IMPLICATURE &
Grice’s MAXIMS
of
CONVERSATION
Conversational Implicature (Grice): sentences mean what one says and more

How is he doing in his new job at the bank? Oh, quite well, he hasn’t been to prison yet.

A proposition which is conveyed indirectly = implication
0 implicatures:
1. conventional: therefore, too, syntactic constructions
2. conversational implicatures: determined by the conversational context, by the mutual conversational beliefs, constrained by Cooperative Principle
Conversational implicatures are:

0 generalized
Some of them have come.
Not all of them have come.

0 particularized
Conversational Implicatures are **cancellable**.

On the morning of the murder John visited Mary, went to the campus and dropped on his friend, but not necessarily in that order.

It’s odd that the dog doesn’t eat cheese.
-> conventional implicature: the dog doesn’t eat cheese

*It’s odd that he doesn’t but he does in fact eat cheese.*
0 explicit cancellation ➔ may draw attention to the implicature:

I was overhearing some of the men and well, some of them are wondering what it is we’re up to here. Not me, of course. I know you’re always the man with the plan. But some, not me, are wondering if there is in fact a plan at all and what it might be.
Conversational implicatures are reinforcible, unlike conventional
*I regret that he is here and he is here
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
Attardo’s Perlocutionary Cooperative Principle = cooperate in whatever goals the speaker may have in initiating a conversational exchange, including non-linguistic, practical goals; anticipate people’s needs

A: How long does it take by taxi?

a) One minute – not pragmatically acceptable, unhelpful, validates mistaken assumption

b) You don’t need a taxi – it’s two minute’s walk.

Get Smith on the phone.

He’s right here in the waiting room.
Grice’s Maxims of conversation:

1. Quantity
   =contribution should be as informative as required: not more, not less

2. Quality
   =tell the truth

3. Relation
   =be relevant

4. Manner
   =avoid obscurity, ambiguity, be brief and orderly
Failure to fulfill a maxim:
1. violate
2. infringe (unintentionally)
3. opt out
4. suspend
5. flout
1. Violate $\rightarrow$ intentionally mislead

Maxim of Quantity

I did not explicitly request a bribe from anyone.
1. Violate → intentionally mislead

0 Maxim of Quality

“I know all. And I should like to begin,” I said, sinking my personal opinion that the female in question was a soppy pest in my desire to buck and encourage, "by saying that Madeline Bassett is a charming girl. A winner, and just the sort for you."
1. Violate → intentionally mislead

0 Maxim of Relation

“How do you think I look, Bertie?”
Well, the answer to that, of course, was "perfectly foul". I evaded the question. "I hear you're in London," I said carelessly.
1. Violate → intentionally mislead

0 Maxim of Manner

CHARMING: You can’t lie. Where is Shrek?
PINOCCHIO: Well, I don’t know where he’s not.
CHARMING: You don’t know where Shrek is?
PINOCCHIO: It wouldn’t be inaccurate to assume that I couldn’t exactly not say that is or isn’t almost partially incorrect.
CHARMING: So you do know where he is.
PINOCCHIO: On the contrary, I’m possibly more or less not definitely rejecting the idea that in no way, with any amount of uncertainty I do not know where he shouldn’t be. If that indeed wasn’t where he isn’t. Even if he wasn’t not where I knew he was it could mean...
2. Infringe → unintentionally violate: imperfect linguistic performance

0 Maxim of Manner

‘Do you know the Guest Room miss? Well, it’s on the New Bridge, miss, between Tudor Building and the North Annex where the Cottage used to be, miss, only of course that’s all done away now and you has to go up by the main staircase past the West Lecture-Room, miss, what used to be the Junior Common Room, miss, before they made the new entrance and moved the stairs, and then turn right and it’s halfway along the corridor. You can’t mistake it, miss. Any of the Scouts would show you, miss, if you could find one about just now.
2. Infringe → unintentionally violate

0 Maxim of Quantity

‘Oh, there you are!’ said Sir Aymler, who was still bellowing out of the window. ‘William, this fellow who calls himself Reginald Twistleton, how about him?’

‘How about him?’

‘Exactly. How about him?’

‘How do you mean, how about him?’

‘Good God, boy, can’t you understand plain English? I mean, How about him?’
2. Infringe → unintentionally violate

0 Maxim of Relation

Such an interesting case and interesting people too, don’t you think, though what the jury make of it I don’t know, with faces like hams most of them, except the artist, who wouldn’t have any features at all if it wasn’t for that dreadful tie and his beard, looking like Christ, only not really Christ but one of those Italian ones in a pink frock and a blue top thing.
3. Opt out

My lips are sealed
Such information is confidential
It’s none of your business
No comment
4. suspend

0 Maxim of Quality: e.g. obituaries
0 Maxim of Manner: e.g. poetry
0 Maxim of Quantity: e.g. text messages
5. flout $\rightarrow$ exploit a maxim: implicatures

Premises:

a) there is no reason to assume that the speaker is disobeying the cooperative principle;

b) the speaker knows that the hearer can come up with the implicature;

c) mutual contextual beliefs
5. Flout Maxim of Quality

‘Did they shoot you?’
‘Sure, but I caught the bullets and tossed them back.’
5. Flout Maxim of Quantity

‘The most ridiculous rumours – someone said you’d been expelled for crashing a flying car.’ ‘Well, we haven’t been expelled,’ Harry assured her.
5. Flout Maxim of Relation

‘Why did you put that ad in the paper?’ Cramer demanded.

‘Archie, this letter from Jordan is farcical. He knows quite well that I do not use Brassavolas in tri-generic crosses. He doesn’t deserve an answer, but he’ll get one. Your notebook. Dear Mr Jordan. I am aware that you have had ill success with – ‘
5. Flout Maxim of Manner

He can’t possibly do it, which is an advantage, because the only things he ever really strains himself on are those that can’t be done.
clash of maxims: quality and quantity: if you say all, you may say that for which you have insufficient evidence
overstatement (hyperbole) and understatement

0 violate Grice’s maxims of quantity

No one understands me
A pig wouldn’t eat this food

Not bad!
overstatement

0 epic grandeur
0 stir curiosity
0 enhance positive face: That was a delicious meal.
0 advertisement: ...........
0 standardized cases of hyperbole: a thousand pardons, scared to death, I’d give the world, work one’s fingers to the bone, move heaven and earth, be all ears
understatement

0 pragmatic purposes: restore credibility
There are some rather splendid murals on the North Wall. They were rather enthusiastic

0 used to underplay aspects of meaning which are pragmatically disfavoured, criticism, pessimistic judgements

I wasn’t overimpressed

0 minimize praise of oneself: I’m rather good at crossword puzzles. That wasn’t such a bad meal that I cooked

0 specialization of adverbials of degree towards negative items: a little bit dirty / ?a little bit clean
Litotes: particular case of understatement: negate a predicative in order to conversationally assert less than the opposite

He is no coward.
He is not without taste.

Negation does not merely suggest the absence of the quality negated but the presence of the opposite