The Application of Grice Maxims in Conversation: A Pragmatic Study

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT

In every individual's life, communicating and interacting with others is vital for carrying out a healthy social and professional relationship. Strictly speaking, we, you and I communicate with one another in our day-to-day life and simply understand each other. Paul Grice's has presented his cooperative principle theory to explain our day-to-day life conversation. This article aims to review the basic Grecian theory of conversational implicature, identifying important consequences, known problems, and useful extensions or modifications. This paper is about how people should consider meeting the cooperative principle in order to perform successfully in communication which is based mainly on Paul Grice's theory of implicature which is considered one of the most important contributions to pragmatics.

1. Introduction

In pragmatics, the major aim of communication is considered the exchange of information. People usually cooperate to convey their intentions and implicit import of their utterances. Therefore, all things being equal, conversations are cooperative attempts based on common ground and pausing a shared purpose.

Grice's work on the cooperative principle led to the development of 'pragmatics' as a separate discipline within linguistics.

Consider the following, taken from Fais (1994)

"One of the defining features of conversation is that it is cooperative in nature." (Fais, 1994:231-242)

The distinction between what is said and what is meant was Austin's core idea of his early theory in pragmatics. Later on, Grice, who is mainly Austin's student has made an attempt to go further. That is, to systematize how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant, from expressed meaning to implied meaning.

Paul Grice, a British philosopher of language, formulated what is now called the cooperative principle. "Make your conversation contribution 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' (1975, 45).

In his William James lectures at Harvard Oxford universities in 1967, Grice explicates the cooperative principle and he pays attention to limit the use of it for describing talk exchanges presenting the following features. " The participants have some common immediate aim, the contributions of the participants are dovetailed mutually dependent; there is some sort of understanding that other things being equal, the transaction should continue inappropriate style unless both parties are agreeable that it should terminate." (Grice, 1989; 31)

Grice (1989, 29) considers that

" Our talk exchanges .... are characteristical, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts and each participant recognize in them .... a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction."

This means both speaker and hearer should mutually cooperate with each other. The theory that Paul Grice presented actually attempts to bridge the gap between what participants in conversation say and what they mean.

2. Theoretical Background of the study

Since the early 1970s, pragmatics has become an essential field in linguistics though it was argued and still argued whether to consider it as a field of linguistics or nor, (Collinge, 2001). Despite this, not until the 1980s, pragmatics has started to appear in 'Textbooks on linguistics." (Thomas, 1995; P: 1)

Principally, Austin, Grice and Searle are considered the proponents of Pragmatics, each of whom has published either a book or essay that has greatly influenced the study of pragmatics and has led in one way or another to the development of this field of study in linguistics. Nevertheless, many linguistics and critics have argued against this field as a branch of philosophy rather than linguistics as its proponents, yet they have discussed and introduced it from philosophy and logic rather than language study.

From among those influential theories in Grice's theory of conversational implicature, Grice attempts to systematically show how a person gets from what is said to what is meant or from the expressed meaning to the implied meaning. (Thomas,1995)

More importantly, our main concern in this research paper is that Grice makes a distinction between observing maxims and non-observance of the maxims and there are five cases where maxims are not observed. According to Grice they are, flouting the maxims, violating the maxims, infringing the maxims, opting out the maxims and suspending the maxims.

3. Conversation as a system of social interaction

Conversation is a form of social interaction in which language is used in a systematic, reciprocal manner. It is a uniquely human form of social interaction and one of the most important achievements of human socio-cultural evolution. One would then naturally expect to find conversation among the foremost subjects of social psychological research. Yet, this is not the case. The reason might be that, because man speaks so much, conversation has more or less been taken as a synonym for interpersonal communication or face-to-face interaction generally.

Conversation is in a rather obvious way divided into the elements of speaking turns. It is equally obvious that these are regulated at least by the principles: only one person speaks at a time and turns of speaking are exchanged. Even at this technical level of analysis, important empirical evidence has been found. It has been shown how speaking listening and exchanging the turns of these are regulated by a fairly uniform set of nonverbal actions, similes, looking at or away, head nods and postural shifts and by some stereotypic utterances or vague vocalizations; speakers do not ordinarily need a chairman nor do they need to utter questions, demands or commands to know when to start or to keep the floor to get their messages completed.

Conversation analysis is a branch of sociology that studies human interaction structure and organisation, with a more specific focus on conversational interaction.

