

Let's briefly delve into...

pragmatics: the study of the context in which meaningful language is used and the purposes to which it is set.

Implicature

Grice notes A can use (1) to convey (1') to B in response to the question "Is C liking his job?"

- (1) He hasn't been to prison yet.
- (1') C is the sort of person likely to yield to the temptations of his present occupation.

But, Grice claims, in speaking (1), one doesn't "strictly speaking" *say* (1'). He introduces a technical term:

implicature: something communicated which is not something literally said.

He claims that this class can be divided into two broad kinds of implicature. First,

conventional implicature: an implicature which is generated (predominantly) from the conventional meanings of words spoken.

Grice's example

- (2) He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave.
- (2') Being an englishman implies being brave.

The word "therefore" generates the implicature. We can see this by the regularity with which that word generates corresponding implicatures in other sentences.

conversational implicature: an implicature which is generated (predominantly) from aspects of the context in which words were spoken.

(1) and (1') give a good example or, in response to the question "Are you going to the party?":

- (3) I should work.
- (3') I am not going to the party.

Some conversational implicatures are "conventional" in a different sense: they are *habitually* or *customarily* implicated by the words used. For example:

- (4) Could you pass the salt?
- (4') Pass the salt!

That *does not* make them conventional implicatures *in Grice's sense!*

Why divide these two classes from each other? Grice notes that they behave differently. Conventional implicatures can be *cancelled* in the following sense.

An utterance U's implicature that p is *cancelable* if it is coherent to say: U, and[*but*] not p.

They can also be *reinforced* in the following sense.

An utterance U's implicature that p is *reinforceable* if it is not redundant to say: U, and [in fact] p.

For example

(5) He is an Englishman; he is therefore brave. But his being an Englishman does not imply he is brave.

sounds contradictory or confused. And

(6) He is an Englishman; he is therefore brave. And his being an Englishman implies he is brave.

sounds redundant. On the other hand (7) merely expresses a coherent ambivalence.

(7) I should work, but I'll come to the party anyway.

(8) I should work, so I'm not coming to the party.

And (8) doesn't sound redundant at all. Another example of a conversational implicature.

(9) Some students passed.

(9') Not all students passed.

(9) implicates (9'). But the implicature is cancelable and reinforceable.

(10) Some students passed. In fact, all did.

(11) Some students passed, but not all of them.

The fact that conversational implicature is cancelable and reinforceable reveals it to be a phenomenon falling squarely within the domain of pragmatics. The type of information conveyed by conversational implicatures is not *just* the information connected with the semantics of a sentence uttered.

Grice's insight was that we could develop a systematic study of this part of pragmatics by recognizing that they are generated in regular ways from principles of cooperative discourse. A quote from Grice:

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically...cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them...a common purpose or set of purposes...This purpose or direction may be fixed from the start...or it may evolve...but at each stage, *some* possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable. We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (*ceteris paribus*) to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

Briefly: conversation is a rational activity whose structure privileges, in an obvious way, certain kinds of cooperative strategies.

Grice gives four examples of the kinds of cooperative strategies privileged by rational cooperative activity and enshrines them in a series of "Maxims":

Maxim of Quantity: make your contribution as informative as required, and not more.

Maxim of Quality: try to make your contribution true. (Do not speak falsehood, or that for which you lack adequate evidence.)

Maxim of Relation: be relevant.

Maxim of Manner: be perspicuous. (Avoid: obscurity, ambiguity. Be brief and orderly.)

These are connected with, and follow from, principles for *any* cooperative rational endeavor at all (say doing something together like repairing a car, baking a cake).

Grice outlines these principles because he thinks that conversational implicatures are the product of our ability to capitalize on these cooperative principles to facilitate communication in unconventional ways. How so? First note three irrelevant ways we can violate these maxims.

- (a) covertly (I intentionally lie): leads to misinformation or breakdown.
- (b) opt out (I refuse to talk): leads to, say, halting of communication.
- (c) unable to proceed due to a clash: again this might lead to a halt in communication.

But there is another interesting option

- (d) flouting (blatantly violating a maxim)

Grice claims when we do this and yet still seem to be *cooperative* there is a kind of "repair" process. Hearers need to reconcile the fact that the speaker is cooperative with the fact that they are violating a maxim. Grice thinks that conversational implicature is the product of this tension. He proposes

S conversationally implicates q by saying p if:

- (1) S is being cooperative.
- (2) The supposition that S believes that q is required to make sense of the fact that S says p (in the way he does).
- (3) S thinks it is clear that the listener can figure (1) and (2) out.

For example, using Grice's original case.

- (1) The speaker is being cooperative.
- (2) The supposition that the speaker believes C is the sort of person likely to yield to the temptations of his employment is required to make sense of the fact that A says that C hasn't yet gone to prison.
- (3) A thinks that B can figure all this out.

Examples of outright flouting

(A) Quantity: A recommender writes that a philosopher has excellent handwriting in his letter.

More explicit reasoning involved in many quantity implicatures:

If

(i) S is cooperatively asserting p.

(ii) q implies p.

(iii) q would be relevant, roughly as brief to assert, and more informative than p.

Then S is implicating not q.

(B) Quality: Metaphor.

(C) Relation: Abrupt change of topic after rude remark.

(D) Manner: "Miss X produced a series of sounds corresponding closely with "Home Sweet Home""

Grice's account explains the two defining features of conversational implicature:

Cancelability: One can opt out of the cooperative principle, while retaining the meaning of what you said.

Reinforceability: One can be uncertain to *some* degree whether the implicature has or will go through. Reiterating the force of the implicature thus won't simply be redundant.

An Application: The Semantics of Logical Vocabulary

"or" seems to be used to convey "one or the other or both" (call this or_i) or "one or the other but not both" (or_x). Is "or" *ambiguous*?

We can explain the fact that "or" sometimes expresses "one or the other but not both" as a quantity implicature.

If..

(i) S is cooperatively asserting that $a \text{ or }_i b$,

(ii) a and b entails $a \text{ or }_i b$,

(iii) a and b would be relevant, roughly as brief to assert, and more informative than $a \text{ or }_i b$.

Then S is implicating not-(a and b).

This allows us to keep a very simple semantics for all our logical connectives like "and", "or", etc. Grice thinks this is generally a good strategy, and associates it with a general principle for doing semantics and pragmatics.

Modified Occam's Razor: senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity.

That is, when it is possible to generate a "sense" from your *pragmatics*, don't needlessly complicate your *semantics*.