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Study of Meaningful Nonfulfillment of Cooperative Principle Resulting in Social Implications

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Abstract:

The present research article strives to focus on the Pragmatic concept The Cooperative Principle and how it triggers social implications. The meaningful nonfulfillment of the maxims of the Cooperative Principle arises out of Violation, Infringement, Opting Out and Clash. In order to emphasize the significance of the Cooperative Principle in communication, the present research throws light on its maxims and the treatment of these maxims in day to day life. Social implication arises from how something is said in context and tells us something about the speaker. Scholars are of the opinion that the presence of conversational implicatures can be said to exploit the particular background knowledge of the maxims in a particular conversation; however, social implication is not part of a message, as normally understood. Suppose a speaker has humors and figurative language as options, while talking to a person having certain relationship, whether he chooses humor or figurative language has certain implications called as social implications.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle, Social Implication, Nonfulfillment, Implicature, Maxims

GRICE'S THEORY OF IMPLICATURE

Grice proposed his theory of implicature in the William James Lectures at Harvard in 1967 and which was published partly in 1975. This theory outlines a formula in which non-conventional kind of inferences can be conveyed taking into consideration Grice's theory of Meaning_{NN}. According to Levinson (1985:101), Grice's theory of implicature is essentially a theory about how people use language. In his proposal, Grice assumes a general rule that governs the conduct of conversation. He basically develops this theory to explain and predict conversational implicature. His aim is to illustrate how various kinds of implicatures are used to interpret the proper message in conversation. With this intention, he postulated a general 'Cooperative Principle' and its four maxims to specify how to be cooperative in conversation. He asserts that, as common knowledge, people generally follow these maxims for successful and efficient conversation.

The Cooperative Principle

Grice points out that conversation does not comprise of a series of broken remarks but they are characteristically rational and cooperative events. Grice's claim is that the interlocutors will recognize a common purpose or a set of purposes which may develop gradually in the conversation. For such efficient and cooperative conversation, Grice formulates the following general principle of conversational interaction. He states:

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 is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE (1975:45).

Grice calls this general principle of cooperative interaction as 'The Co-operative Principle.' He states that interlocutors are supposed to follow this basic principle governing conversation. It is based on the assumption that, in conversation, participants will cooperate with each other while making their contribution.

Maxims of Cooperative Principle

Grice identifies maxims and sub-maxims which jointly constitute and make up the force behind the cooperative principle. He formulates four maxims and nine sub-maxims of the Cooperative Principle (hereinafter CP):

1. QUANTITY:
 - i. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange).
 - ii. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
2. QUALITY:
 - i. Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - ii. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
3. RELATION:
 - i. Be relevant.
4. MANNER:
 - i. Avoid obscurity of expression.
 - ii. Avoid ambiguity.
 - iii. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 - iv. Be orderly.

(1975:45-46).

The primary function of these maxims and sub maxims is to constrain the behavior of interlocutors so that conversation should become orderly, purposeful and efficient at its best.

NONFULFILLMENT OF THE MAXIMS

Maxims of the CP facilitate comprehension not only when they are observed but also when they are not. Grice (1975:49) mentions that interlocutors ‘may fail to fulfill a maxim in various ways.’ It is from such ways, in which interlocutors might not fulfill the maxims, various kinds of implicatures arise. Grice suggest the following ways in which a participant in conversation may fail to fulfill the maxims:

1. He may quietly and unostentatiously VIOLATE a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be liable to mislead.
2. He may OPT OUT from the operation both of the maxim and of the CP; he may say, indicate or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires. He may say, for example, I cannot say more; my leaps are sealed.
3. He may be faced by a CLASH; he may be unable, for example, to fulfill the first maxim of Quantity (Be as informative as is required) without violating the second maxim of Quality (Have adequate evidence for what you say).
4. He may FLOUT a maxim; that is, he may BLATANTLY fail to fulfill it. On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfill the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of a clash), is not opting out, and is not, in the view of the blatancy of his performance, trying to mislead, the hearer is faced with a minor problem: How can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that he is observing the overall CP? This situation is one that characteristically gives rise to conversational implicature; and when a conversational implicature is generated in this way, I shall say that a maxim is being EXPLOTTED (1975:49).