Communication skills are the key to develop friendships and building a strong social support network.

4. Logic and Conversation

Grice (1975) is interested in the concept of logic and the relationship between conversation and logic. He considers logic a basic philosophical tool but claims that the formal devices indicating the logical functions have different meanings from their natural language equivalents. Then, he summarizes the formalists and non-formalists positions regarding this issue as follows:

Formalist believes that the additional meanings within a natural language are flaws of that system, and we should make an ideal language, including the formal devices, and clear and explicit sentences without any metaphysical implications. By contrast, the non-formalists state that failing to grasp the meaning of words lacking logical equivalence should not be regarded as a problem in the system: language plays other functions rather than serving science.

Grice argues that formalists cannot explain the logic of conversation. He adds that the acknowledge existence of these divergences but claims there are mistakes that stem from insufficient attention given to the nature and importance of the conditions that govern conversation.

Grice (1975) tries to prove the operation of logic in the performance of these aspects of conversations to challenge this viewpoint. To him, implicatures are used as an instrument to investigate and signal the philosophical usefulness of implicatures and indicate that we can explain structures that ignore the understanding of formal logic systematically.

5. Cooperative principle and Maxim

In order to examine the CP, We will first outline the basic concepts briefly behind the CP and maxims. Previous work by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) was largely concerned with the relationship between direct and indirect speech acts. Any number of indirect speech acts can, infact convey a particular meaning. Grice is concerned with this distinction between saying and meaning.

Grice first introduces the cooperative principle and explains conversational implicature in his article, "Logic and Conversation."(1975). He argued that the generation and perception of these implicatures were based on the following cooperative principle: 'Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which is occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged'. (Grice, 1975; p. 48)

The cooperative principle attempts to make explicit certain rational principles observed by people when they converse.

Grice claims that human beings communicate with each other logically and rationally, and cooperation is embedded into people's conversations.

Furthermore, he argues that this habit will never be lost because it has been learned during childhood.

In his theory, Grice makes a distinction between saying and meaning. He argues that speakers can create implicit meanings and their audiences can infer these intended meanings from their conversations. He believes that people follow specific patterns in their interactions and claims that listeners generally assume that a speaker's utterance contains enough relevant information. When it patently violates this assumption, we understand that meaning. Therefore, violation of relevance does not mean a lack of cooperation.

The maxims that Grice's (1975) discuss are as follows:

Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation: Be Relevant.

Manner: Avoid obscurity of expression.

       Avoid ambiguity

       Be Brief

       Be orderly

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(Grice 1975; 45-46)

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He suggests that there is an accepted way of speaking which we all accept as standard behavior**.**

When we produce or hear an utterance, we assume that it will generally be true, have the right amount of information, be relevant, and be couched in understandable terms.

There is a relationship between the conventional meaning of an utterance and any implicit meaning it might have, and it is calculable. What Grice (1975) does not say is that interaction is 'cooperative' in the sense which is found in the dictionary.

6. Ways of failing to observe a maxim

People fail to observe the maxims of cooperation, whether deliberately or accidentally. There are five main ways of failing to observe a maxim.

6.1 Flouting

6.2 Violating

6.3. Infringing

6.4. Opting out.

6.5. Suspending

The ways of failing to observe a maxim are given below:

6.1 Flouting of maxim
The infringement of maxims, which involves exploitation, that is, a procedure by which a maxim is flouted to get a conversational implicatures, is usually carried out through indirect, contradictory utterances, understatement tautology and hyperbole.

6.1.1 Flouting maxim of quantity
1. A: What time is it?

   B: It's two o'clock. In fact it's four pass two, and now it's Sunday.

Maxim of quantity and its implicature occur when the speaker or the writer conveys messages that are not as informative as they are required or the information is too much and unnecessary.

'B' flouts the maxim of quantity, since he gives too much information to A, while too much information to A, can distract the listener.

6.1.2 Flouting maxim of quality
A: What is the capital of Indonasia?

B: I believe it's Bogor, or may be Jakarta.

Maxim of quality and its implicature occur when your contribution is untrue or lack evidence. 'B' flouts the maxim of quality since he gives the insincere answer for 'A' question.

6.1.3 Flouting maxim of relevance
Mom: Have you done your homework?

Son: My bicycle is broken mom.

Maxim of relevance and implicature arise when the speaker deviates from the topic being asked and discussed. The answer of the son is not answering the mother's question. The son tries to direct his mother's concern away from the question which he does not like.

