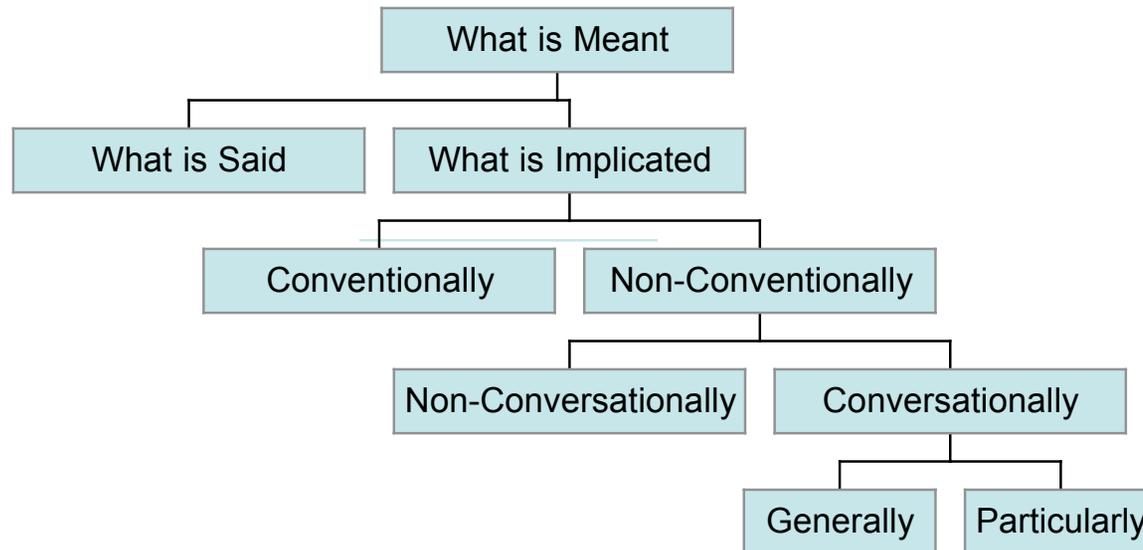


Conversational Implicature

Read: Grice 1975

Additional Source: Levinson 1983

Types of Meaning: Grice (Levinson)



What is Implicated/Said

- A: How is C getting on in his job?
B: Oh, quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn't been to prison yet.
 - +> C is the sort of person likely to yield to the temptation provided by his occupation; or C's colleagues are really very unpleasant and treacherous people, etc.
- A: He is in the grip of a vice.
 - A has said, about some particular male person or animal x, that at the time of utterance, either (1) x was unable to rid himself of a certain kind of bad character trait or (2) some part of x's person was caught in a certain kind of tool or instrument.
 - For a full identification of what was said, one would need to know (a) the identity of x, (b) the time of utterance, (c) of the phrase *grip of a vice*, some decision as to (1) and (2).

Conventional Implicature

- He is an Englishman; he is, therefore brave.
 - “I have certainly committed myself, by virtue of the meaning of my words, to its being the case that his being brave is a consequence of (follows from) his being an Englishman.”
 - “I have said that he is an Englishman, and said that he is brave.”
 - “I do not want to say that I have SAID (in the favored sense) that it follows from his being an Englishman that he is brave; though I have certainly indicated, and so implicated, that this is so.”
 - “I do not want to say that my utterance of this sentence would be, STRICTLY SPEAKING, false should the consequence in question fail to hold.”

Conversational Implicature

- The Cooperative Principle:
 - 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.
 - The Maxim of Quality
 - (i) do not say what you believe to be false.
 - (ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

– The Maxim of Quantity

- (i) make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
- (ii) do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

– The Maxim of Relevance

- Make your contribution relevant.

– The Maxim of Manner

- Be perspicuous, and specifically,
 - (i) avoid obscurity.
 - (ii) avoid ambiguity.
 - (iii) be brief.
 - (iv) be orderly.

Non-conventional, non-conversational implicatures

- “There are, of course, all sorts of other maxims (aesthetic, social or moral in character), such as ‘Be polite’, that are also normally observed by participants in talk exchanges, and these may also generate nonconventional implicatures.”
- “The conversational maxims, however, and the conversational implicatures connected with them, are specially connected (I hope) with the particular purposes that talk (and so talk exchange) is adapted to serve and is primarily employed to serve.”

