



Pragmatics

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Previously on 201



Pragmatics is the study of how **context** contributes to meaning or it is the study of **implied meaning**

presuppositions

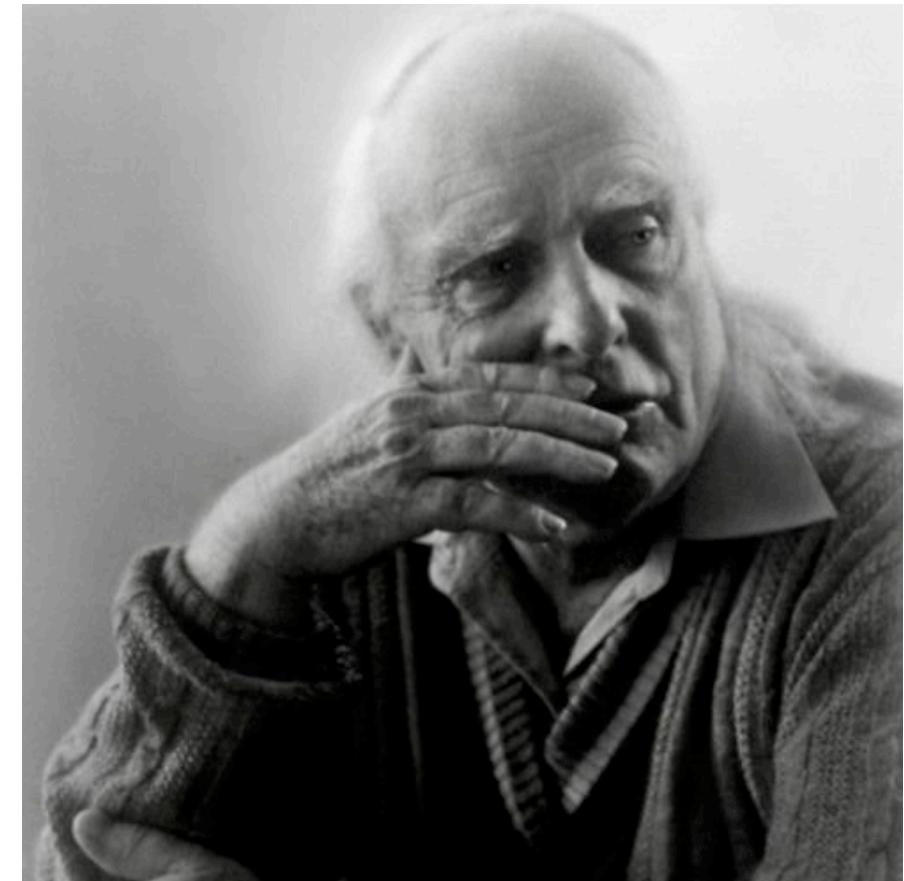
- a type of **implied** meaning
- background information that is taken for granted or in the **common ground** for an utterance to make sense

conversational implicatures

- another type of **implied** meaning
- meaning arises from our understanding of **how people behave** in conversation

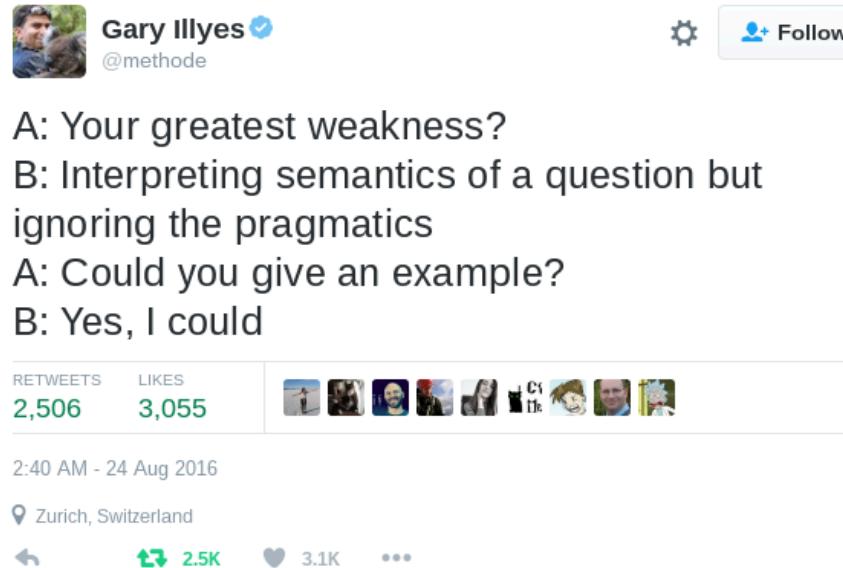
How do conversations work?

