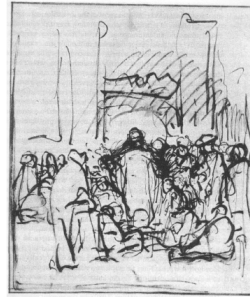


## Conversational Implicatures: The Basics

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## The idea (Levinson)



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- "We interpret this sketch instantly and effortlessly as a gathering of people before a structure, probably a gateway; the people are listening to a single declaiming figure in the center. [ . . . ] But all this is a miracle, for there is little detailed information in the lines or shading (such as there is). Every line is a mere suggestion [ . . . ]. So here is the miracle: from a merest, sketchiest squiggle of lines, you and I converge to find adumbration of a coherent scene [ . . . ].
- "The problem of utterance interpretation is not dissimilar to this visual miracle. An utterance is not, as it were, a veridical model or "snapshot" of the scene it describes [ . . . ]. Rather, an utterance is just as sketchy as the Rembrandt drawing."

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## Cooperation Principles/Maxims

- They fill in the 'sketch'
- they are not etiquette prescriptions (e.g. 'speak clearly and be courteous at all times')
- They reveal what the listener can assume about the speaker's intentions. Only by making those assumptions can talk be understood that would otherwise be unintelligible

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## The Cooperative Principle ( 'Super-maxim' )

- Make your contribution as is required, when it is required, by the conversation in which you are engaged.

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## Quality

- Contribute only what you know to be true. Do not say false things. Do not say things for which you lack evidence.

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## Quantity

- Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not say more than is required

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## Relation (Relevance)

- Make your contribution relevant.

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## Manner

- avoid obscurity
- avoid ambiguity
- be brief
- be orderly

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## Gricean Maxims (Summary)

**The Cooperative Principle:** make your contribution as is required, when it is required, by the conversation in which you are engaged.

- **Quality:** contribute only what you know to be true. Do not say false things. Do not say things for which you lack evidence.
- **Quantity:** Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not say more than is required.
- **Relation (Relevance):** Make your contribution relevant.
- **Manner:** avoid obscurity, avoid ambiguity, be brief, be orderly

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## Using the maxims

- Grice says that people, if they are cooperating at all, do usually follow the maxims **even if they appear not to!** (i.e. even when they flout the maxim)
- The appearance of non-adherence to maxims can arise from looking too narrowly at what is said, and not what might be conveyed

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## Using the maxims (ctd)

- The maxims can be taken as extra premises about the speaker's behavior which are available to the hearer when calculating what the speaker intended to convey.
- the assumption that the speaker is following some or all maxims, i.e. the assumption of the maxims as additional premises, allows the hearer to draw extra inferences: these are **conversational implicatures**.

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## Maxims: Obeyed and Flouted

- "Do you like Jill's new car?"

Maxims Obeyed:

- "I'd drive across the country in it."

Maxims Flouted:

- "The windshield is very clear."

Maxims Ignored:

- "Pickles give me gas."

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## Example: Relevance

- John: Where's the roast beef?  
Mary: The dog looks happy.
- Mary means something like "In answer to your question, the dinner has been eaten by the dog"
- she doesn't say that - we work it out on the basis that what she says is *relevant* to what she's been asked.

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## Example: Relevance (ctd.)

- John: Do you have your bike with you?  
Mary: I walked in today.
- Based on Relevance we infer: Mary walked in, hence Mary does not have bike.

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## Example: Relevance (ctd.)

- John: Is the chicken good?  
Mary: I once tried one of their entrees.  
Now I always go for the salad.

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## Example: Relevance (ctd.)

- John: What do you think of the prof?  
Mary: Nice weather for the time of year.
- M implicates perhaps that the professor, or a potential snitch, is within earshot.

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## Example: Quantity

- John: Where did you go yesterday?  
Mary: NB train station.
- John automatically assumes that Mary went to no less and no more than the NB train station (e.g. to meet someone).
- If John later discovers that Mary then took the train and went to NY to spend the day shopping, he will feel... surprised.

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### Example: Quantity (ctd.)

- John: Bill has a small birth-mark on his left cheek.
- This implicates that the speaker (John) believes that: (A) Bill has a birth-mark and (B) John has evidence for this belief.

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### Example: Quantity (ctd.)

- Tautologies and truisms do not carry any information literally.
- "Boys will be boys".
- Assuming that the speaker is being cooperative, the point may be to indicate that hearer should not expect some particular boy to behave otherwise.

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### Example: Quantity (ctd.)

- "For every crime there's a criminal".
- The speaker may indicate e.g. (A) that some particular event should be classified as a crime, and/or (B) that a hunt for a criminal will now begin.

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### Example: Manner

- John: Let's get the kids something.  
Mary: OK, but not I-C-E C-R-E-A-M.
- Mary is going out of their way to be a bit obscure, spelling out the words rather than simply saying them.
- Mary flouts Manner so flagrantly that John can infer that there must be a special reason for her being so uncooperative (e.g. Mary does not want the kids to complain that they're being denied a treat)

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### Example: Manner (ctd.)

- John: The professor came in and the student left.
- Indicates that student left after (or, as a result of) the professor coming.

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### Example: Manner (ctd.)

- John: Did you get my assignment?  
Mary: I received two pages clipped together and covered with rows of black squiggles.
- M indicates, perhaps, that the assignment departed from what was expected.
- How is this example a consequence of (flouting) the Manner maxim?

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### Example: Quality

- John: I might win the lottery.  
Mary: Yes, and pigs might fly.
- The hearer assumes that the speaker is not knowingly telling a lie or fantasizing.
- Mary is flouting the maxim of quality, so there must be something else going on...
- ...the implicature: John's chances of winning the lottery are about the same as pigs flying.

