



EGG 2018: Intro to pragmatics (week 2)

Session 2: The basic ideas – Gricean pragmatics 2

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Yesterday's class

- ▶ **Traditional picture:** meaning that we intuitively perceive in connection with a natural language expression can be of two different types
 - ▶ part of their truth-conditional contribution
 - ▶ inferred pragmatically on the basis of the particular use
 ⇒ traditional distinction between semantics & pragmatics
- ▶ **Examples:** the connectors *and* and *or*
- ▶ The non-truth-conditional meanings perceived for *and* and *or* can be derived as a result of Grice's **cooperative principle** and his **conversational maxims**.

Today: lay the foundation for a general model of discourse compatible with Grice's ideas

⇒ this session is based on Grice 1975, Stalnaker 2014: Ch 2



Roadmap

Intro

Grice 1975 again

A step back: communication

Context and shared beliefs: the common ground

Summary



The cooperative principle and conversational maxims (Grice 1975: 26–27)

Central assumption: interlocutors observe the cooperative principle

(1) **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.

- ▶ Maxim of Quantity
- ▶ Maxim of Quality
- ▶ Maxim of Relation
- ▶ Maxim of Manner



Condition 1 for *or* – I

Condition 1: Use *or* if you believe one of the disjuncts is true but don't know which.
→ a result of the Maxim of Quantity

(2) A: Alex likes beer or rakija.

Question addressed by A: Which drinks does Alex like?

⇒ contextual options: beer, rakija

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- ▶ A believes: Alex likes beer, but not rakija
⇒ (2) is true based on what A believes Can it be uttered?
- ▶ A believes: A has seen Alex drunk at a party that had only beer and rakija
⇒ (2) is true based on what A believes Can it be uttered?



Condition 1 for *or* – II

Maxim of Quantity allows us to derive:

Alex likes beer or rakija is only acceptable if the speaker believes one of the disjuncts to be true but does not know which.

- ⇒ **all other circumstances:** more informative statements are available
- ⇒ **more informative = excludes more states the world might be in**



Condition 1 for *or* – II

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⇒ **more informative = excludes more states the world might be in**

From the hearer perspective: if the speaker uses a statement with *or*, the hearer may infer that the speaker does not believe the stronger statements

- (3) a. Alex likes beer and rakija. (not a speaker's belief)
- b. Alex likes beer. (not a speaker's belief)
- c. Alex likes rakija. (not a speaker's belief)

- (4) Alex likes beer or rakija \rightsquigarrow Alex likes beer or rakija, but not both



Conversational implicatures (Grice 1975: 32–37)

Conversational implicatures are pragmatic inferences based on the truth-conditional content of an utterance and the Gricean maxims

They may **arise as a result of**:

- ▶ observing the maxims (\rightarrow *and / or*)



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(5) A: Where does Peter live?
B: Somewhere in the South of France.

- ▶ explicitly and openly flouting a maxim

(6) A: I told Peter that his new haircut looks stupid.
B: You're a really good friend.



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The conversational maxims allow the speaker to convey more than / something different from the truth-conditional content of a sentence!



Criticism of Grice 1975

Fully accepted: cooperativity as the guiding principle

Criticism in the literature: the Gricean maxims are not particularly systematic and are mostly stipulative

- ▶ attempts to systematize the Gricean maxims and to derive them from more basic principles of communication and cooperation



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- ▶ attempts to systematize the Gricean maxims and to derive them from more basic principles of communication and cooperation
- ▶ **Horn 1984 and Levinson 2000:** two interacting principles of speaker economy and hearer economy
 - ▶ **Hearer economy:**
say as much as you can to help the hearer understand
 - ▶ **Speaker economy:**
say only as much as you have to for the hearer to understand

⇒ different formulations by Horn and Levinson

→ Neo-Gricean pragmatics



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What is communication and what is necessary for it to occur?



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Tentative description: communication is the act of conveying content with the intention of uptake by an interlocutor (see: Grice's "meaning_{NN}")

- ▶ the speaker can use verbal or non-verbal means
- ▶ uptake can have different effects
 - ⇒ a new belief
 - ⇒ an acknowledgment of a new obligation
 - ⇒ an acknowledgment of a request
 - ⇒ ...

What are the necessary requirements for verbal communication to succeed?



A story

An English spy is asked to meet another spy in front of Mercator Borik to inform him about the status of his current operation. The spies do not know each other, and the first spy is told that he will recognize his colleague by a copy of Paul Grice's book "Studies in the Way of Words".



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He goes up to her and states:

(7) The rooster has milked the racoon.

Completely dumbfounded the woman turns and walks away. The spy is confused.



Necessary ingredients for communication

- ▶ The individuals that are addressed need to realize that the speaker intends to address them.
- ▶ All interlocutors need to share a language.
- ▶ All interlocutors need to share the communicative principles.
- ▶ All interlocutors need to share a communicative goal.

⇒ **common beliefs and common communicative interest**

(For a more sophisticated discussion, see Stalnaker 2014: Ch2)



Connection to the cooperative principle

- ▶ **Dependence on a common communicative interest:** acknowledged in the cooperative principle → reference to an accepted purpose

(8) **Cooperative principle:**

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Connection to the cooperative principle

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(8) **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.

- ▶ **Dependence on common beliefs:** not explicitly addressed in the cooperative principle
 - ⇒ **BUT:** the common beliefs at the start of a conversation can be seen as the initial context guiding the first speaker's choice of words
 - ⇒ Stalnaker's "common ground" (Stalnaker 1970, 2002, 2014)



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Shared belief and the common ground

Stalnaker introduces a body of knowledge that lies at the heart of successful communication and guides the development of discourse.

- (9) The **common ground** is the body of presumed background knowledge shared by the participants in a conversation.

(Stalnaker 2014:36)

Specifically: the set of propositions p such that

- ▶ all interlocutors believe p (or accept p for the purpose of the conversation)
- ▶ each interlocutor believes that the other interlocutors believe p
- ▶ each interlocutor believes that the other interlocutors believe that they believe p
- ▶ ...



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Shared communicative interest:

the interlocutors mutually acknowledge their aim to maximize the common ground



Applications of the common ground

The common ground can be used to:

- ▶ capture contextual restrictions on the uses of certain expressions
⇒ presuppositions
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The common ground changes if:

- ▶ new information that is evident to all interlocutors becomes available in the physical context
- ▶ interlocutors agree to share or agree to discard content as a result of their conversation
⇒ modelled in connection with the effects of speech acts



A minimal discourse model

The results so far allow us to build up a **minimal model** to capture the inner workings of a conversation between two or more interlocutors:

- ▶ the set of interlocutors
- ▶ their common ground
- ▶ rules for how the common ground changes as a result of different types of utterances

Extended in:

e.g., Ginzburg 1996, Farkas & Bruce 2010, Rojas-Esponda 2014, Farkas & Roelofsen 2015, Bledin & Rawlins 2016, Murray 2017, Roberts 2017,...



Summary

- ▶ **Grice 1975:** cooperative principle and conversational maxims to guide and structure discourse
 - ⇒ The (non-)observance of the maxims can lead to additional pragmatic inferences: **conversational implicatures**.
- ▶ **Necessary ingredients for communication:** common belief and common communicative interest
 - ⇒ both connected to the cooperative principle
 - ⇒ common belief can be modelled with Stalnaker's common ground
- ▶ **Common ground:** a set of propositions that are mutually believed/accepted for the purposes of discourse by the participants
- ▶ **General communicative goal:** maximize the common ground



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