

Pragmatics studies the factors that govern people's choice of language in social interaction and the effects of this choice on others.

In the uses of language what is meant is often more than , or different from, what has actually been said.

Paul Grice: Theory of Conversational Implicature

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**How is it possible to mean more than we
actually say?**

PAUL GRICE

- Grice's aim was to understand how “speaker's meaning” rises from “sentence meaning” (Speaker meaning = Sentence meaning + What is implicated)
- Grice proposed that many aspects of “speaker's meaning” result from the assumption that the participants in a conversation are cooperating in an attempt to reach mutual goals – or at least are pretending to do so!
- Conversation is a cooperative behaviour, and therefore proceeds by rules of cooperative conduct.
- Grice called this the **Cooperative Principle**.

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”

The cooperative principle has four sub-parts, four rules or maxims that people involved in conversations tend to respect:

- 1. The maxim of quality**
- 2. The maxim of quantity**
- 3. The maxim of relevance**
- 4. The maxim of manner**

(1)The maxim of quality (“Tell the truth”)

Do not say what you believe to be false.

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

(2) The maxim of quantity (“Say just as much as is necessary”)

Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.

Do not make the contribution more informative than is required.

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(3) The maxim of relation / relevance ("Stick to the point")

Make your contributions relevant.

(4) The maxim of manner (“Be clear”)

Avoid obscurity.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief.

Be orderly.

Grice was not acting as a prescriptivist when he stated these maxims.

He observed the difference between “what is said” and “what is meant” to show that people actually do follow these maxims in conversation.

An example on the maxim of quantity:

Mum: *Did you finish your homework?*

Pat: *I finished my algebra.*

Mum: *Well, get busy and finish your English, too!*

The child did not say that her English homework is not done, nor did she imply it.

Nevertheless her mother is entitled to draw this conclusion, based on the combination of what the child actually said and the cooperative principle.

An example on the maxim of relation/relevance:

The maxim of relevance is behind the implications of this letter of recommendation (a classic type of example).

Dear Colleague,

Dr John Jones has asked me to write a letter on his behalf. Let me say that Dr Jones is unfailingly polite, is neatly dressed at all times, and is always on time for his classes.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. H.P. Smith

The person reading this letter assumes that all the relevant information will be included; so the maxims of quantity and relevance lead one to suspect that this is the best that the professor can say.

Maxims may be: Observed

Ex:

John got into Columbia and won a scholarship.
I went to the supermarket and I bought some sugar.

“and” means that both linked events occurred, but implicates also temporal progression due to the maxim of manner: be orderly.

Maxims may be:

Violated (because of a clash with another maxim)

A: Where does Dave live?

B: Somewhere in the South of France

This response infringes the first maxim of quantity, but does so in order to avoid violating the second maxim of quality.

What is the implicature?

Maxims may be: Flouted

E.g.:

A: Will you come out on a dinner date with me?
B: Hasn't the weather been lovely recently?

B flouts the maxims of quantity and relevance.
What is the implicature?

The linguistic meaning of what is said

+

The information from the context (shared knowledge)

+

The assumption that the people speaking are observing the cooperative principle

=

Conversational implicature

Implicature interpretation requires both Speaker and Hearer to be collaborative

Ex:

