Conversational principles: co-operation
Grice and the Cooperative Principle

- Grice’s theory is about how people use language.

- Hearers show some regularity in their production of inferences and speakers exploit this to imply something more than what is stated:
  - Grice was the first to systematically account for this by positing the Cooperative Principle.

- The Cooperative Principle (CP) is a tacit agreement between speaker and hearer to cooperate in communication.
What the CP is not...

- An ideal of fair and honest cooperation amongst human beings.

- The term ‘cooperation’ is not used in an everyday sense to refer to people’s feelings.

- It does not designate a prescriptive set of rules and regulations for human interaction.
The Cooperative Principle

- Make your 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**.

  - Grice’s suggestion:
    - In their everyday interaction people observe **regularities** which arise from rational **considerations**.
Maxims of the Cooperative Principle

These ‘rules ‘ of conversation were first formulated by Paul Grice (1975) as the Cooperative Principle. This states that we interpret the language on the assumption that a speaker is obeying the four maxims (known as Grice’s Maxims) of:

1. QUALITY (BEING TRUE)
2. QUANTITY (BEING BRIEF)
3. RELATION (BEING RELEVANT)
4. MANNER (BEING CLEAR)
Maxims of 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” (Grice, 1989 [1967]: 26).
The Maxim of Quality

- This maxim requires that we only give true information for which we have evidence.

- Make your contribution one that is true, specifically:
  - (i) Do not say what you believe to be false.
  - (ii) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
The Maxim of Quality

definition

example

- A: Who won the match yesterday?
- B: Manchester did.
  - Assuming that B is cooperative and provides information for which he has evidence, his reply is true and therefore Manchester won the match; otherwise, B would have provided a different answer.
The Maxim of Quantity

- This requires that the speaker provides all the necessary information s/he has for the present needs of the partner.
  
  ◦ (i) Make your contribution as informative as required.
  
  ◦ (ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than required.
The Maxim of Quantity

example

- A: I’ve run out of petrol.
- B: There is a petrol station round the corner.
  - As far as the speaker knows, the station is open and also sells petrol. If neither of the two was true B would not have said so. Therefore, I can find petrol there.

- A: Have you read Shakespeare’s plays?
- B: I’ve read some.
  - B hasn’t read all his plays, only some.
The Maxim of Relevance

- The maxim is very simple:
  - Make your contribution relevant.
The Maxim of Relevance

example

A: Can I borrow 10 pounds?
B: My wallet is in the bedroom.
  ◦ Provided B is cooperative and provides a relevant answer, I can borrow 10 pounds.

A: How are the trumpet lessons going?
B: Not great, but I’d rather not discuss it now.
  ◦ The trumpet lessons are not going so well.
The Maxim of Manner

- Be perspicuous, and specifically:
  - avoid obscurity
  - avoid ambiguity
  - be brief
  - be orderly
The Maxim of Manner

example

- A. Do you love me?
- B. Of course I do.
  - provided that B is cooperative, s/he is giving me a clear, unambiguous answer; therefore, B loves me.
Points to Remember...

• The **maxims are not rules** that people have to follow in an interaction.

• People **do not always follow** these maxims in everyday interaction.

• Even when the maxims are violated, the hearer assumes that this is **done on purpose** and looks for particular inferences.
Flouting the Maxims

- Grice argues that although speakers, usually choose to co-operate, they can also refuse to abide by that principle, or, in other words, flout it.
- If a maxim is deliberately broken, it is normally done so to achieve a very specific effect and communicate a specific meaning, known as a conversational implicature, in other words, the special meaning created when a maxim is flouted.
Flouting the Maxims

**example**

- A: How are we getting there?
  B: Well, we’re getting there in Dave’s car.

  - Flouts the maxim of **quantity** (gives less information).
  - A will not be travelling with them.
A: You know, many people here are depending on you.

B: Great! That really is a relief…

- B’s answer is sarcastic; she says something which is obviously untrue, thus implying that the opposite is true. The true meaning here is something along the lines of “That really stresses me out”.

"Produce to win"
Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

- A: Where does Mary work?
- B: Room 43 or Room 34.
  - B does not know which of the two places Mary works.

