Language & Communication – Practice exam with model answers

Deze oefenvragen zijn alleen in het Engels beschikbaar, maar ze zouden alsnog goed te begrijpen en te maken moeten zijn.

1. Implicatures (25 points)

In Chapter 2, Birner discusses a court case during which the following exchange took place:

1 A: Do you have any bank accounts in Swiss banks, Mr. Bronston?
2 B: No, sir.
3 A: Have you ever?
4 B: The company had an account there for about six months, in Zürich.

It turned out later that not only the company but also Bronston himself had a bank account in Switzerland. However, it seems to be an implicature of his last answer that he did NOT have a bank account there.

a. What kind of implicature would that be according to Grice (conventional, generalized, particular)? Why?
b. In the derivation of this implicature, TWO maxims are at play. Which ones? Explain.
c. Did Bronston lie in his final answer of did he not, according to Grice? Why (not)?
d. If Bronston would defend himself against, perjury by pointing out that he did not really say anything untrue (since the company did have an account there), which defence strategy is he using in the terminology of Boogaart et al. (2020) based on classical rhetoric? Would you consider this a strong defence? Why (not)?

a. That is a particular conversational implicature, which is not tied to a particular linguistic element and is completely context-dependent.
b. Quantity and Relation: the speaker should be as specific as necessary (what he does not say, is not the case); the question is about his OWN bank account, so he is actually (tacitly) violating the maxim of Relation.
c. No, because literally it is true so Quality is not violated. For Grice, true/false (lie/not lie) is about quality and literal meaning.
d. That is a case of 'redefinition', i.e. you appeal to the meaning/interpretation of what you have said. In this particular case you only take responsibility for literal meaning and deny being responsible for the implicature. That is not a strong defense in this case because of the violation of the maxim of Relation (answer b): after that question, the implicature is very strong and really undeniable.

2. Speech Acts (20 points)

Answer the questions below about the following comic:

Sir, is this stool taken?

Not at all, young lady!

I'm not surprised.

a. The first utterance in the comic above ("Sir, is this stool taken?") can be interpreted as an indirect speech act. Explain what the primary and secondary speech acts would be, and how you can connect these speech acts with each other according to Searle.

b. Explain why the utterance "I'm not surprised" can clarify how the S meant her first utterance in the cartoon.

c. Discuss the speech acts in the utterances "Not at all, young lady!" and "I'm not surprised" (describe the specific illocutionary acts, as well as the speech act categories they belong to, and whether they are explicit/implicit performatives).

(a) The utterance "Sir, is this stool taken?") is a question, but can be regarded as an indirect request in this context. When interpreting the question as an indirect request, the primary speech act is a request (to take a seat) and the secondary speech act a question (as to whether the stool is taken. These speech acts can be connected with each other by means of the preparatory condition (the stool needs not to be taken to approve the request); the S questions this condition.

(b) The utterance "I'm not surprised" shows that the first utterance ("Sir, is this stool taken?") is meant as a question (and hence not as a request). The reason for this is that if it were meant as an indirect request, a logical reaction would have been something like "OK, so I'll take this seat then" (or its non-verbal equivalent). "I'm not surprised" would amount to an irrelevant response.

(c) The utterance "Not at all, young lady!" is an answer to the 'young lady's' question (also correct: an approval of her request). This is an implicit performative (since the S does not say something like "I ask you…") and is an assertive (since the S state what is the case in the world and does not change it with his words).
The utterance "I'm not surprised" is a statement. Similar to the utterance, this is an implicit performative (the S does not say "I state that…") and is an assertive (here too, the S states what she believes is the case and she does not change the world with her words).