A. I got an A on that exam.
B. And I'm Queen Marie of Rumania.

A. Where did you go?
B. Out.

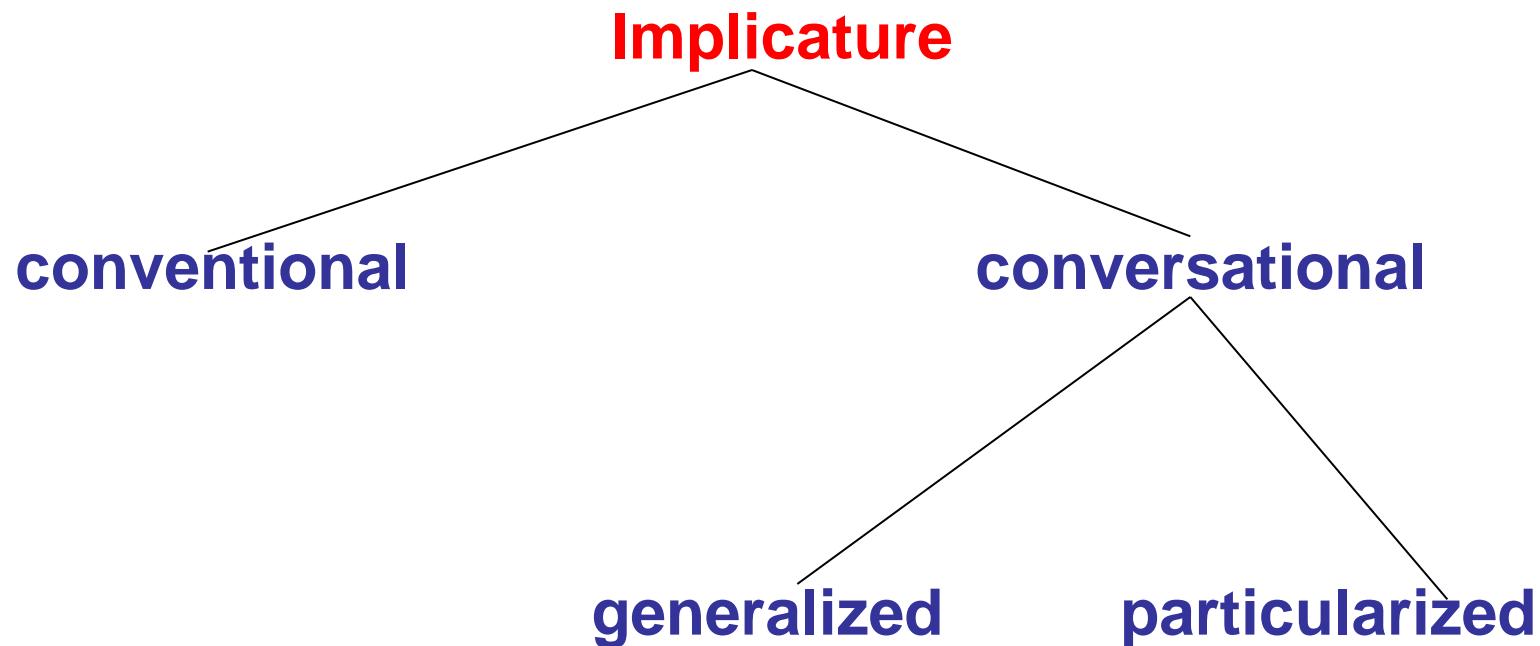
A: Where does Arnold live?
B: Somewhere in southern California.

Jokes are a good example and often rely on the hearer's knowledge of the rules of conversation for their humorous effect.

In the following joke, the woman is also violating the maxim of relevance:

I came home last night, and there's a car in the dining room. I said to my wife: "How did you get the car in the dining room?" She said: "It was easy. I made a left turn when I came out of the kitchen."

Types of implicatures



Conventional implicatures

- not based on cooperative principle or maxims
- encoded in the lexicon or grammar
- not dependent on context for their interpretations

Ex:

George is short but brave. (contrast)

Sue and Bill are divorced (conjunction)

He jumped on his horse and rode away. (sequence)

I dropped the camera and it broke (consequence)

Conversational implicatures

- Inferred via the cooperative principle or maxims (observed, violated or flouted)

Ex:

A: I am out of petrol.

B: There is a garage around the corner.

Generalized conversational implicatures

- independent of the context

Ex.:

1. Indefinites

A car ran over John's foot. (not John's car / not the speaker's car)

the speaker is assumed to follow the maxim of quantity, if he wanted to be more specific he would have said my car or John's car

2. Scalar implicatures

communicated by choosing a word expressing a value from a scale (quantity, frequency, etc.)

I'm studying linguistics and I've completed some of the required courses (not all)

If the scale is *all, most, many, some, few....*, the use of ***some*** implicates that all the higher items in the scale are to be considered negative.

Particularized conversational implicatures

- dependent on a specific context

Ex.:

Rick: Hey, coming to the party tonight?

Tom: My parents are visiting. (flouting relevance)

Ann: Where are you going with the dog?

Sam: To the V.E.T. (flouting manner)

Bert: Do you like ice-cream?

Ernie: Is the the Pope Catholic? (flouting relevance)