

Grice's initial motivations: logic

In logic: $A \& B = B \& A$

But consider:

1. John went to bed and had a sandwich.
2. John had a sandwich and went to bed.

In logic: A or B is compatible with A & B

But consider:

3. Set lunch: salad or garlic bread; risotto or pasta; coffee or tea

Can you get risotto *and* pasta for the set?

In logic: not-A or B implies if A, then B

But consider:

4. The moon is not made of green cheese.
5. Therefore, either the moon is not made of green cheese or I'm a chicken.
6. Therefore, if the moon is made of green cheese, I'm a chicken.

The last claim seems false.

We might think that natural language (English) is deficient somehow, and logic is better. But Grice wants to deny this claim. He thinks that language gets used for purposes that logic doesn't, and it's better suited to these purposes than logic is. So neither English nor logic is "better", it depends on what you want to do.

Implicature

First example:

A: How is C getting along at his new job at the bank?

B: Very well. He really likes his colleagues and he hasn't been to prison yet.

A: What are you implying?/ What are you suggesting?/ What do you mean by saying that?

Grice introduces the word 'implicate' to stand for the notion that A is getting at when he says 'imply'/'suggest'/'mean by' etc.

He distinguishes 'what is said' (literal semantic meaning) from 'what is implicated' ("implicatum").

What B literally said was that C hadn't been to prison. However, he may have implicated that C was likely to steal from the bank, or that his colleagues were so terrible C might want to kill them, or something else.

Conversational Implicatures

Conversation serves a purpose. It serves many purposes at many times, but it always serves at least one purpose every time. We talk with one another for reasons.

Our reasons may be very definite from the beginning. I might ask the waiter what the specials are for the evening. In such a case it would be unsuitable for him to tell me about the weather, or sports, or ask me about whether I had grandchildren.

At other times, our purposes are more indefinite, and they may evolve through the course of a conversation. Still, there are always some conversation options that are unsuitable for the discourse.

The Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principle: Make the required contribution to the conversation, given the conversation's purpose.

The four maxims of conversation:

Quantity: Be informative!

1. Don't say less than you should.
2. Don't say more than you should.

Quality: Try to tell the truth!

1. Don't say something that you think is false.

2. Don't say something you have no evidence for.

Relation: Be relevant!

Manner: Be clear!

1. Don't be obscure.
2. Don't be ambiguous.
3. Don't be prolix.
4. Don't be disorderly.

Analogy with ordinary cooperative action

Suppose you and I are, together, building a house.

Quantity: You should make your contribution neither more nor less than is required. If I need four nails, you shouldn't hand me two or seventeen, you should hand me four.

Quality: You should make your contribution genuine. If I need a hammer, you shouldn't hand me a fake hammer, or pretend to hand me a hammer.

Relation: You should make your contribution relevant. If I need a paint roller, you shouldn't stand on your head and count backwards from 70.

Manner: You should make your contribution clear. If I need you to make sure the floor is level, and you've already done that, you shouldn't make it difficult for me to tell that you've done it (say, by not showing or telling me). You shouldn't be ambiguous: if I need you to do two jobs and you come back from one of them with a thumbs up, I don't know which you've done and how I can proceed. Etc.

Grice's point is that cooperative conversation is similar to other cooperative endeavors.

Failing to Fulfill Maxims

There are various ways you can fail to fulfill conversational maxims:

1. Violate: Liars, for instance, violate Quality. TMIs violate Quantity; absurdists violate Relevance; rambler violate Manner.

2. Opt out: You can, of course, simply refuse to cooperate. “I won’t tell you what you want to know.”

3. Clash: For example, someone may ask you “Is it Tuesday or Wednesday?” But suppose you don’t know, and you also don’t know whether it’s Sunday, Monday, Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. Then you can’t fulfill Quantity (say what is required) without violating Quantity (say only what you have evidence for).

4. Flout: Blatant failure to fulfill the maxim (contrast violation, where it seems they’re not even trying).

General Form of Reasoning about Implicatures

1. The speaker is being cooperative (i.e. I have no reason to think s/he has, say, opted out of employing the maxims).

2. Unless the speaker believed that Q and thought I could figure that out, s/he would not be cooperative.

3. Therefore, the speaker believes Q.

Examples

Group A

No maxim is violated:

A: I’m out of gas!

B: There’s a gas station around the corner.

B implicates that he thinks the gas station is open, because if it wasn’t, he wouldn’t be observing Relevance.

Group B

Violation on account of clash:

A: Where does C live?

B: In the south of France.

B implicates that he doesn't know where C lives more precisely, because otherwise he wouldn't be observing Quantity.

Group C: Exploitation

Flout Quantity: Be informative!

1. Don't say less than you should.

Handwriting case; "boys will be boys"

2. Don't say more than you should.

Revealing the horrors you've committed to shut your conversational partner up.

Flout Quality: Try to tell the truth!

1. Don't say something that you think is false.

(a) Irony: X is a "fine friend"

(b) Metaphor: "Yao Ming is a monster!"

(c) Overstatement:

(d) Understatement: "He was a little drunk."

2. Don't say something you have no evidence for.

Suppose Mr. X leaves a meeting early and I say: "He's going to go get drunk," when I clearly have no evidence for this. I implicate that he's a drunkard.

Flout Relation: Be relevant!

Continuing on a different topic after someone says something highly inappropriate.

Flout Manner: Be clear!

1. Don't be obscure. [In front of kids] "Ixnay on the Isneylanday"

2. Don't be ambiguous.

3. Don't be prolix. Cf. "Miss X sang 'Home Sweet Home'" with "Miss X produced a series of sounds that roughly approximate the score of 'Home Sweet Home'"
4. Don't be disorderly.

Generalized Implicature:

Compare:

"Do you have three kids?"

with

"Do you have three dollars?"

(Consider the answer, "No, I have four.")

Facts about Conversational Implicatures

1. Cancellable—you can always opt out
2. Nondetachable—you can't get rid of the implicature by changing how you said what you said (unless it's a manner implicature)
- 3.