3. Presuppositions (25 points)

Answer the questions below about the following conversation:

1 A: Do you need help?
2 B: No, no, I have to make the decision about Jannie myself. I shouldn't rush it, I should think about it again.
3 A: Yes, that's okay, take your time...
   It was Walter who told you to take your time!

a. On line 5, the phrase "it was Walter who..." evokes a presupposition. Explain what the presupposition is and how it is evoked.

b. For the presupposition mentioned in question a, indicate how you can determine that this is indeed a presupposition and not an entailment.
c. Reformulate the utterance on line 5 in a minimal way, in order for the presupposition mentioned in question a to disappear.
d. Provide two examples of other presuppositions from the text and explain how they are evoked.

a. Line 5, "it was Walter who…" is a cleft construction and evokes the presupposition that someone said time had to be taken.
b. With the "constancy under negation" test, you can determine whether an inference is a presupposition, because a presupposition stays the same under negation, unlike entailments and implicatures. "I shouldn't make the decision about Jannie", "I shouldn't think about it again", and "It wasn't Walter who said", all three still evoke the presuppositions mentioned.
c. You can avoid the presuppositions by removing the triggers, as in "I need to decide something", "I need to think about it" (minus "again"), and "because Walter told you to take your time". (this only concerns the last presupposition)
d. In line 2, the definite description (article "the") evokes the presupposition that there is a decision about Jannie. In line 3, the iterative "again" evokes the presupposition that there has already been a decision (about Jannie) before.

4. Conversation analysis (20 points)

The dialogue below is a (slightly adapted and translated) excerpt of a consultation between a family doctor (D), and a patient with voice problems (P).

1 D How are ye?
2 P Me, fine
3 D Yeah?
4 P Yeah. (.)
5   But I actually came for my throat because I get very hoarse, and more and more hoarse. (0.2) Then I wonder what it is. Sometimes I can really hardly talk. And I thought now: maybe there is something wrong
6 D But, tell me a little bit more, you say "I get hoarse all the time" or…
7 P Yes, I've always got a hoarse voice
8 D That doesn't sound right, no

a) Describe the dialogue in terms of basic, insertion, pre- and post-sequences.
b) Describe how the family doctor and patient organise their turn taking.
c) Which of Brown & Levinson's (1987) five main politeness strategies does the patient use in turn 5 (this could be multiple strategies)? Please motivate your answer.
d) Is the patient 'politic' or 'polite' in this dialogue? Please explain.
e) Last, give an example of an adjacency pair in the above dialogue. Explain what kind of adjacency pair it is (e.g., invitation-acceptation).

a) 4p (0,5p / sequence)
   1 Basic 1: 1st pp / pre-pre-sequence 1: 1st pp
   2 Basic 1: 2nd pp / pre-pre-sequence 1: 2nd pp
   3 Post: 1st pp/ pre-sequence 2: 1st pp
   4 Post: 2nd pp/ pre-sequence 2: 2nd pp
   5 Basic 2: 1st pp

6 Insertion: 1st pp
7 Insertion: 2nd pp
8 Basic 2: 2nd pp

b) 2p (0.25p / selection)
1 Self selection
2 Other selection
3 Self selection
4 Other selection
5 Self selection
6 Self selection
7 Other selection
8 Self selection

c) Indirectness: The patient indirectly requests the doctor for a diagnosis; she does not ask "what do you think is wrong with me?"

Positive politeness: The patient gives reasons why she is concerned about her voice. By doing so, she takes the doctor's wants into account and thus affirms her positive face.

Negative politiness: The patient downplays her request ("And I thought now: maybe there is something wrong"). She states that it is something she thought, not what is the case. In addition, she uses the interjection "maybe".

d. The patient is politic; she is institutionally dependent on the doctor, hence the weight of the FTA is quite large. The politeness strategies used by the patient (indirectness, positive and negative politeness) are therefore to be expected.

e. Possible answers:
Turns 1 and 2: Question - answer (the doctor asks how the patient is, the patient answers)
Turns 3 and 4: Question - answer (doctor asks for confirmation, patient provides this)
Turns 6 and 7: Request - granting the request (the doctor requests more information, the patient provides that information)