

Introduction to Linguistics (CL1.102)

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Conversational Implicature (contd.)

Inference

In natural language, meaning is often conveyed and interpreted by inference. There are mainly two types of inference.

Co-reference Two constituents (in the same or in different sentences) referring to the same thing. There are many types of co-reference:

- Repeated nominal: *I attended the seminar. The seminar was on Human Values.*
- Independent nominal (epithet): *Rahul came home. Poor thing has had a rough trip.*
- Antecedent and anaphoric pronoun: *Gangaram had come. He wanted money.*

Bridging Inference This kind of inference assumes some knowledge on the part of the listener. For instance, *I was looking for Leech, but the library was closed.* Here, *Leech* refers to a book written by the author Leech.

The definite article *the* shows that the speaker assumes that the referent is accessible to the listener. The listener makes a bridging inference.

Grice's Maxims

We generate inferences by following the Co-operative Principle – a tacit agreement by the participants in a conversation to co-operate in communication. The listener must make inferences using contextual information of different types:

- deictic information
- reference of nominals
- background knowledge

Grice identified some general principles underlying the efficient co-operative use of language:

1. 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.
2. The Maxim of Quality: Make your contribution one that is true. Do not say what you believe to be false or what you lack adequate evidence for.
3. The Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required for

the current purpose of the exchange. Do not make it more informative than is required. 4. The Maxim of Relevance: Make your contribution relevant. 5. The Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous; specifically, avoid obscurity and ambiguity, and be brief and orderly.