1 The Cooperative Principle and Grice’s Maxims

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.

Maxim of 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.

Maxim of Quality:

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

Maxim of Relation:

1. Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner:

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

Each of these maxims is supposed to follow from the general cooperative principle. It’s really this principle that is most important, rather than any of the specific maxims. Thus, we may often find pragmatic meanings that can’t easily be described in terms of these four maxims, but are nonetheless consistent with the basic idea behind the cooperative principle.
2 A Note on Scalar Implicatures

Scalar implicatures are a subset of conversational implicatures that arise when there exist some scales of lexical items that are organized by informativity.

- \{all, most, many, some\}
- \{excellent, good, not bad\}
- \{always, often, sometimes\}
- \{none, not all\}
- \{terrible, bad, not good\}

These scales are often thought of as conventionalized aspects of the language, but we can see cases in which “ad hoc” scales arise.

If we’re in the context of the above image, we have the following scale: \{hat, mustache\}.

The standard Gricean story about scalar implicatures goes as follows. The maxim of quantity tells us to be as informative as possible. But the maxim of quality tells us to not lie and to say only what we have evidence for. Therefore, if a speaker uses an item that is not the most informative on its respective scale, a listener infers that either:

1. The speaker believes that a corresponding sentence with a stronger item is false, or
2. The speaker does not have evidence supporting a corresponding sentence with a stronger item.

So, for example, *some* implicates *not all* and *mustache* implicates *not hat*.

One way to see that these are implicatures, rather than entailments is to use diagnostics such as cancellation, suspension, and re-enforcement. But we can also look at what happens when we modify a sentence with negation, by changing it to a question, or putting the sentence in the antecedent of a conditional.

**Example:** Phil ate some of the cookies.
• Hypothesis A: This entails that Phil ate some of the cookies, and implicates that he did not eat all of them.

• Hypothesis B: This entails that Phil ate some of the cookies and did not eat all of them.

Suppose Phil ate all of the cookies. Now consider the following examples:

1. Phil did not eat some of the cookies.
   On Hypothesis A, this is false. On Hypothesis B, this is true.

2. Did Phil eat some of the cookies?
   On Hypothesis A, “yes” is a true answer to this question. On Hypothesis B, it is a false answer.

3. If Phil ate some of the cookies, he can’t have any dessert. If he did not eat some of the cookies, he can have dessert.
   On Hypothesis A, Phil can’t have any dessert. On Hypothesis B, Phil can have dessert.

Our intuitions suggest that Hypothesis A is correct.

3 Calculating Implicatures

1. A: Do you have any idea where Bill is?
   B: There’s a yellow Volkswagen parked outside Sue’s house.
   • Implicature:
   • Calculation:

2. Context: Speaker A knows that speaker B has a son.
   A: How’s your son?
   B: I haven’t got a son.
   • Implicature:
   • Calculation:
4 Diagnosing Implicatures

1. Example: She won’t necessarily get the job.
   - Target meaning: She will possibly get the job.
   - Cancellation:
   - Suspension:
   - Re-enforcement:
   - Is the target meaning an implicature?

2. Example: He remembered to take out the trash.
   - Target meaning: He took out the trash.
   - Cancellation:
   - Suspension:
   - Re-enforcement:
   - Is the target meaning an implicature?

3. Example: He was able to solve the problem.
   - Target meaning: He solved the problem.
   - Cancellation:
   - Suspension:
   - Re-enforcement:
   - Is the target meaning an implicature?