Pragmatics I

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Week 9

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LING 20001: Introduction to Linguistics

Beyond truth conditions

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- This is where **pragmatics** comes in.

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      B: The seats were comfy
          Inference: 'I didn't enjoy the movie'

- Although conveyed, this meaning was not part of what was said.
- This other kinds of meaning is an **inference** (assumptions on the part of the speaker based on what they think is likely).
- So how do we know what B meant to convey?

Cooperative Principle

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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.
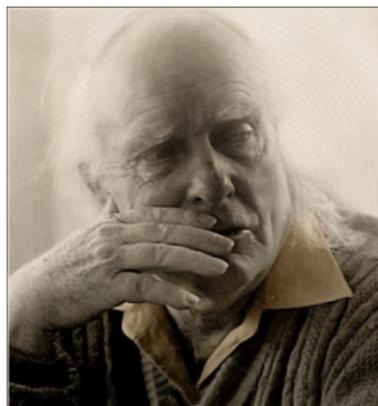
Herbert Paul Grice (1913-1988)

Gricean Maxims

Quality   Try to make your contribution one that is true.
- Do not say what you believe to be false.
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Relevance   Be relevant. (Do not mention unnecessary or irrelevant information.)

Manner   Be perspicuous.
- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Avoid ambiguity.
- Be brief.

Maxim of Quality

a. Do not say what you believe to be false.
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(4)   During a trivia quiz…
    A: What's the capital of Botswana?
    B: Paris.

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(4)   During a trivia quiz…

      A: What's the capital of Botswana?

      B: Paris.

Inference: B doesn't want A to get the answer right. B doesn't actually know the answer.

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(5)   Nelson Mandela: 'Tony Blair is no longer the Prime Minister of Britain, he is the Foreign Minister of the United States.'

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(5)   Nelson Mandela: 'Tony Blair is no longer the Prime Minister of Britain, he is the Foreign Minister of the United States.'

Inference: Nelson Mandela thinks that Tony Blair has followed American foreign policies too closely (and he has a negative opinion of this).

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(6) A: Do you know where James lives?
    B: Yes.

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Inference: B is deliberately withholding information (B is annoyed at A? B is trying to be funny?).

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(6)   A: Do you know where James lives?
       B: Yes.

Inference: B is deliberately withholding information (B is annoyed at A? B is trying to be funny?).

(7)   A: Do you know where James lives?
       B: Somewhere on the South Side of Chicago.

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(6) A: Do you know where James lives?
     B: Yes.

Inference: B is deliberately withholding information (B is annoyed at A? B is trying to be funny?).

(7) A: Do you know where James lives?
     B: Somewhere on the South Side of Chicago.

Inference: B doesn't know James' address/B is deliberately withholding information

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(8)   In Grice's letter of recommendation about pupil X, a candidate for a job in the philosophy department:

> Dear Sir,
> Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular.
> Yours,
> H.P. Grice

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(8) In Grice's letter of recommendation about pupil X, a candidate for a job in the philosophy department:

> Dear Sir,
> Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular.
> Yours,
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Inference: Grice thinks Mr. X is no good at philosophy.

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(9) A: How was the linguistics talk?
     B: I liked the speaker's tie.

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b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

(9) A: How was the linguistics talk?
     B: I liked the speaker's tie.

Inference: B did not like the talk.

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(10) A: Will you help me carry these boxes upstairs?
      B: Hey, is that a squirrel?

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(10) A: Will you help me carry these boxes upstairs?
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Inference: B does not want to help carry the boxes.

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Be perspicuous: Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief.

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(11)   James caused the window to open

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(11)   James caused the window to open

Inference: James opened the window in an unusual way (perhaps indirectly).

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(12)   I went to Target and bought some beer

Inference: I went to Target and then bought some beer

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