This taxonomy provided by Grice examines the maxims and how they might be nonfulfilled. As Mooney (2004:907) points out, Grice’s taxonomy can be simplified in only two types of meaningful nonfulfillment: (i) Which produces a conversational implicature and can therefore be said to exploit the maxims: (ii) Which produces social implications. The significant approaches to Grice’s taxonomy of nonfulfillment include those of Jenny Thomas (1995) and Wilson and Sperber (2000). The following table, reproduced from Mooney (2004), summarizes these approaches:

Approaches to Nonfulfillment

Grice	Wilson and Sperber	Thomas	New System
Violation (unsuccessful violation)	Overt violation	Violation	Not relevant Social implication
Opting out	Overt Suspension	Opting Out	Exploiting (opting out at maxim level)

Clash			Social implication (opting out at CP level) Exploiting (lack of knowledge) Social implication (capabilities)
Flout	Overt violation (flouting)	Flout Suspension Infringement	Exploiting and Possible social Social implication Social Implication

Note: From Mooney (2004:908).

Maxim Hedges

Speakers use certain linguistic structures to secure themselves against any possible violation of the maxims. Such linguistic structures are called hedges. Maxim hedges also save speakers from committing face-threatening acts by stating the facts and creating the background. According to Levinson (1983:162), speakers use discourse particles like well, oh, ah, so, anyway, actually, still, after all and so on to indicate that they are being cooperative to the extent. As Grundy states:

Speakers frequently use highly grammaticalized hedges and intensifiers to inform their addressees of the extent to which they are abiding by the maxims (2000:80).

The maxim hedges indicate that the participants try their best to follow the maxims to be cooperative in conversation.

The Maxim of Quality

Most of the times, interlocutors avoid making bold statements in order to save themselves from further complications. There are a number of expressions, as Yule states, which interlocutors use to convey that what they are saying may not be completely accurate. Yule gives some examples of hedges as:

I may be mistaken, but ...
As far as I know ...
I'm not sure if this is right, but ...
I guess ... (1996:38)

For instance:

- i. Ambitious parents are responsible for student-suicide cases.
- ii. I may be mistaken but I think that ambitious parents are responsible for student-suicide cases.

When a speaker utters (ii) instead of (i), it implicates that the speaker is observing the maxim of quality with respect to his own view, that may be wrong. It further implicates that there may be some contrary opinions too.

The Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity can be hedged with the following expressions suggested by Yule:

All I know...

As you probably know ...

So, to cut a long story short ...

I won't bore you with all the details, but ... (1996:38)

Most of the times, speakers use such expressions to indicate that they know only that much amount of information:

i. Diabetes is a lifelong disease.

ii. All I know is that diabetes is a lifelong disease

Instead of saying (i) if the speaker says (ii), it might be taken to implicate that the speaker doesn't have sufficient information about the disease. Consequently, the maxim of quantity is hedged due to inadequate information.

The Maxim of Relation

The hedging of the maxim of relation implicates, as Grundy (2000:78) states, that what is said by the speaker is not as relevant at the stage at which it occurs in the conversations as expected.

Yule lists certain expressions used as hedges.

Oh, by the way ...

Well ...

Anyway ...

I don't know if this is important, but ...

This may sound like a dumb question, but ...

Not to change the subject, but ... (1996:38)

For instance:

By the way, what does your father do?

When the speaker utters the above sentence, it implicates that asking personal questions is irrelevant at that time. Yule (1996:38) states that speakers use such expressions hedging the maxim of relation and go on contributing irrelevant information.

The Maxim of Manner

Speakers tend to hedge the maxim of manner, as Yule points out, to show that they are aware of the expectations of manner. He lists some expressions that hedge the maxim of manner:

This may be a bit confused, but ...

I'm not sure if this makes sense, but ...

I don't know if this is clear at all, but ...