- Philosopher **Paul Grice** studied how people behave when they're having a conversation
- Participants in a conversation (**interlocutors**) tend to collaborate and follow certain rules:
 - **NOT** say things that are **irrelevant**
 - *How are you today?*
 - *false.*
 - **NOT** say things they believe to be **false**
 - *Do you know where the truck is?*
 - *On the top of my head.*
 - **NOT** say **more** or **less** than they need to
 - *Do you fancy a cuppa tea or coffee?*
 - *Yes.*



Paul Grice (1913-1988)

Cooperative Principle (Grice)



A: Your greatest weakness?
 B: Interpreting semantics of a question but ignoring the pragmatics
 A: Could you give an example?
 B: Yes, I could

RETWEETS 2,506 LIKES 3,055

2:40 AM - 24 Aug 2016

Zurich, Switzerland

First Previous Directory Next Last

- We tend to behave in similar ways whenever we're collaborating on a **common task** with a **common goal** with other people
- Imagine Merlin is baking a cake with his mom:
 - When she tells him the next step is to stir the butter, what would he do?
 - When she asks him to hand her two eggs, what would he do?
- It is the same when we have a conversation, we tend not to say **irrelevant** things or give **more** or **less** information than is required

participants in a conversation tend to say what's **appropriate** for the situation and goals of the conversation

Grice's Maxims of Conversation



- **maxim of quality:** Be truthful!
 - Don't say what you believe to be false
 - Don't say what you don't have evidence for
- **maxim of quantity:** Be informative!
 - Don't say more than you need to
 - Don't say less than you need to
- **maxim of relevance (relation):** Be relevant!
 - Don't say irrelevant things
- **maxim of manner:** Be clear!
 - Don't be obscure
 - Don't be ambiguous
 - Don't be too wordy
 - Provide information **in a sensible order**

Although they're worded like commands, the maxims are intended to describe how people **tend** to behave or are **assumed** to behave, not how they **ought to** behave

provide information in a **sensible** order

What was reported in the news:

1. Arthur entered the jewelry store with a bag.
2. The clerk screamed.
3. The alarm started ringing.
4. Arthur ran out onto the street.
5. The police caught him outside.

What actually happened:

1. Arthur entered the jewelry store with a bag.
2. The alarm started ringing.
3. The clerk screamed.
4. The police caught him outside.
5. Arthur ran out onto the street.



sometimes we **SEEM TO** break the maxims

- We generally assume interlocutors are following the **Cooperative Principle** and **conversational maxims**
- Yet, sometimes it **seems** we break the maxims:
 - speaker **A**: *Do you want to go out tonight?*
 - speaker **B**: *I have an exam in the morning.*
- B said something unrelated to A's topic:
 - violation of **Maxim of Relevance**
- B did not answer A's question:
 - violation of **Maxim of Quantity**
- What if we assume B is in fact being cooperative and following Grice's maxims?
an't go out, because I have an exam.



conversational implicature: implied meaning inferred from assuming speakers are following the **Cooperative Principle** and **maxims**

Maxim of Quality (be truthful)



- do **not** say what you believe to be **false**
 - not everything is a lie in a conversation
- do **not** say that for which you **lack adequate evidence**
 - "adequate evidence" depends on the situation
 - a doctor would be held to a **higher standard of evidence** than a regular person on a disease outcome

Maxim of Quality (be truthful)



- when someone tells us something, we infer the information is **true** and **reliable** generally
 - Sandy: *We need someone to make some sort of cake for the picnic.*
 - Sasha: *I can make my family's favorite chocolate cake.*
- if we assume Sasha followed the **maxim of quality**, there are following **implicatures**:
 - Sasha is being **truthful**: she actually knows how to make the cake.
 - Sasha has **evidence**: she has succeeded in making the cake in the past.
- Were any of these things literally said? **Nope!** They're just **implicatures**!

violating and flouting conversational maxims

- We **DO** have cases where people **violate** or **ignore** the **maxims**
- **lying** and **claiming without evidence** would be **violating** **maxim of quality
- sometimes, **flouting** a maxim is done to convey additional message for sarcastic or comedic effect
 - – *My TA gave me 59 as the final grade intentionally just to fail me!*
 - *What a lovely and responsible TA he is!*
- What is the second speaker **implicating**?