6.1.4 Flouting maxim of manner
It's the taste.

Maxims of manner and its implicature occur when the utterances are not brief, ambiguous and obscure. Advertisements often flout the maxim of manner. The statement flouts maxims of manner because it is obscure.

6.2 Violation of maxim
Violation is defined as the unostentatious or 'quite' non-observance of a maxim. A speaker who violates a maxim 'will be liable to mislead' (Grice, 1975; 49)

Violating a maxim is the opposite of flouting a maxim. Violating a maxim prevents or discourages the hearer from seeking implicatures and encourages their taking utterances at face value.

When violating the maxim of quantity, the speaker does not provide the hearer with sufficient information. As for the maxim of quality, the speaker is not honest and provides wrong information. When violating the maxim of manner, he/she may say everything except what the hearer desires to cognize. Concerning the last maxim of relation, here, one can observe that the speaker endeavours to change the discussion subjects or to deflect the hearer.

Dad: 'Did you have volleyball practice today?'

Daughter: 'Yes, I have just arrived.'

The girl (who was her boyfriend at the cinema) violates the maxim of quality as he lies to his father for some reason.

6.3 Infringing the maxims
Maxim's infringement occurs when a speaker fails to observe the maxim, although he/she has no intention of generating an implicature or deceiving.

Usually, infringing results from defective linguistic performance or impaired linguistic performance brought by emotions and states, such as excitement, nervousness etc.

Example:

Japanese customer: Do you have lice?

English seller: What??

The Japanese often pronounce 'r' as 'l' so he says 'lice' instead of 'rice', thus infringing the maxim and causing misunderstandings.

6.4 Opting out of the maxims
A speaker opts out of observing a maxim whenever he/she indicates an unwillingness to cooperate as the maxim requires.

Example:

Reporter: What can you tell us about the state of Mr. Hastings?

Doctor: I'm sorry. Such information is confidential.

The doctor deliberately fails to observe the maxim as he refuses to give the information required due to the doctor patient confidentially.

6.5 Suspending the maxims
Under certain circumstances, there is no exception on any participant that one or several maxims should be observed.

For instance, in the case of communication via e-mail, notes, the quantity maxim is suspended because such means are of functional owing to their very brevity.

7. Limitations of the cooperative principle
The first issue is the different cultures, countries and communities, each having its own way of observing and expressing maxims.

For instance, if you are in Britain and you say: 'We will see…. anyway….. I will give you a call tomorrow.' and you don't call at all, it's considered a violation of the maxim of quality, whereas in other countries, this is a normal way of flouting by implying 'I am not quite interested.'

Another problem represents the overlap that often appears between the maxims.

It can be difficult to identify which maxim acts because sometimes there are two or more operating simultaneously.

8. The role of the maxims in the interpretations of figurative utterances.

Grice claims that irony, metaphor, meiosis and hyperbole can all be analysed in terms of conversational implicatures.

According to Grice, the hearer concludes that the speaker must have been attempting to get across some closely related proposition which does not violate the maxim of truthfulness; in the case of irony, for example, it might be contradictory of the proposition uttered and in the case of metaphor it might be a comparison so that a metaphor is reinterpreted as implicating a simile.

In most of the examples of conversational implicatures that Grice discusses, the speaker of an utterance intends to convey both what is conversationally implicated and what is actually said. In the case of metaphor, irony and so on, the speaker intends to convey only what is conversationally implicated. This analysis seems to us to involve an unjustified extension of the notion of a conversational implicature. The basic rationale behind the notion of conversational implicature is that the hearer posits the existence of an implicature in order to preserve his assumption that the conversational maxims have been observed on the level of what is said. In the case of metaphor, irony and so on, the fact that an implicature has to be substituted for what was literally said ought to confirm the hearer's suspicion that the maxims have been violated, rather than preserving his assumption that they have been obeyed.

In other words, the implicatures carried by irony, metaphor etc. do not seem to be at all of the same type as more standard implicatures; they do not satisfy the same basic definition, and they must be worked out according to rather different principles.

The connection between Grice's conception of irony and metaphor and the traditional rhetorical view that certain utterances have 'figurative' instead of 'literal' meaning should be obvious. In both cases, the interpretation of an utterance is claimed to involve substituting one type of conveyed meaning for another in both cases, the relations between 'literal' and 'figurative' meaning, and the rationale for substituting one for the other remain unclear.