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### Example: Quality (ctd.)

- Flouting the maxim of quality is the driving force in **irony**.
- Think of ironic comments you've heard/said recently; how do they achieve their ends and how is that related to expectations of 'truth'?

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### Example: Quality (ctd.)

- John: I'm gonna flunk this course.  
Mary: Sure, just like you flunk every course you take.
- Suppose J has passed every course so far, and M knows this. M is flouting Quality: by forcing J to think about other courses taken, M conveys that J should be more optimistic.

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## Two Standard Tests for Conversational Implicature

A conversationally implicates B if:

- **Cancelability:** "A and not B" is consistent and felicitous.
- **Reinforcibility:** "A. Indeed B" is felicitous.

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## Scalar Implicatures

- The numeric determiners . . . *four, three, two, one* form a scale (with the more informative items to the left)
- "I have two sisters".
- since *four* is more informative than *two* on this scale, it follows that: "I don't have four sisters".
- Apply the **Cancelability** test to check that this is an implicature.

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## Scalar Implicatures (ctd.)

- A: "How many children do you have?"  
B: "I have two children."

A understands that B has *only* two kids.  
Why?

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## Scalar Implicatures (ctd.)

- This is not an Entailment
- "I have two children" does *not* entail "I have *only* two children."

Situation: Applying for social benefits: if you need to have two kids to qualify, you also qualify if you have three.

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## Scalar Implicatures (ctd.)

- The implicature is due to obeying the maxim
- The hearer assumes that the maxim was obeyed, i.e. the hearer assumes that the speaker gave *all* the information.
- i.e. we are talking about the maxim of ... ?
- The hearer concludes that any claim giving more information is false, i.e. the implicature is to *negate more informative claims*

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## Scalar Implicatures (ctd.)

- The phrases *all of the, most of the, some of the* are on a scale.
- "Most of the cake was eaten" implicates the negation of "all of the cake was eaten", i.e. "Not all of the cake was eaten"
- Cancelability:  
Some of the cake was eaten, in fact most of it.  
Most of the cake was eaten, in fact all of it.
- Other scales?

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## Scalar Implicatures (ctd.)

- The adjectives *OK, interesting, exciting, orgasmic* could form a scale.
- Consider the implicatures of "The lecture was interesting."
- and, or
- necessarily, possibly
- always, often, occasionally
- will, must, should, may
- freezing, cold, cool, cool-ish

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## Scalar Implicatures (ctd.)

- The *and>>or* scale:
- "David has a dog *or* a cat."
  - Implicature: David does not have a dog *and* a cat.
  - Again: This is *not* an entailment!
  - Situation: if one needs a license for a dog or a cat, one also needs a license for a dog *and* a cat.

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## Scalar Implicatures (ctd.)

- Again, the hearer assumes that the Maxim of Quantity was obeyed, i.e. the hearer assumes that the speaker gave *all* the information.
- The hearer concludes that any claim giving more information is false, i.e. the implicature is to *negate more informative claims*.

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## Entailment vs. Implicature

- **Entailment:** A logical conclusion; based only on the *literal* meaning of the sentence.
- **Implicature:** A conclusion based on the rules of conversation.

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## How an Implicature arises

- The maxim is *flouted*: the hearer recognizes that and comes up with an explanation for the speaker's behavior.
- The maxim is *obeyed*: for Quantity, the hearer concludes that any claim that is more informative is false.

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## More cases

- Imagine that Mr. X is applying for a philosophy position and his teacher is writing him the following letter of recommendation:
- Mr. X's command of English is excellent and his attendance at tutorials has been regular.
- What does the recommendation implicate?

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## More cases (ctd.)

- ... it implicates that: Mr. X isn't a brilliant philosopher.

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## More cases (ctd.)

- A: What time is it?  
B: Some of the guests are already leaving.
- Implicature that...

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## More cases (ctd.)

- ... It must be late.

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## More cases (ctd.)

- A: Where is John?  
B: Some of the guests are already leaving.
- Implicature that...

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## More cases (ctd.)

- ... Perhaps John has already left.

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## More cases (ctd.)

- A: I am out of petrol.  
B: There is a garage around the corner.
- Implicature that...
- What maxims are needed to infer the implicature?

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### More cases (ctd.)

- Miss X produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely to the Britney Spears song "Oops!...I Did It Again".

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### More cases (ctd.)

- A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.  
B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.

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### More cases (ctd.)

- *When Harry met Sally* (1989) – discussion about implicatures:  
Jess: If she's so great why aren't YOU taking her out?  
Harry: I told you, we're just friends.  
Jess: So you're saying she's not that attractive.  
Harry: No, I told you, she IS attractive.  
Jess: But you also said she has a good personality.

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### More cases (ctd.)

Harry: She HAS a good personality.  
Jess: *When someone's not that attractive they're ALWAYS described as having a good personality.*  
Harry: Look if you were to ask me *what does she look like ?* and I said she has a good personality, that means she's not attractive. But just because I happen to mention that she has a good personality, she could be either.

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### More cases (ctd.)

- Setting up implicatures for certain expressions - Herman Finkers (a Dutch comedian):
- When a baby isn't cute, I wouldn't lie about it. Of course I know that one cannot say: "That is one ugly baby". One cannot and should not do that. What I always say when a child is not that cute is: "That is a *sweet* baby". For example, my neighbors just had an extremely sweet child. I told them in all honesty: "This is the sweetest child I have ever seen".

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### Some of the sources for the slides

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- Notes by Charles Antaki: <http://www-staff.lboro.ac.uk/%7Essca1/tlectures.htm>
- Notes by David Beaver: <http://www.stanford.edu/class/linguist230a/grice.pdf>
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