The Cooperative Principle and Politeness
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.
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)

“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

Example

- A: Who won the match yesterday?
- B: Manchester did.
  - Implicature: 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.
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.
  - Implicature: 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 Dostoevsky’s novels?
- B: I’ve read some.
  - Implicature: B hasn’t read all his novels, 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.
  ◦ *Implicature:* 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.
  ◦ *Implicature:* 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

description

example

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

- The woman got out of her car and went straight into the office.
  - Implicature: The woman got out of her car and then went to the office.
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.
What is at work here is:

- The hearer assumes that the speaker is being cooperative and, unless there is an indication to the contrary, the speaker:
  - will tell the truth,
  - will say as much as the occasion requires by estimating what is already known,
  - will know what is being discussed,
  - will make sure the hearer(s) understands her/him.
Maxims may be observed

- John got into Harvard 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 maxim of quality.
Maxims may be **flouted** (openly and intentionally disregarded).

• 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.
Maxims may be infringed, infringement is a failure to observe a maxim because of:

- imperfect linguistic performance (a child or a foreign learner)
- nervousness;
- drunkenness;
- excitement;
- cognitive impairment;
- incapability of speaking clearly.
When violating the maxim of quantity, the speaker does not provide the hearer sufficient information.

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

- When violating the maxim of **quality** (and therefore being insincere or lying), the speaker is not honest and provides wrong information.

- 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

- When violating maxim of manner, the speaker may say everything excepting what the hearer desires to recognize.

- When violating maxim of relation, here one can observe that the speaker endeavors to change the discussion subject or to deflect the hearer.
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].
Violating other Maxims

- As violation is defined as the unostentatious [not pretentious or showy display; not designed to impress.] or "quiet" non-observance of a maxim, a speaker who violates a maxim "will be liable to mislead" (Grice, 1975: 49).

- Violating a maxim is the opposite of flouting a maxim. Violating a maxim prevents or discourages the hearer from seeking for implicatures and encourages their taking utterances at face value.
Flouting the Maxims

- The hearer draws inferences as to what the speaker implies in two distinct ways:
  - When the speaker is observing the maxims, inferences will be quite straightforward:
    - A: I need to check my email.
    - B: The laptop is in the kitchen.
  - When the speaker deliberately flouts the maxims and it is obvious that s/he is doing so, this prompts the hearer to look for a different meaning from what is explicitly expressed.
Flouting the Maxims

- Grice argues that although speakers, usually choose to cooperate, 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* [with emphasis tone] are getting there in Dave’s car.

  - Flouts the maxim of **quantity** (gives less information).
  - *Implicature*: A will not be travelling with them.
Flouting the Maxim of Quality

- A: You know, many people here are depending on you.
- B: Great! That really is a relief…

  *Implicature*: 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”.

![Image: "We're depending on you!" Produce to Win]
Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

- A: Where does Mary work?
- B: Room 43 or Room 34.
  ◦ *Implicature*: 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!
  - *Implicature*: 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.
  - Implicature: 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-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.
Flouting’ the Principles on Purpose

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)
Because these principles are assumed in normal interaction, speakers rarely mention them. However, there are certain expressions used to mark that speakers may be in danger of not fully adhering to the principles. These expressions are called ‘hedges’. The following examples are taken from Yule (1996:38-39):
Hedges

Examples

- Quality:
  As far as I know, they’re married

- Quantity:
  As you probably know, I am afraid of dogs.

- Relation:
  Not to change the subject, but is this related to the budget?

- Manner:
  I’m not sure if this makes sense, but the car had no lights.
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.
Then, violating, flouting, infringing a Maxim

Faced with a speaker’s non-observance of a maxim, a competent hearer will draw one of several possible conclusions:

A. The speaker is openly ‘opting out’ (to choose not to be part of an activity or to stop being involved in it) from the operation of the maxim and is unwilling to abide by the CP.

B. The speaker is deliberately subverting (undermining) a maxim and the CP in order to observe other maxims; and sometimes, for some self-serving purpose. This constitutes an instance of maxim violation of the subverted maxim.

