

Lecture 13

Co-operative Principle

Co-operative Principle

In a normal conversation, a speaker tries to:

- (1) Give relatively specific answers to questions.
- (2) Give new information that the hearer doesn't already know.
- (3) Give information that is relevant to the topic of conversation.
- (4) Give information in a way that is easy to understand.
- (5) Avoid ambiguity, or potentially misleading statements.

The previous points reflect what we call in pragmatics **the Co-operative Principle**, the social rule which speakers try to follow in conversation.

The Co-operative Principle can be stated simply as 'be as helpful to your hearer as you can'.

The fact that speakers normally try to follow this principle is used by hearers in making inferences from the utterances they hear.

Co-operative Principle

Heart story

Being co-operative in conversation obviously involves more than simply telling the truth, although truthfulness is part of co-operativeness.

E.g. The second speaker in the following conversation is telling the truth, but is not being co-operative:

Mother: 'Who put the cat in the bathtub?'

Son (who knows who did it): 'Someone put it there.'

Maxims of Grice

The philosopher **Paul Grice** developed four components (called maxims) of conversational cooperativeness.

These **Maxims of Grice** are: **quantity**, **quality**, **relation** and **manner**.

We will discuss them briefly here:

- 1) **Maxim of Quality:** Truthfulness – do not say what you believe to be false.
- 2) **Maxim of Relation:** Relevance – keep to the topic of the conversation.
- 3) **Maxim of Quantity:** Informativeness – tell the hearer just what he needs to know, no more and no less.
- 4) **Maxim of Manner:** Clarity – speak in a way that the hearer will understand.

Implicature

There might be situations in which one or more of the maxims might seem to be violated, but in fact the hearer's assumption that this is not the case leads him to a particular inference from the speaker's utterance.

We will look at an example of a situation like this to make this idea clearer.

If a speaker says "Mary speaks French" this would not normally lead the hearer to think that "Mary is John's daughter."

However, if you ask me for example "Do any of John's daughters speak a foreign language?", and I reply "Mary speaks French", now it would be reasonable for you to conclude that Mary is John's daughter.

You reached this conclusion in the previous example because you assume that I would make a relevant reply to your question.

In the above situation, if Mary were not in fact John's daughter, then my reply would not be relevant.

Thus, it is sensible for you to reason as follows:

If Mary were not John's daughter, his reply would not be relevant: I assume that his reply IS relevant and therefore Mary IS John's daughter.

The example we have just discussed is a case of **implicature**.

Heart story

The hearer reaches the conclusion that Mary is John's daughter only if it can be assumed that the speaker is being helpful.

Thus, the inference that Mary is John's daughter is an **implicature** of the utterance 'Mary speaks French' in our example.

- **Implicature** is a concept of **utterance meaning** (as opposed to **sentence meaning**).
- **Implicature** is related to the method through which speakers understand the **indirect illocutions** of utterances.
- In a case of **implicature** the hearer assumes that the speaker is not violating one of the **conversational maxims** we mentioned (relevance, informativeness, clarity.. etc.)

Lecture 14

Pragmatics: Practical Applications

Exercise 1

Below are some conversations between two people, A and B. After each conversation, an **implicature** from B's utterance is given.

In each conversation, say whether the assumption that lead the hearer to this implicature is a result of **relevance**, **informativeness**, or **clarity**.

1. A: (standing by an obviously immobilized car)

'My car has broken down'

B: 'There is a garage round the corner'

Implicature: The garage is open and has a mechanic who might repair the car.

R / I / C

2. A: 'What subjects is Jack taking?'

B: 'He's not taking Linguistics'

Implicature: B does not know exactly which subjects

Jack is taking.

R / I / C

Heart story

3. A: 'Who was that man you were talking to?'

B: 'That was my mother's husband'

Implicature: Speaker B's mother's husband is not B's father.

R/I/C

4. A: 'Is Betsy in?'

B: 'Her light is on'

Implicature: Betsy's light being on is usually a sign of

whether she is in or not.

R/I/C

Exercise 1: Answers

1. relevance

2. informativeness

4. clarity

5. relevance

Exercise 2

Heart story

Say whether the utterance of the second speaker in each of the following situations is violating the maxim of relation (**irrelevant**), violating the maxim of quantity (**uninformative**), violating the maxim of manner (**unclear**), or violating the maxim of quality (**untruthful**).

Exercise 2

(1) Policeman at the front door: 'Is your father at home?'

Small boy (who knows that his father is at home):

'Either my mother's gone out shopping or she hasn't.'

(I, UT, UC, UI)

(2) Traffic policeman talking to a man parked in a no-parking zone:

'Is this your car, sir?'

Man (who owns the car): 'No, this car is not mine.'

(3) Customer in a stationery shop: 'Are pens in the first floor or the second floor of the store?'

Shop girl (who knows pens are on the first floor):

'You can find them on the floor that has notebooks.'

(I, UT, UC, UI)

(4) Mother: 'Now tell me the truth. Who put the cat in the bathtub?'

Heart story

Son (who knows who did it): 'Someone put it there.'

Exercise 2: Answers

1. irrelevant
2. untruthful
3. unclear
4. uninformative

Sample Questions

Questions on Definitions

1. "A sense relation where the meaning of a word is the opposite of another word."
 - a. synonymy
 - b. polysemy
 - c. antonymy
 - d. hyponymy
2. "Hyponymy" is a sense relation where:
 - a. the meaning of a word is the opposite of another word.
 - b. the meaning of a word is the same as another word

Heart story

- c. the meaning of a word is included in another word
- d. the meaning of a word is not related to another word

Questions on Examples

1. Which of the following pairs are binary antonyms?

- a. meat – cheese
- b. silver – gold
- c. married – unmarried
- d. love – hate

2. Classify the utterance: 'I order you to go.'

- a. constative
- b. explicit performative
- c. implicit performative
- d. neither constative nor performative

Questions on Discussion

Which of the following is true about hyponymy?

- a. The upper term is called the hyponym.
- b. The lower term is called the superordinate.

Heart story

- c. A hyponym can never be a superordinate of another term.
- d. There is not always a superordinate term for hyponyms in a language.