Maxim of Quantity (be informative)

- be as **informative** as is required
- do not be
overinformative or **underinformative**
- this maxim calls for an **appropriate** amount of information
 - – Arthur: *What languages do you speak?*
 - Merlin: *I speak English, Kazakh, and Mandarin.*
- if Merlin also speaks Russian and German
 - is the utterance still true?
 - does the utterance feel weird?



Maxim of Quantity (be informative)

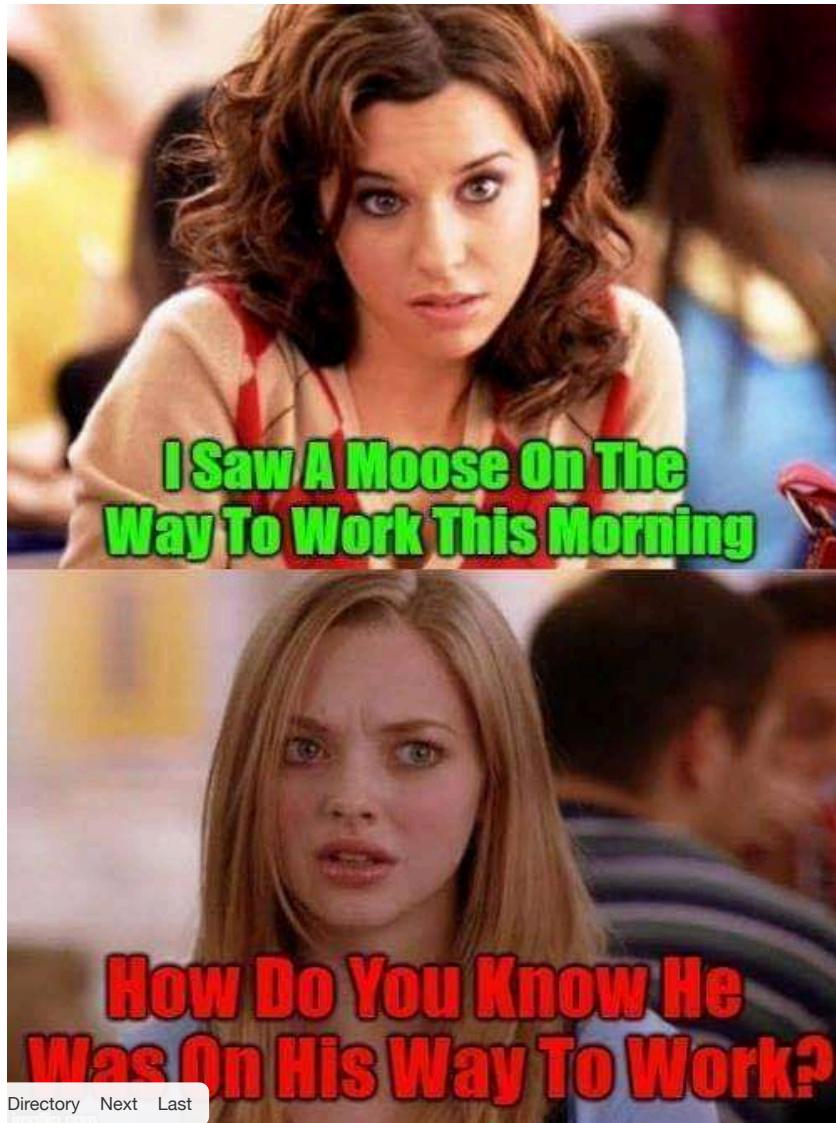
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yes, the utterance is still true according to an **entailment** inference;

YET, it is weird in terms of being **informative**

Maxim of Quantity (be informative)



- – Judge: *Mr. Lachinskaya, have you pleaded guilty to all of the charges listed before this court?*
- Defendant: *I admit to the first one, Your Honor.*
 - What is the defendant **implicating**?
- – Arthur: *What do you do for a living*
- Merlin: *I work.*
 - Is Merlin's response **awkward**?
 - What might Merlin be implicating by **flouting** the **maxim of quantity**?