- A: What can you tell me about my son’s school performance?
- B: Your son is always well-dressed and he is never late for class.
Flouting the Maxim of Relation

- A: Do you like your new flat?
- B: The flowers are looking great!
  - B does not like her/his new flat.

- A: Are you coming to my party this weekend?
- B: It looks like it’s going to rain.
Flouting the Maxim of Manner

- A. Do you love me?
- B. I’ll ponder on that matter soon and when an answer pops up, it will be delivered to you without haste.
  - B is being unnecessarily ambiguous and confusing; therefore, B either does not know or s/he does not want to answer the question.

(a couple has just had an argument and are having supper with their small children)
- A: Do you still think I was wrong?
- B: Oh, just go to H-E-L-L.
Flouting’ the Principles on Purpose

Maxim of quality: Be true

• “My phone never stops ringing”
• “She’s got nerves of steel”
• “I love it when you forget to tell me you won’t be in”
Flouting’ the Principles on Purpose

Maxim of relation: Be relevant
A: Can I borrow your car this morning?
B: It’s not insured in your name.
Maxim of **manner**: Be clear
Avoid ambiguity, obscurity. Be brief and orderly.

What is the difference between 1 and 2?
1. Jack and Jill got married and had a baby.
2. Jack and Jill had a baby and got married.
Conversational Implicature

- How do you understand an utterance?
  1. The conventional meanings of words
  2. The cooperative principle & the 4 maxims
  3. The linguistic and non-linguistic context of the utterance
  4. Items of background knowledge
  5. The fact that all of the above are available to both participants and they both assume this to be the case (interlocutors have a shared cultural knowledge)
Discuss these examples:

- “What’s on TV?”
  “Nothing”

- “What’s your hamburger like?”
  “A hamburger is a hamburger.”

- “Did you invite Bella and Cathy?”
  “I invited Bella”

- “Did you feed the cats already?”
  “Do you see them hanging around?”
Discuss these examples:

- “What’s on TV?”
  “Nothing”  \[\text{Flouts maxim of quality – not true}\]

- “What’s your hamburger like?”
  “A hamburger is a hamburger.”  \[\text{Flouts maxim of manner – unclear}\]

- “Did you invite Bella and Cathy?”
  “I invited Bella”  \[\text{Flouts maxims of manner and quantity so hearer infers Cathy is not invited}\]

- “Did you feed the cats already?”
  “Do you see them hanging around?”  \[\text{Flouts maxim of relation}\]
Summary

- **The co-operative principle**: Grice’s principle for explaining how conversational implicatures arise. The CP is supported by four maxims: Quality, quantity, relevance and manner.

- **Implicatures**: implications following from the maxims. They are additional or different meanings from the expressed meaning.
Limitations of the Cooperative Principle

- Different cultures, countries, and communities have their own ways of observing and expressing maxims for particular situations.
- There is often an overlap between the four maxims. It can be difficult to say which one is operating and it would be more precise to say that there are two or more operating at once.
Violating Maxims

- Unlike flouting, violating maxims means that the speaker knows that the hearer will not recover the implicature and will only see the surface truth. In other words the hearer will take the words at face value and act accordingly.
Violating Maxim of Quantity

- Violating the maxim of **quantity** means deliberately providing insufficient information so that the hearer will not fully understand the situation.

A  Does your dog bite?
B  No.
A  (Bends down to stroke dog and is bitten)  Ow! But you said it doesn’t bite?!.
B  It’s not my dog.
Violating Maxim of Quality

- Violating the maxim of **quality** (and therefore being insincere or lying).
- It is quite permissible and acceptable in some contexts and cultures, especially a lie that protects or a white lie, the kind that are told to children.
Violating other Maxims

- **husband** (asks his wife): How much did that new dress cost?

- **wife (A1)** I know, why don’t we eat out for a change?
  [deliberately violating the maxim of relation].

- **wife (A2)**: A tiny fraction of my salary, though most probably a very high fraction of the salary of the shop assistant who sold it to me”
  [violating the **maxim of manner**, avoiding clarity and being deliberately obscure].