C. The speaker means to observe the CP, but fails to fulfill a particular maxim through ineptitude. For example, he may ineptly use words too technical for the audience and occasion, thus inadvertently non-observing the Maxim of Manner. This is an instance of maxim infringement.
Then, violating, infringing, flouting a Maxim

D. The speaker presumably means to observe the CP, and yet s/he is blatantly (deliberately) not observing a maxim; if he is not inept, s/he must mean something additional to what s/he is saying (a conversational implicature).

- For example, when asked what she thinks of a new restaurant, a woman who replied, ‘They have handsome carpets’

would appear to be flouting the first Maxim of Relevance. If there is no reason that she means not to be observing the CP and that she is not inept either, then her remark must mean something other than what it literally asserts - for example, that the food they serve is not the best in town.

When non-observance of a maxim is deliberate and intended to be recognized (by the hearer) as deliberate, this is a case of maxim flouting.
Relevance

Sperber and Wilson went on to suggest that it is Relevance that is the key to understanding how we interpret utterances. It is our assumption of relevance that allows us to explain the many ways in which we use language in ways that cannot be explained simply by lexical, semantic and grammatical knowledge (and which might otherwise flout Grice’s maxims):

- **A. How do I get to Carrefour mate?**
- **B. It’s twenty past twelve.**
- **B. There’s a petrol station just round the corner.**
- **B. You’re not going anywhere.**
POLITENESS

is the only accepted hypocrisy.
LINGUISTIC action which makes communication possible between competitive parties because it neutralize the potential for aggression in social interaction. (Brown & Levinston)
Face and Facework

Goffman

**Face**: The positive social image we seek to maintain during interaction.

The term, *Face*, idiomatically refers to one's own sense of dignity or prestige in social contexts.
FACE

- POSITIVE FACE:
  The desire that one's self image be appreciated and sanctioned by others.

- NEGATIVE FACE:
  The basic claim to territories, personal preserves and in general freedom of action.
Face and Facework

Negative and Positive Face

Negative Face
The need to be independent and free.
- I’m sorry to bother you.
- I know you’re busy.
- Appeal to negative face

Positive Face
The need to be connected and a member of the group.
- Let’s do it together.
- You and I have the same problems.
- Appeal to positive face.
Positive Face  (the dog) is the desire to be valued and included by relevant or significant others
Negative Face (the cat) is the desire to be free from imposition and restraint and to have control of our time, property, space, and resources.
Threats to Pos./Neg. Face

- Social connections make threat to positive and negative face inevitable.
- We need to give orders, ask favors, deny favors, give feedback, etc.
- When part of a job requirement, threats are not problematic
- During social interaction, threats are problematic and should be prevented.
Severity of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Severity = Power, Distance, Rank (PDR)

- Power of speaker over hearer
- Distance between hearer and speaker (close or distant)
- Rank of imposition
  - Both social/conventional ranking of threat
  - And idiosyncratic/relational ranking of threat
# Threats To The Negative or Positive Face

## OF THE HEARER
- Orders, requests
- Suggestions, advices
- Remindings
- Threats, warnings
- Expressions of disapproval, criticism, complaints, insult
- Disagreement
- Irriverence, mention of taboo subjects
- Expression of violent emotions

## OF THE SPEAKER
- Expressing thanks
- Expressing apology
- Accepting thanks
- Accepting apology
- Self-humiliation, self-contraddiction
- Acting stupid
- Confessing, admitting guilt or responsability
- Lack of emotional control (e.g. laughter, tears)
Strategies For Doing FTAs

Figure 5.2 Flow-chart showing conscious or subconscious decisions leading to choice of a particular politeness strategy. (Adapted from Brown and Levinson 1987: 69.)
Strategies For Doing FTAs

1. Don't do the FTA
2. Off record (hinting)
3. Negative Politeness (redressive action)
4. Positive Politeness (redressive action)
5. Without redressive action (bald on record)
STRATEGIES FOR DOING FTAs

Say nothing and keep on freezing

‘Isn’t it cold in here?’
‘I’m sorry. Could you do me a favour and shut the window?’
‘You look cold, Sam. Should we shut the window?’