Maxim of Relevance (be relevant)



- Be **RELEVANT!!!**
- it is generally assumed that people will say things **relevant to the current topic** of conversation
- we **CAN** change the topic without violating this **maxim**, as long as we signal that to our interlocutors:
 - – Arthur: *How was the movie?*
 - Merlin: *Actually, there's something I wanted to talk to you about.*
- Merlin is not being relevant, but he signaled his desire to change the topic with "**actually**"

Maxim of Relevance (be relevant)



We often rely on implied meanings like implicatures because it would be **rude** or **inappropriate** or even **pedantic** to say everything literally

- assuming that people are being **relevant** helps us make sense of people's utterances
 - Arthur: *Is Lancelot dating anyone these days?*
 - Merlin: *Actually, he goes to London every weekend.*
 - if we say Merlin (~~as always~~) makes sense (is being **relevant**), what is he implicating?
- a professor writes in the recomm letter:
 - *Merlin has good handwriting and dresses neatly?*
 - Is it relevant? What is the implicature?

Maxim of Manner (be clear)

- Avoid **obscenity** of expression (Don't be hard to understand.)
- Avoid **ambiguity**
- Be **brief**. (Don't be too wordy.)
- Be **orderly**. (Present information in an order that makes sense.)
 - *Arthur took the medication and had an allergic reaction.*
 - *Arthur had an allergic reaction and took the medication.*
- what does each sentence implicate about the relationship between *medication* and *allergies*?



Practice on Maxims

Identify the **conversational implicatures** in the following dialogues;

Identify the **maxims** that lead to each implicature.

1. Merlin: Did you mow the grass and wash the car like I told you?
Arthur: I mowed the grass.

2. Merlin: Did Morgana make a doctor's appointment?
Arthur: Their line was busy.

3. Merlin: When will you finish your work?
Arthur: I have band practice tonight.

4. Merlin: Where's your car?
Arthur: Aliens took it while I was asleep.



Cancelling and Reinforcing Implicatures



- implicatures can be **cancelled** and **reinforced**, but literal meaning cannot.
- What do the following utterances implicate:
 - – *What languages does Anna speak?*
– *Anna speaks English, Korean, and Farsi.*
 - **implicature:**
 - *Ian ate a cake and was happy.*
 - **implicature:**
 - – *Does Sue have any siblings?*
– *Sue has a brother.*
 - **implicature:**

Cancelling and Reinforcing Implicatures



- implicatures can be **cancelled** and **reinforced**, but literal meaning cannot.
- What do the following utterances implicate:
 - – *What languages does Anna speak?*
– *Anna speaks English, Korean, and Farsi.*
 - **implicature:** *Anna speaks only these three languages.*
 - *Ian ate a cake and was happy.*
 - **implicature:** *Ian ate a cake and that made him happy.*
 - – *Does Sue have any siblings?*
– *Sue has a brother.*
 - **implicature:** *Sue has only one brother.*

Cancelling Implicatures

- What if we say the following sentence:

*Anna speaks English, Korean, and Farsi. **In fact, she also speaks Greek.***

- Implicatures can be **cancelled** or **defeated**: we add extra information to the statement that **contradicts** the **implicature** and makes it go away

Cancelling Implicatures

- What if we say the following sentence:

Anna speaks English, Korean, and Farsi. In fact, she also speaks Greek.

- Implicatures can be **cancelled** or **defeated**: we add extra information to the statement that **contradicts** the **implicature** and makes it go away
 - – *Anna speaks English, Korean, and Farsi. In fact, she also speaks Greek.*
 - **implicature:** ~~Anna speaks only these three languages.~~
 - – *Ian ate a cake and was happy. In fact, he ate the cake because he was happy.*
 - **implicature:** ~~Ian ate a cake and that made him happy.~~
 - – *Does Sue have any siblings?.*
 - *Sue has a brother. In fact, she has two brothers.*
 - **implicature:** ~~Sue has only one brother.~~

Reinforcing Implicatures

- What if we say the following sentence:

*Anna speaks English, Korean, and Farsi. **And she doesn't speak any others.***

- Implicatures can be **reinforced** as well: we add extra information to the statement that **further supports** the **implicature** and makes it firmer

