

Meaning 3.1: Pragmatics 2 — Gricean reasoning and scalar implicatures

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Recall the definitions (intuitive, not formal)

Implicature: An inference which is drawn given an utterance **and** some context (so, it is not necessarily true).

Cooperative Principle: Speakers assume mutual cooperation when engaging in conversation.

Grice's Maxims:

- Maxim of Quality: Be honest.
- Maxim of Quantity: Give the right amount of information.
- Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.
- Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous.

Grice's reasoning

Assumptions: Speakers assume each person in the conversation is cooperating, and they are aware of this. Part of the cooperation is adhering to the four maxims proposed.

Derivation of implicature: When a speaker strays from one of the maxims, the listener(s) assume the speaker did so for a reason, and the information needed to bridge the maxim and the deviant utterance is inferred, call this information the implicature.

Enumerating the steps in reasoning

Gricean reasoning:

- (i) participants assume cooperation
- (ii) a speaker makes deviant utterance U
- (iii) listener notices U deviates from (a) maxim(s)
- (iv) listener adds information I , based on context, to make new meaning $U' = U + I$, call the additional inference I an implicature
- (v) listener understands the speaker's original utterance U as meaning $U' = U + I$, which reconciles the deviation

An example — relevance deviance

Context: Tyson and Maria are on a walk, and they run into their friend Erykah at the park. Erykah adopted a really goofy, sweet dog, later named Tiny (often shortened to just T), about a couple of months ago — one that Tyson and Maria helped her pick out. She got the dog when it was rail-thin, but now the dog has, quite frankly, ballooned to be 15 pounds over the suggested weight by the veterinarian. Erykah is so happy to show off her dog is no longer that frail little puppy anymore, but has a full, strong body (in her words). So excited to see her friends and show off her dog, she asks Tyson and Maria:

Erykah: It is so nice to see you guys. Take a look at Tiny (whose tail is wagging, but is panting quite hard from the walk)! Look how much progress she has made. She looks great now, right?

Maria: Maybe we should change her name to B.

Tyson: Does her stomach always touch the ground when she walks?

An example — relevance deviance (cont.)

Implicature: Tiny is no longer tiny.

Gricean reasoning:

- (i) Erykah assumes both Tyson and Maria are cooperating, so when they utter seemingly irrelevant things, she needs to reconcile that deviance.
- (ii) Even Erykah can see Tiny is overweight, so when Maria suggests a name change to B, she infers B must refer to 'big' because Maria is answering a question about Tiny.
- (iii) Although Tyson seemingly asked an irrelevant question as an answer, Erykah assumes he, too, is being relevant, and Erykah knows it is not common for a dog's belly to touch the ground when they walk; this only happens when the dog is overweight.
- (iv) Erykah infers Tiny is not tiny.

Another example — manner deviance

Context: It's Basbous' birthday. Basbous usually eats pretty healthy and usually doesn't overindulge in libations, but on his birthday he makes exceptions. He had been gifted a decadent chocolate birthday cake earlier in the day, and his best friend Kitty said that drinks were on her at the bars that night. Basbous likes to eat a good meal before he goes out with the intention to drink.

Utterance: Basbous ate a lot of cake, and he drank a lot of tequila on his birthday.

Another example — manner deviance (cont.)

Implicature: Basbous had a lot of cake, and *then* he had a lot of tequila that day.

Gricean reasoning:

- (i) Whoever uttered the sentence is question would be assumed to be cooperating and therefore adhering to the conversational maxims.
- (ii) If Basbous didn't have cake before he went out but had cake as a late-night snack, the speaker wouldn't have been unorderly in their utterance, and they would have ordered the propositions differently (Basbous drank a lot of tequila, and then came home and had that luscious cake waiting for him)
- (iii) Since we assumed the speaker was being orderly, we assume they meant the events occurred in the order in which they stated them.

Scalar implicatures

Some fairly consistent implicatures arise when we use words which exist on a scale; these are called **scalar implicatures**.

- (i) **Some** people want diamond rings (and some just want everything).
~> Not all people want diamond rings.
- (ii) Michael **swung at** the ball.
~> Michael didn't hit the ball.
- (iii) (In response to the question: Did Miguel drink anything last night?)
Miguel **sipped** on the martini.
~> Miguel didn't drink all of the martini.

Lexical scales

Each one of the bolded words exists on a scale, where there is at least one other word which is higher on that scale.

Words higher on the scale are more informative (because more specific — i.e. the set of situations (/worlds) where you can say them is smaller).

(i) *no / none* < **some** < *many* < ... < *all*

(ii) *missed* < **swung at** < ... < *hit*

(iii) *abstained* < **sipped** < *chugged* < ... < *finished*

A scalar implicature example — deviance from quantity and quality

Some people want diamond rings \rightsquigarrow Not all people want diamond rings.

Gricean reasoning:

- (i) When Alicia sings this, we assume she is cooperating and therefore adhering to the maxims of communication.
- (ii) If all people wanted diamond rings, Alicia would have sung so because otherwise she wouldn't have been maximally informative, as there are more informative words like *all* or *many* she could have used. Additionally, she would have not been being honest if she knew that using *all* or *many* would have been true.
- (iii) Since we assume Alicia is being honest and maximally informative, she must either not have reason to believe that all people want diamond rings or she in fact knows that not all people want diamond rings, so we infer that not all people want diamond rings.

End of this video's material.