
    - I'm not hungry, so let's not eat right now.
  - I would pay $100 for that vase.
    - I would pay $100 for that vase, but I would not pay much more than $100 for that vase.
- The theory of *conversational implicature* says that the differences between semantic meaning and speaker's meaning can be calculated on the basis of a well-defined set of principles:
  - Grice's Cooperative Principle and his Maxims of Cooperative Conversation. (See Grice handout.)

- – The maxims are not rules to be followed, but rather commonplace assumptions people make about how speakers are behaving.
- – As much as possible, hearers will construe the speaker's meaning of an utterance so that it conforms to the maxims.
- – A speaker can count on this and thereby communicate more than the literal meaning of a sentence.

- Speakers can surreptitiously **violate** the maxims.
  - – When someone lies, they secretly violate the Maxim of Quality: They expect this to not be recognized.

- Speakers can **opt out** of the maxims.
  - – A: By the way, did you ever talk to my sister about her proposal?
  - – Opting out of Relevance.

- Speakers generate implicatures through the assumption that they are **following** the maxims:
    - A: I'm out of gas.
    - B: There's a gas station around the corner.

    ++> *You can get gas at that station*, e.g. *It is open.*
    - Following Relevance; Quantity 1, …

- Implicatures can arise by maxim **clash**, when a speaker has to violate one maxim in order to follow others and the cooperative principle:
    - A: Is it raining right now?
    - B: It might be raining.

    ++> *B does not know if it is raining.*
    - VIolates Quantity 1 in order to obey Quality 2

- Implicatures can also arise when a speaker **flouts** a maxim, by flagrantly and obviously violating it, intending this to be recognized.
  - A: I flunked out of law school.
  - B: That's life.

  ++> *Since life is full of bad things, accept this and other similar bad things without getting upset.*
  - Flouts Quantity 1

  - A: Miss Smith is an old windbag.
  - B: It's a nice day, isn't it?

  ++> *You had better be quiet; she can hear you!*
  — Flouts Relevance

  —A: Margaret Thatcher is an iron maiden. (Metaphor)

  ++> She is tough and inflexible.

  —Flouts Quality 1

Properties of Conversational Implicatures

- They are **calculable** from the semantics of what is said plus the CP and the maxims (See Grice handout and Portner, pp. 201-202)

- They are **cancellable** (**defeasible**)

  - I ate two apples.
    ENTAILMENT: *I ate at least one apple*.
    IMPLICATURE: *I didn't eat three apples*.

  - ??I ate two apples, but I didn't eat one.

  - I ate two apples, and in fact I ate three.

- They are **non-detachable** (if you say the same thing in a different way, it should generate the same implicatures):

  - It's dark in this room.
    There's no light in here.
    I can't see anything.

  ++> *You should turn the light on*.

Types of Implicature

- **Particularized Conversational Implicatures**
  - Depend for their generation on the context.
    - A: I wonder if Smith has a girlfriend these days.
      B: He's been paying a lot of visits to Toronto lately.
    - ++> *Maybe he has a girlfriend in Toronto.*

- **Generalized Conversational Implicatures**
  - Typically arise with the use of certain linguistic expressions.
    - **Some** of the students passed the exam.

    ++> *Not all of the students passed*.

    - I **believe** that he's coming.

    ++> *I don't know that he's coming.*

    - He got into bed **and** put on his pajamas.

    ++> *He did it in that order*.

– Many GCI's can be explained as "scalar" or "clausal" implicatures, arising from the existence of a unilateral entailment relation between expressions. (Horn 1972, Gazdar 1979).

- *<all*, *most*, *many*, *some, a few>*
- *<… five*, *four*, *three*, *two*, *one>*
- *<know*, *believe>*
- *<must*, *can>*
- *<and*, (inclusive) *or>*

- In saying "Most students will pass", you implicate that "Not all students will pass"; because in saying "most" you have avoided the stronger expression "all", and H can infer that you must not have had evidence to support that stronger message or must have not believed it.
  - Violate Quantity 1 to obey Quality 1/2.

- If you say, "John or Mary will pick you up", you implicate that not both of them will; because H can infer that if you had meant that stronger statement, you would have said it.
  - Violate Quantity 1 to obey Quality 1/2

Conventional Implicature

- Grice (1967, 1975) also defined a class of 'conventional implicatures'

    (i)   John is an Englishman; he is, *therefore*, brave.

    - — (i) conventionally implicates that being brave somehow follows from being English.

    (ii) She is poor *but* honest.

    - — (ii) conventionally implicates that there is some kind of contrast between poverty and honesty.

    - According to Grice, these do not affect the truth-conditional content of the sentence.

        - Even if the implicature is false, the sentence could still be true.

    - They are a matter of the conventional meaning of words and cannot be cancelled.

Studies by Ira A. Noveck

- While sitting on her couch, Julie was reading a comic book. Suddenly, the phone rang. She went out of the living room and ran to answer. It was Isabelle, who was inviting Julie to celebrate her birthday Saturday. Since they were very good friends, Julie accepted the invitation.

- "Julie answered the phone and accepted an invitation?"
  - "Yes" for a high level of all ages.

- "Julie accepted an invitation or answered the phone?"
  - "Yes"   85%   7-year-olds
            63%   10-year-olds
            29%   adults

	Correct answer	7-8	10-11	Adults
• All chairs tell time.	No	93	99	99
• All elephants have trunks.	Yes	91	99	96
• All dogs have spots.	No	86	99	96
• Some stores are made of bubbles.	No	95	99	98
• Some birds live in cages.	Yes	84	90	99
• **Some giraffes have long necks**	**Yes**	**89**	**85**	**41**

- Box 1:   Open   Parrot, Bear
- Box 2:   Open   Parrot
- Box 3: Closed

  – "Box 3 has the same content as Box 1 or Box 2."

  – "There might be a parrot in the box."
    - True   80% of 7-year-olds
                  35% of adults

Chierchia, Guasti, Cualmini, Meroni, Crain and Foppolo (2004)

- Puppet: "I bet that Batman will take a cake or an apple".
- Story acted out where Batman takes just a cake, takes just an apple, or takes both a cake and an apple.
- "Did the puppet win the bet?"
- Yes:

	5-year olds	Adults
A or B	**95**	**60**
A or B	78	100
A and B	16	0