

PH130 Meaning and Communication

Lecture 3

Introductory examples of implicature

“Someone ran over her with a tractor”

“Someone drank it”

On the distinction between what is said vs. what is conveyed (=con conversationally implicated):

1. What is said can be true while what is conveyed is false.
2. What is said can be false while what is conveyed is true (“I was so hungry I ate a horse.”)
3. Conversational implicatures attach to utterances in specific contexts, not to sentences.
4. Conversational implicatures are *cancellable*.

Contrast:

“Someone drank your milk. Maybe it was me, I’m not saying”

with:

* “Felix and Frédérique drank your milk. Maybe it was me, I’m not saying.”

5. Speakers are in control of conversational implicatures to an interesting extent.

Action: background to implicature

Conversation consists of actions which are (1) goal directed, (2) intentional, (3) done for reasons (there are reasons why words are chosen), (4) co-ordinated, and (5) co-operative.

Carl Showalter is driving

GRIMSRUD

Where is Pancakes Hause?

CARL

What?

GRIMSRUD

We stop at Pancakes Hause.

CARL

What're you, nuts? We had pancakes for breakfast. I gotta go somewhere I can get a shot [...]

Conversation 1
(from *Fargo*)

Manner—“Be perspicuous”

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly. (27)

MILES

What do you want?

MARYLIN

I want to nail your ass. [...]

I'm reporting you to the IRS.

[...]

MILES

Did our marriage ever mean anything to you?

MARYLIN

Drop the bogus forgery charge and I'll forget about your generous friends slash clients.

MILES

That's blackmail.

MARYLIN

That's marriage.

Conversation 2
(from
*Intolerable
Cruelty*)

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.” (26)

Grice's Maxims:

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.” (25)

Quality—“try to make our 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.” (27)

Relation—“be relevant”

MARGE

Yah, it's this vehicle I asked you about yesterday. I was just wondering -

JERRY

Yah, like I told ya, we haven't had any vehicles go missing.

[...]

MARGE

So how do you - have you done any kind of inventory recently?

JERRY

The car's not from our lot, ma'am.

MARGE

but do you know that for sure without -

JERRY

Well, I would know. I'm the Executive Sales Manager.

MARGE

Yah, but -

JERRY

We run a pretty tight ship here.

Conversation 3
(from *Fargo*)

In what sense does the Cooperative Principle apply to actual conversations?

“observance of the Cooperative Principle and maxims is reasonable (rational) along the following lines: that anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication (such as giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced by others) must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstances, in participation in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the Cooperative Principle and the maxims.” (30)

Roughly speaking: it's rational for someone interested in conversation to adhere to the CP and maxims.

Implicature

A theory of implicature should enable us to distinguish what is said from what is conversationally implicated.

Main part of Grice's theory of implicature:

“to calculate a conversational implicature is to calculate what has to be supposed in order to preserve the supposition that the //p. 40// Cooperative Principle is being observed” (39–40)

MARGE

Where is everybody?

LOU

Well - it's cold, Margie.

Conversation 4
(from *Fargo*)

Grice's theory about what is conversationally implicated:

“A man who, by (in, when) saying (or making as if to say) that p has implicated that q, may be said to have conversationally implicated that q, provided that (1) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle; //p. 31// (2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, q is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say p (or doing so in those terms) consistent with this presumption; and (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (2) is required.” (30–1)”

The above theory applied to Conversation 4:

p = “It's cold”

q = “The others are not here because it's cold”

Lou says p. For Lou's saying q to have been an act which conversationally implicates q is for:

- (1) Lou is presumed to be observing C.P. and Maxims.
- (2) The supposition that Lou thinks q is required to make his saying p consistent with (1).
- (3) Lou thinks, and expects Marge to think, that it is within Marge's competence to work out that (2) is true.

MILES

I'll have the tournedos of beef.
And the lady will have the same?

(To Marylin)

I assume you're a carnivore.

MARYLIN

I know you do.

Conversation 5
(*Intolerable
Cruelty*)

MILES

Well, when this goes south --
promise you'll have dinner with
me?

MARYLIN

(She holds a plate of food for
him) Have you tried the duck?

MILES

I figure a couple of months.
That's how long it should take
for the ink on the settlement to
dry.

(He takes the plate of food from
her.)

MARYLIN

It has bones. Be sure to swallow
one.

Conversation 6
(*Intolerable
Cruelty*)