... if you see what I mean. (1996:39)

By using such expressions speakers encourage the listeners to try to overcome the obscurity and ambiguity they might have expressed unintentionally:

I'm not sure if this makes sense, but at night I saw a lightning fast shining object.

In the above utterance, the speaker, previously aware that he is going to tell something obscure, hedges the maxim. It implicates that the speaker is unable to make it clear what he saw at night.

Unsuccessful Violation

Mooney (2004:913-916) distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful violations. Unsuccessful violations generate social implications. Mooney (2004:916) points out that in the violation of quantity by saying too little, implications are generated about speaker's shy personality or little knowledge. The case of unsuccessful violation of CP as a whole results in social implication, that is, unwillingness to be cooperative. Mooney cites the following exchange between husband and wife as an instance of unsuccessful violation:

Alice has been refusing to make love to her husband. At first, he attributes this to post-natal depression, but then he starts to think she may be having an affair.

'Allie, I've got to ask you this.'

He stopped.

'Ask me then ...'

'Will you give me a truthful answer? However much you think it'll hurt me?'

Alice's voice has a little quaver.

'I promise'.

Martin came back to his chair and put hands on its back and looked at her.

'Is there another man?'

Alice raised her chin and looked at him squarely.

'No', she said. 'There isn't another man'.

And then Martin gave a long, escaping sigh, and grinned at her and said he thought they had better finish the champagne, didn't she? (2004:917).

In the above extract, Alice does not observe the maxim of quantity while answering Martin's question. She says 'No,' but then she adds 'There isn't another man,' which generates further implications. It could be seen as an example of violation of the maxim of quantity as Alice's reply doesn't provide adequate information. She gives either more or less information.

Infringement

Mooney (2004:910) points out that infringement results from imperfect command of language and provides social implications. Jenny Thomas (1995:74) is of the opinion that infringement is due to speaker being unfamiliar with the language, or being drunk, nervous, excited or just being unable to speak to the point. It also occurs if one is unable to cooperate because of lack of language proficiency. For instance, consider a piece of conversation between a native English speaker and a non-native speaker recently exposed to English language:

Mike : Would you like hamburger or pizza?

Vijay : Yes.

Here, Vijay could not comprehend the question as alternative one. As a result, Mike might repeat the same question giving stress on 'or' to convey that he is providing options. The maxim of relation is suspended, in that; the reply should be one or both of the alternatives. Such infringements, as Mooney (2004:910) points out, are cases of social implications when implicatures are not at work.

Opting Out

Opting out is choosing not to be co-operative. As mentioned by Grice (1989) and further pointed out by Jenny Thomas (1995) and recently referred by Mooney (2004), opting out is due to an unwillingness to cooperate. Grice (1975:49) states that the speaker 'may say, indicate or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires.' However, the indication of opting out, as Mooney (2004:911) points out, most of the times, may not be 'linguistically explicit'. In other words, it may be conveyed with body language, gestures intonation as well as silence. For example:

Manmohan: What do you think about India's Nuc' Deal with America?

Prakash: ... (Silence)

Opting out may occur at two levels: at the level of maxims and at the level of the CP. Complete opting out of the CP has a social implication that the speaker doesn't want to communicate at all.

Clash

According to Grice (1989:51-52), clash is the demand of one maxim infringing another. Clash triggers implicatures. Grice further notes that a clash may result from an imperfectly informed or unequipped speaker trying to be cooperative. In this way, the speaker's knowledge of the world can be implicated through clash:

A: Where is the Computer Shoppe?

B: Somewhere in the next lane.

Here, B is unable to give precise answer forcing A to draw inference that B does not know exactly where the Computer Shoppe is. It results from B trying, but being unable to be cooperative.

CONCLUSION

Grice's theory of the Cooperative Principle is one of the most influential concepts in Pragmatics. Apart from violation and observance of the maxims of the CP, nonfulfillment also triggers implications that are not the literal import of language. Varieties of nonfulfillment such as maxim hedges, opting out, clash, infringement and so on prove useful for the interlocutors to communicate.

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