The maxims have analogues in non-talk exchanges

- “[O]ne of my avowed aims is to see talking as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational, behavior.”
 - Quantity: In mending a car, if at a particular stage, I need four screws, I expect you to hand me four, not six or two.
 - Quality: If I need sugar as an ingredient for a cake, I expect you to hand me sugar, not salt.
 - Relation: If I am mixing ingredients for a cake, I do not expect to be handed a good book.
 - Manner: I expect a partner to make it clear what contribution he is making, and to execute his performance with reasonable dispatch.

Ways of failing to fulfill a maxim

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.
3. He may be faced by a CLASH: He may be unable to fulfill the first maxim of Quantity (be as informative as 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....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?.... When a conversational implicature is generated in this way, I shall say that a maxim is being EXPLOITED.

Characterizing Conversational Implicature

- “A man who, by (in, when) saying (or making as if to say) that p has implicated that q, may be said to have conversationally implicated that q, PROVIDED THAT (1) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the cooperative principle; (2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, q is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say p (or doing in THOSE terms) consistent with this presumption, and (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (2) is required.”

Working out a Conversational Implicature

- The hearer will rely on the following data:
 1. The conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of an references that may be involved.
 2. The CP and its maxims.
 3. The context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance.
 4. Other items of background knowledge.
 5. The fact (or supposed fact) that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case.

General pattern for working out a conversational implicature

- ‘He has said that p; there is no reason to suppose that he is not observing the maxims, or at least the CP; he could not be doing this unless he thought that q; he knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that the supposition that he thinks that q is required; he has done nothing to stop me thinking that q; he intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that q; and so he has implicated that q.’

Examples in which no maxim is violated

- A: I am out of petrol.
B: There is a garage around the corner.
 - +> the garage is open, has petrol to sell, etc.
(Obeying relevance)
- A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.
B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.
 - +> Smith has, or may have, a girlfriend in New York.
(Obeying relevance)

Example of maxim violation, explained by a clash

- A: Where does C live?
B: Somewhere in the South of France
 - +> B doesn't know in which town C lives.
(violate Quantity 1 to preserve Quality 2)

Examples that involve flouting a maxim

- A: 'Dear Sir, Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc.'
 - +> Mr. X is no good at philosophy.
(flouting Quantity 1)
- Women are women.
War is war.
 - +> various particular things.
 - (flouting Quantity 1)
- A wants to know whether p, and B volunteers not only the information that p, but information to the effect that it is certain that p, and that the evidence for its being that p is so-and-so and such-and-such.
 - (flouting Quantity 2)

- Irony.
 - X is a fine friend.
 - Flouts Quality 1
- Metaphor
 - You are the cream in my coffee.
 - Flouts Quality 1
- Meiosis
 - He was a little intoxicated.
 - Flouts Quality 1
- Hyperbole
 - Every nice girl loves a sailor.
 - Flouts Quality 1
- She is probably deceiving him this evening.
 - +> she is given to deceiving her husband, or she is the sort of person who would not stop short of such conduct.
 - Flouts Quality 2

- A: Mrs. X is an old bag.
B: The weather has been quite delightful this summer hasn't it?
 - +> A's remark should not be discussed; or A has committed a social gaffe.
 - Flouting Relevance.
- Ambiguity
 - I sought to tell my love, love that never can be told.
 - Flouting Manner 1
 - Peccasi (literally, "I have sinned")
 - +> "I have Sinned"
 - Flouting Manner 1

- Obscurity
 - A: Let's get the kids something.
B: Okay, but I veto I-C-E C-R-E-A-M-S (Levinson)
 - Flouting Manner 2
- Failure to be brief or succinct:
 - Miss X produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score of 'Home sweet home.'
 - +> Miss X's performance suffered from some hideous defect.
 - Flouting Manner 3

Generalized conversational implicature

- X is meeting a woman this evening
 - +> the person to be met was someone other than X's wife.
- X went into a house yesterday and found a tortoise inside the front door.
 - +> the house was not X's own.
- But:
 - I have been sitting in a car all morning.
 - I broke a finger yesterday.
- Use of the form of expression *an X*, often implicates that the X does not belong to or is not otherwise closely connected with some identifiable person
 - Failure to follow Quantity 1 for one reason or another.

Properties of Conversational Implicatures

- Cancellability
 - They can be cancelled, explicitly or contextually.
- Non-detachability
 - It will not be possible to find another way of saying the same thing, which simply lacks the implicature in question (except in the case of some Manner implicatures).
- Non-conventionality
 - Initially at least, conversational implicatures are not part of the meaning of the expressions to the employment of which they attach.
 - The implicature is not carried by what is said, but only by the saying of what is said, or by ‘putting it that way.’
- Calculability
 - There may be multiple ways of calculating an implicature, which is why they often possess an indeterminacy.