

Implicature

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1 Generalized Conversational Implicature

(1) *Grice's example*

A is writing a testimonial about a pupil who is a candidate for a philosophy job and his letters reads as follows: "Dear Sir, Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc."

(2) *What is implicated*

This letter quite clearly conveys that Mr. X is no good at philosophy.

(3) *What is said*

Two very positive things about Mr. X, that he speaks English well and that he is regular and reliable fellow.

(4) *What is entailed is very different from what is implicated*

- (a) What is entailed is, for example, that Mr. X speaks English, that he has tutorials, that he has been attending them, etc.
- (b) What is implicated is that he is bad at philosophy, and that is definitely NOT entailed.
- (c) What is implicated is particular to the context of a recommendation letter for a letter in philosophy
- (d) Suppose someone asks: How is Mr. X's English and how is his attendance at tutorials.?

- (e) In this context, the utterance “Mr. X’s command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular” carries no implication about Mr. X’s abilities as a philosopher.
- (f) But the same entailments hold as before. Entailments generally are not context dependent.

What A has done

1. There is a general principle at work that says: Say as much as is required by the present circumstances
2. There is a principle that says: Be truthful
3. A has apparently flouted the first principle.
4. On the assumption he is not just being a randomly uncooperative guy, there must be a reason.
5. The reason is that he is confining himself to things he can say truthfully (He’s obeying the second principle).
6. This gives rise to the implicature: There is not a great deal more of relevance that he could say truthfully.

2 Basic Machinery of the theory

2.1 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.

[Be helpful.]

2.2 The Four Conversational Maxims

(5) Maxim of Quality[Truthfulness]

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

- (1) Do not say what you believe to be false.
- (2) Do not say that for which you lack evidence.

- (6) **Maxim of Quantity**[Informativeness]
 - (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.
- (7) **Maxim of Relation**[Relevance]

Be relevant.
- (8) **Maxim of Manner**[Clarity]
 - (1) Avoid obscurity of expression.
 - (2) Avoid ambiguity.
 - (3) Be brief. (Avoid unnecessary prolixity)
 - (4) Be orderly.

Reviewing what A did

- 1. A flouted Informativeness in order to preserve Truthfulness.
- 2. Frequently an implicature is given rise to when two principles come into conflict and one is obeyed in deference to other.
- 3. The conspicuousness of disobeying a maxim is what gives rise to the implicature.
- 4. We call the maxim disobeyed the *flouted maxim*.

3 Examples

- 1. A: Smitty doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.
B: He's been driving to New York every weekend.
 - (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
 - (b) What has he *implicated*?

Some possibilities:

- (a) B may not have adequate evidence for the implicature

(b) B may not want to expose herself to being called upon to produce her evidence, because she doesn't want to reveal how she got it.

2. A: Have you seen my stubby screwdriver?
B: Look in the red toolbox.

Notice that B hasn't directly provided an answer to A's question.

- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What has he *implicated*?

3. A: What would you like for your birthday?
B: Well, my camera's not working.

- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What's implicated here?

Note how the peculiar particle *well* functions here. What it actually seems to signal is: I'm not saying everything I could be saying here. There's something I'd like you to infer.

4. A: You know, I can crush rocks with my bare hands.
B: Yeah, and I'm Marie, Queen of Rumania

- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What is being implicated here.

5. A: Who are those two standing by the door?
B: That's my mother and her husband.

- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What is being implicated here.

6. A: I've just run out of gas.
B: Oh, there's a garage around the corner.

- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What's implicated here?

7. A: Let's get the kids something.
B: Okay but I veto I C E C R E A M S.
- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What is being implicated here.
8. A: The flag is white
- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What's implicated here?
9. A: Nigel has fourteen children.
- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What's implicated here?
10. A: How did Harry do in court the other day?The flag is white
B: Oh he got a fine.
- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What's implicated here?
11. A: Can you tell me the time?
B: Well the milkman has come.
- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What's implicated here?
12. A: Walk up to the door, turn the door handle clockwise as far as it will go, then pull gently toward you.
- (a) What maxim(s), if any, is/are being flouted?
(b) What's implicated here?

4 Bizarreness, opting out, subversion, irony, and metaphor

4.1 Bizarreness

If we can't derive an implicature to explain an apparent violation, then the effect is bizarreness:

- (9) A stranger walks up to you at a train station and says, "I'm Algernon P. Farnsworth, Can you tell me the time?"
- (10) The lone ranger rode into the sunset and jumped on his horse.

4.2 Opting out

Sometimes people just overtly request relief from the burdens of a maxim. This is *opting out*

- (11)
 - a. I am not at liberty to say more.. [Quantity]
 - b. I probably don't need to say this... [Quantity]
 - c. I'm not sure if it's true but ... [Quality]
 - d. I have no evidence for this but .. [Quality]
 - e. I know this is irrelevant but ... [Relation]
 - f. As you know ... [Quantity]
 - g. This may just be a rumor [Quality]
 - h. By the way .. [Relation]

4.3 Subversion

Yes, sometimes people do **lie**. On purpose, hoping to get away with it.