‘Shut the window, Sam.’

Don’t do the FTA

Do the FTA but redress the threat to face:
Off record (hint)
Negative politeness

Positive politeness

Do the FTA without redress to face:
Bald request/order

Very Polite

Very Efficient
Positive Politeness Strategies

Convey X is admirable/interesting
- Notice, attend to X’s interests, needs, etc.
- Exaggerate interest, approval, etc.

Claim in-group membership with X
- Use in-group markers (we, us)

Claim common point of view, attitude, opinions, knowledge, empathy
- Give agreement and avoid disagreement
- Joke

Indicate you are taking X’s interests or needs into account
- Give reasons
- Give gifts to X
Negative Politeness Strategies

Don’t assume X is willing or able to perform the action

- Question, hedge

Don’t try to coerce X and give X option not to act

- Be indirect

Assume X is not likely to do the action (Be pessimistic)

- Minimize threat
- Minimize imposition
- Give deference
- Apologize
- Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H
Complications

- As evident in the politeness strategies, the interaction is complicated by the fact that:
  - Some FTAs threaten both positive and negative face so a particular message might contain both types of strategies.
    - *Consider a complaint*
  - Some politeness strategies threaten the speaker’s positive or negative face while addressing the hearer’s face
    - *Consider an apology*
Politeness across Cultures
Observation about Politeness Across Cultures

- Cultural values determine which parameters (i.e., face, status, rank, role, power, age, sex, social distance, intimacy, kinship, group membership) interact with each other, and which ones are weighted more heavily in comparison with the others.
Politeness across Cultures

• Being polite may differ from culture to culture.
• There are linguistic and paralinguistic means of conveying politeness, distance and respect which do not hold true in every language.

Take the classic French *tu-vous* distinction

• Using this plural of respect and distance makes politeness easier to spot.
• For learners coming from these or similar languages, the absence of this in English is rather unsettling and difficult to replace with other linguistic tools.
Politeness across Cultures

• Another politeness indicator is the highly frequent use of *please* in English and many other languages.

• In Greek, this is not used as often as it is in English, so people tend to say that Greeks are rude!

• Yet, informal requests incorporate this ‘please’ function via other means:
  1. The use of the noun suffix –ακι which acts as a diminutive and makes the request less direct, or friendlier.
  2. A softer intonation while making such a request using an imperative will further make it sound less abrupt.
Politeness across Cultures

• Japanese of course has many different levels of politeness that would be unimaginable in English, German, or French.

• There are more than a dozen words that mean “I” in Japanese (watashi – neutral standard, watakushi – much more formal, boku – informal but humble, ore – masculine, kind of macho, atashi – feminine or effeminate, etc., depending on how polite you want to be, or whether you want to be perceived as a man or as a woman).
**Politeness across Cultures**

- Women have special “feminine” particles, such as the particle “wa”, which have no real meaning other than to bring attention to the female gender of the speaker after every 5 words or so.

- You can use the honorific prefix “o”, which vaguely means “yours”, with words for things like health and tea, with some words you basically have to use them (お金 o-kane = money), you can use respectful language (敬語, keigo), or humble language (丁寧語, teineigo), etc.
Politeness across Cultures

WHAT TO SAY BEFORE YOU EAT
A European Cultural Exchange Initiative

France
Bon appetit!

Germany
Guten Appetit!

Italy
Buon appetito!

Britain
Never mind!

specimen—copyright LGP
Politeness across Cultures

Get around in ENGLISH

Lesson Twenty-Five
How to be Polite

1. Wrong

HELP!

2. Right

Excuse me, Sir. I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but I wonder if you would mind helping me a moment, as long as it's no trouble, of course.
Politeness across Cultures
House and Kasper’s Model Of FTA Realisations

House and Kasper developed a taxonomy of politeness markers to account for their data divided according to two major classes: *downgraders* and *upgraders*.