Reinforcing Implicatures

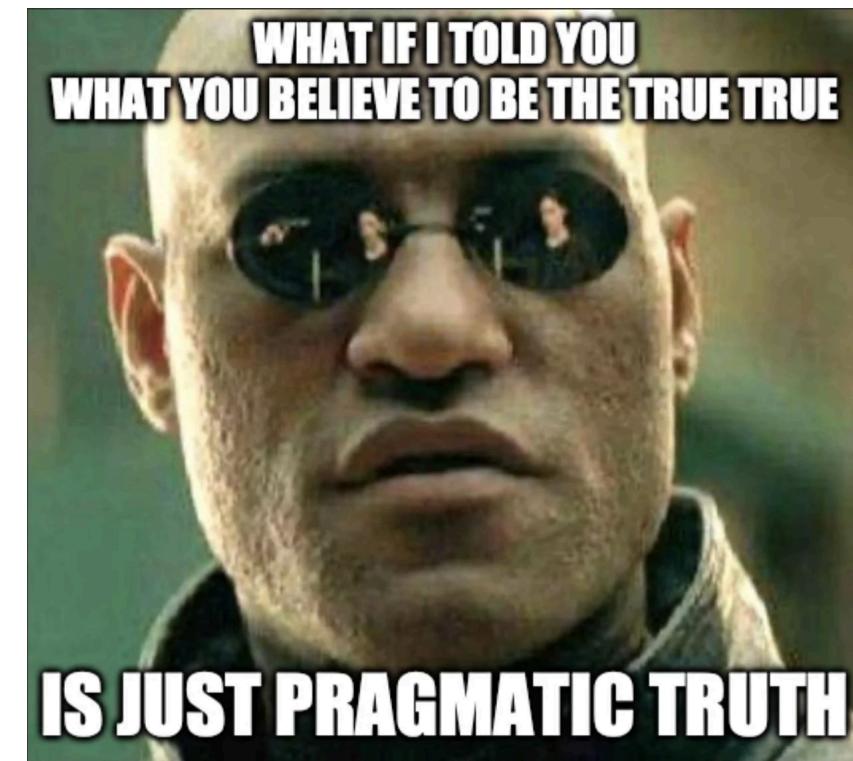
- What if we say the following sentence:

*Anna speaks English, Korean, and Farsi. **And she doesn't speak any others.***

- Implicatures can be **reinforced** as well: we add extra information to the statement that **further supports** the **implicature** and makes it firmer
 - – *Anna speaks English, Korean, and Farsi. And she doesn't speak any others.*
 - **implicature:** Anna speaks only these three languages. ✓
 - – *Ian ate a cake and was happy. It was the cake that made him happy.*
 - **implicature:** Ian ate a cake and that made him happy. ✓
 - – *Does Sue have any siblings?.*
 - *Sue has a brother, and only one brother.*
 - **implicature:** Sue has only one brother. ✓

literal meaning **CANNOT** be cancelled or reinforced

- **cancelling** and **reinforcing** are important tests for literal **vs.** implied meaning
 - **literal meaning CANNOT** be cancelled or reinforced
 - but **implicatures CAN** be
- *Merlin speaks English, Kazakh, and Mandarin.*
 - *but he does not speak Kazakh.*
cancelling → contradiction
 - *and he speaks Kazakh.*
reinforcing → redundancy



Practice on cancelling and reinforcing

For each sentence, two additional statements are given – one is part of the sentence's literal meaning, one is an implicature. Try to **reinforce/cancel** each statement to test whether it is **literal** or an **implicature**.

1. **I drove home at noon.**

A: I drove a car.

B: I drove home during the day.

2. **I called 10 times and nobody picked up.**

A: I called at least 5 times.

B: I was using a phone.



Summary

- **Cooperative Principle**: people in a conversation tend to cooperate by following certain rules
- **conversational maxims**: quality, quantity, relevance, manner
- **conversational implicatures**: implied meanings that arise from the assumption that speakers are following the cooperative principle
 - this is sometimes because people's words implicate things **beyond what they literally say**
 - it's sometimes because people deliberately **flout** the maxims for ironic or comedic effect
 - implied meaning is used as a way to avoid saying uncomfortable things or to avoid the effort of speaking
- That's it for **Pragmatics** – the study of implied meaning and how context contributes to meaning – if you'd like to learn more, consider taking a Pragmatics class!



Homework V is due this Sunday (**Nov 2nd**)

Homework VI will be published this week which is due next Sunday (**Nov 9th**)

reading materials before Wednesday class

Phonetics in O'Grady et al.'s *Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction*



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