When they do this they are actually relying on the fact that quality is a standard assumption of conversation. This is called **subverting** a maxim.

Yes, sometimes people are irrelevant. Even rambling. Again, a general assumption of coherence is what lets them get away with it, at least for a while.

This is subverting relevance.

4.4 Irony

Irony arises when flouting Truthfulness (Quality)

- (12) a. What if the USSR blockades the gulf and all the oil?
b. Oh come now. Britain rules the seas.

What is conveyed (once the irony is absorbed) is that there is not a damned thing Britain could do about it.

One difference between cases of irony and the “Yes and I’m Marie the queen of Romania” cases is that in irony the speaker produces not just a random absurdity but one that is exactly the opposite of what he means to convey.

But there’s more to irony than that....

4.5 Metaphor

Quality again.

- (13) Queen Victoria was made of iron.

5 Horn

The idea is to sort implicatures into two broad classes.

Quality still lurks in the background. It has a different status than the others...

- (14) *Q Principle*

Make your contribution sufficient. Say as much as you can (given both Quality and **R**)

The Q-Principle subsumes the following Gricean maxims:

- (1) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes in the current exchange).
- (2) Avoid obscurity of expression.
- (3) Avoid ambiguity.

(15) *R Principle*

Make your contribution necessary. Say no more than you must (given **Q**)

The R-Principle subsumes the following Gricean maxims:

- (1) Be relevant.
- (2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- (3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- (4) Be orderly.

One of a family of minimax economics-like principles. A principle of “maximum of illocutionary ends with a minimum of phonetic effort” (Searle 1965) Others: Paul, Zipf (1949; speaker and auditory economies), Martinet, Tanenhaus (Horn 1993)

Q-Implicature

Asserting Point p on a pragmatic scale implicate not q for any point q higher on the scale (or you would have said q, by the Q-principle).

Pragmatic Scales

Possible < Likely ~ Probable < Certain

- (16) a. It is probable that he will come.
- b. implicates that I dont know that he’ll come
- c. implicates it is not certain that he’ll come.

lukewarm < cool < cold

am-ambivalent-about < sort-of-like < like < love

sometimes < often < usually < always

or < and

$p \wedge q$			\rightarrow	$p \vee q$		
p	q	$p \wedge q$		p	q	$p \vee q$
T	T	T		T	T	T
T	F	F		T	F	T
F	T	F		F	T	T
F	F	F		F	F	F

OK < good < excellent

a < the

In all of the above scales, degree of lexicalization is not a factor. Therefore all of the choices require the same amount of “phonetic effort”, and you should always choose the maximally informative one. [= clean Q-implicature]

- (17) a. She is either in the kitchen or the bedroom. [I don't know she's in either place]
b. The kitchen is a mess. [Does not implicate the bedroom isn't; choosing the kitchen may just be determined by relevance or interest, since it would have taken MORE effort to bring the bedroom in]

When two choices involve the same amount of effort, the decision between them is ruled by relevance or quantity.

Division of Pragmatic Labor (economics metaphors)

R-Implicature

Given two expressions covering the same semantic ground, a relatively unmarked form — briefer and more lexicalized — tends to be R-associated with a particular unmarked, stereotypical meaning, while the use of the periphrastic or less lexicalized expression tends to be Q-restricted to those situations outside the stereotype, for which the unmarked expression could not have been used appropriately (Horn 2004).

R-based implicature tied to forms [because economy/markedness of form enters in]

- (18) a. Can you close the window. [request to do something.]
b. Are you able to close the window? [information request]

Neg-raising

- (19) a. I don't think he can come. [implicates I think he can't come.]
[Alternative: He may not come.]
b. I don't guess he can come. [parallel implicature harder to get.]

Notice that logically (assuming we can't have contradictory beliefs):

think not p → not think p
 Stronger → Weaker

So to go from not-think-p to think-not-p is a strengthening implicature. R-implicatures are **strengthening**

Assume $p > q$, q SAID	
Q-implicature	R-implicature
$\sim p$	p

- (20) a. He got the machine to stop. [did something other than flip the off switch]
 b. He stopped the machine.

Unmarked/marked pairs

- (21) I broke my finger. [implicates not a thumb, but does not implicate not a ring-finger, or not a pinkie, because these are not lexicalized alternatives to *finger*]
- (22) a. Her blouse was pale red [something out of the range of pink].
 b. Her blouse was pink.
- (23) a. She wants her to win.
 b. She wants to win. [an alternative explanation to Principle B]
- (24) a. I am going to marry you.
 b. I will marry you. [which is promise, which prediction?]
- (25) a. My brother went to the church/the jail/the school.
 b. My brother went to church/ jail/ school.
- (26) a. It's not impossible that you will solve the problem.
 b. It's possible that you will solve the problem.
- (27) a. That's my father's wife.
 b. That's my mother.
- (28) a. I saw Smithers in a bar with a woman last night.
 b. The woman wasn't his wife (assuming we know Smithers was married).

6 Wilson and Sperber

7 Bibliography

Grice, H Paul. 1975. Logic and conversation. In *Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press.