‘Post-modern’ Approaches
• Politeness is not a universal given, but is contested across cultures and, importantly, within cultures.
• What constitutes polite behaviour is negotiated between speakers and hearers and cannot be predicted by a fixed model.
‘Post-modern’ Approaches

A: Does anyone want a mineral?
B: I’ll have one.
A: Yeah?
B: **Make me a cup of tea.**
C: The kettle is boiled. He’s dehydrated.
A: Do you want a cup of tea?
C: Does anyone want the cup before she goes?
D: Ok I will so.
C: Kettle is boiled anyway. Oh I’ll have a cup too …
A: … do you take sugar?
B: Yes **please.**
A: How many?
B: One and a half.
A: Do you want [some chocolate]
B: **Please** yeah.
C: You shouldn’t give him anything.
Instruments of Politeness

Pronouns of address

- Romance languages - ‘tu’ vs. ‘vous’ forms
- Thai – use of pronouns for ‘I’ and ‘you’ depends on status, rank, age, sex, social distance/intimacy & kinship/group membership

‘I’
phŏm/dichăîn
chăn
uá?
kuu
rau
kháu
phîi
nǔu
etc.

‘you’
khun
thsão
lur
mìŋ
kææ
nuŋ
naay
than
etc.
Instruments of Politeness

Honorifics

- Japanese
  - Yamada ga musuko to syokuzi o tanosinda.
    - Speaker H, referent & son L
  - Yamada-\textit{san} ga musuko-\textit{san} to o-syokuzi o tanosim-\textit{are}-ta.
    - Speaker L, referent & soon H
  - Yamada-\textit{san} ga musuko to o-syokuzi o tanosim-\textit{are}-ta.
    - Speaker & son L, referent H
  "Yamada enjoyed dinner with (his/my) son."

- German –
  - ‘Herr Doktor Professor Hűbner’

- English
  - ‘Honorable,’ ‘Respected,’ ‘Sir,’ ‘Excellency’
Kinship terms

In many Asian languages, kinship terms are often used for people unrelated to the speaker:

- Uncle / aunt
- Older sibling
- Younger sibling
- etc.
Instruments of Politeness

Set formulas

- Arabic
  - Alla maʔak = ‘God be with you’
  - Alla yihfazak = ‘God preserve you’

- Hindi
  - Praṇaaam
  - Xuš raho
In many languages (e.g., Russian, Czech, Serbo-Croatian, some dialects of Polish), plurals may be used to show politeness when addressing a single person.
Instruments of Politeness

Questions

- In some societies, questions are used to express politeness, e.g. Inner Circle English-speaking cultures.

‘Could you tell me the time, please?’
Indirect speech acts
  ◦ ‘It’s cold in here.’

- In Bengali, requests are sometimes made through plain statements, e.g., in a clothing shop …
  ◦ Aamaar šarț dorkaar
    ‘I need a shirt.’

- In some cultures, talk about some unrelated topic is first indulged in before the real subject is mentioned.
Topicalization and focus

In English, topicalization and focus can effect the degree of politeness.

◦ ‘If you DON’T MIND my asking, where did you get that dress?’
◦ ‘WHERE did you get that dress, if you don’t mind my asking?’

Which is more polite sounding? Why?
Instruments of Politeness

Effort

- The greater the effort expended in face-maintaining linguistic behavior, the greater the politeness,

  E.g., ‘I wouldn’t dream of it since I know you are very busy, but I am simply unable to do it myself, so ….‘

Is this a universal trend?
Use of ‘little’

- Many languages use the phrase ‘a little’ to convey the meaning carried by English ‘please’ in imperatives.
  - Japanese ‘chotto’
  - Thai ‘nooy’
  - Milwaukee-ese ‘once’
  (as in ‘Come here once’)

Instruments of Politeness
Hedges

- Linguistic devices by which a speaker avoids statements that are considered too strong.
  - Hedges are used to reduce friction in that they leave the way open for the respondent to disagree with the speaker and the speaker to retreat.
  - ‘I wonder if you have some surplus cash to lend me some 50 dollars?!’
Gaze, gesture, & body posture

- Japanese bow, exchange business cards with two hands
- Thais *wai*, avoid touching the head
- The ‘ok’ sign can mean
  - Money (Japan)
  - Zero (France)
  - An obscene comment (Greece)
End of class 06