1 Gricean Maxims

The purpose of Grice’s theory is to formulate a system for explaining how sentences convey more than they truth-conditionally say.

(1) Mary has two children.
   Implicature: Mary does not have three children.

(2) A: Can you spare 2 dollars?
    B: Here, I have 2 dollars.
    Implicature from (1) is canceled.

(3) A: Are you coming to my party?
    B: I have an exam.
    Implicature: I am not coming to the party.

Grice formulates a general conversational principle, which, he suggests, allows communication to be successful.

The Cooperative Principle make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage in which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

This principle is made up of four maxims which underly efficient cooperative conversation:

Grice’s Conversational Maxims:

1. **Maxim of Quality**: Contribute only what you know to be true. Do not say false things. Do not say things for which you lack evidence.

2. **Maxim of Quantity**: Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not say more than is required.

3. **Maxim of Relevance** (also called Relation): Make your contribution relevant.
4. **Maxim of Manner:** (i) Avoid obscurity; (ii) avoid ambiguity; (iii) be brief; (iv) be orderly.

When people participate in a conversation, they assume that the speakers are interacting with the maxims, and their interpretation of what is said is based on this assumption. However, this interaction can take a number of forms.

- A maxim can be observed, it can be ignored because it **clashes** with another maxim; it can be ignored because the speaker is not cooperating – otherwise known as **opting out**; or it can be **flouted** for conversational effect generating different implicatures in each case.

- Implicatures are generated by how the speaker’s assertions interact with the maxims thus allowing the speaker to communicate more than just the literal, truth-conditional content of their words

1.1 Practice

For each of the following examples answer the following questions:

- Which maxim(s) is/are involved?
- What is the implicature generated?
- Are the maxims being observed? flouted? is there a clash?
- How do the maxims create the implicature?

Example:
A: How is C getting along in his job?
B: Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn’t been to jail yet.

- **Maxim(s) involved:** Relevance
- **Implicature:** C is the sort of person who might go to jail (e.g. a treacherous or criminal person).
- **Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?** Observing Relevance
- **How do the maxims create the implicature?** The speaker would not mention C’s going to jail unless it were relevant, and it would only be relevant if there were some significant chance that C would do something that would land him in jail.
1. A: Do you have any idea where Bill is?
   B: There’s a yellow Volkswagen parked outside Sue’s house.

   - Maxim(s) involved:
   - Implicature:
   - Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?
   - How do the maxims create the implicature?

2. A: Bill’s girlfriend is a dirty, slimy little cheat.
   B: Huh, nice day, isn’t it?

   - Maxim(s) involved:
   - Implicature:
   - Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?
   - How do the maxims create the implicature?

3. Context: speaker A knows that speaker B has a son.
   A: How’s your son?
   B: I haven’t got a son.

   - Maxim(s) involved:
• Implicature:

• Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?

• How do the maxims create the implicature?

4. A: Where are my keys?  
B: On the coffee table.  
B': In the living-room, on the coffee-table, 17.5 centimeters from the edge, next to the ashtray.

• Maxim(s) involved:

• Implicature:

• Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?

• How do the maxims create the implicature?

5. A: Who is that woman over there?  
B: A female offspring of my parents.

• Maxim(s) involved:

• Implicature:
• Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?

• How do the maxims create the implicature?

6. A: Your tap is leaking.
   B: My plumber is on holiday.
   • Maxim(s) involved:
   • Implicature:

   • Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?
   • How do the maxims create the implicature?

7. Either John will come to the party, or he won’t.
   • Maxim(s) involved:
   • Implicature:

   • Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?
   • How do the maxims create the implicature?
8. Context: A was not there for B when B needed him most.
B: You are a wonderful friend!

   - Maxim(s) involved:

   - Implicature:

   - Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?

   - How do the maxims create the implicature?

9. Context: A professor is asked about a colleague’s suitability for a teaching post.
He replies: Mr Smith always comes to work on time, his handwriting is neat, and he dresses well.

   - Maxim(s) involved:

   - Implicature:

   - Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?

   - How do the maxims create the implicature?

10. A: Who will help Jill?
    B: Someone, I guess.

    - Maxim(s) involved:
• Implicature:

• Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?

• How do the maxims create the implicature?

11. A: Who will help Jill?
   B: I have to do my homework.

   • Maxim(s) involved:

   • Implicature:

   • Maxims observed? Clashing? Flouted?

   • How do the maxims create the implicature?