9. Comments on Grice theory

In his article, Ladegaard (2008) suggests that both the semantic and the pragmatic sides of human interaction as well as all the linguistic awareness necessary for the perception and interpretation of meaning in any communicative behavior should be covered in any theory of conversational cooperation.

He argues that Grice only considers the semantic aspect of an utterance and then clarifies it based on pragmatics or context which help us to interpret the speaker's intentions.

Grice's theory is flawed. First, it is too biased towards cooperation. Grice's believes that people aim at communicating successfully and effectively and in trying to solve their problems.

Second, his theory is fundamentally asocial. We can say that he follows Chomsky's idea. (1965: p-4) of positing an 'ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speaker community'.

Therefore, he fails to explain how people actually communicate concerning sophisticated social contexts, for instance, if the speaker aims to be accepted in all social settings in which they find themselves.

Since Grice's theory does not take the social contexts into account, and only considers the speaker-listener interaction in an ideal context, and applies universally, it has little explanatory power.

Grice is interested in finding the logic of conversation and explaining the gap between saying and meaning, saying and implicating conventional and non-conventional meaning. This logic, in his view, is considered a manifestation of rational acts.

His theory is inflexible because it does not consider that human communication, like his nature, is a complicated, diverse and rich phenomenon. Moreover, it disregards the situations where the goal of the interaction is miscommunication. As Sarangi and Slembrouch (1992: p.142) assert:

'A sufficient theory should illustrate how people get the speaker's intention by pointing out the social positioning of the language users and the societal language on the situational context'.

10. Critical Challenge

Grice's cooperative principle has played a historically significant role in pragmatics because this theory separated pragmatics from linguistics. There seems to be a misinterpretation between the everyday notion of 'cooperation', and Grice's technical term.

Thomas (1998b: p.176) argues that proponents of Grice's theory have neglected to explore the ambiguous term 'cooperation' and have not explained how they interpreted and used this concept in their own works.

Thomas (1998a) criticizes Grice's theory for three misinterpretations which are as follows:

'Viewing human nature optimistically, proposing a series of rules for effective conversation and believing that his suggested maxims would always be taken into considerations.

Thomas (1998a, 1998b) claims that although Grice's theory is not satisfactory and suffers from many holes, nothing better has been found to replace it.

Thus many researchers have questioned or rejected the university as well as the feasibility of Grice's cooperative principle. Grice's theory is too biased towards the notion of cooperation in human conversation. But he cannot answer questions about what would happen in situations where human beings prefer employing non-cooperative strategies; or how the cooperative principle accounts for miscommunication.

11. Neo Griceans: (Martinich, Levinson, Geoffrey Leech)
Martinich suggests, instead, a maxim that is 'broad enough to cover the entire spectrum of speech acts' (Martinich 1980, 219). He settles on his authenticity supermaxim B:

B. Be authentic. That is not knowingly participating in a speech act for which the conditions for its successful and non-defective performance are not satisfied. (Martinich 1980, 220)

It seems that most speech acts at least the ones that Martinich lists, such as promising, forgiving, and apologizing, all entail non-natural meanings. Grice clearly had this in mind when he proposed his maxims, so this dramatic change may be unnecessary to the theory.

The second maxim that Martinich modifies is the maxim of relation. He divides this maxim into two submaxims, unlike his modification to the QL- maxim. He calls the first of these two submaxims C1, which is 'make your contribution one that moves the discussion towards its goal.'(Martinich 1980, 220)

This modification does address two of the major criticism levied against Grice.

Martinich refers to the second of the two submaxims of relation as C2. This maxim is as follows:

'Express yourself in terms that will allow your hearer to tie your contribution into the conversational context'. (Martinich, 1980, 221).

This brings light to another alternative to Grecian theory, which is that of Relevance theory.

Continuing with the modification of Neo-Griceans theory, one must mention the theory presented in Levinson's presumptive meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature. It concerns itself with general conversational implicatures (GCIs) rather than particularized Conversational Implicatures.

Thus, Levinson's theory of pragmatics is intentionally incomplete, as he points out when he writes, 'a theory of GCIs has to be supplemented with a theory of PCIs that will have at least as much, and possibly considerably more importance to a general theory of communication.' (Levinson, 2000, 22).

One of the problems Levinson sees in the Griceans theory is that there is no major distinction between generalized and particular implicatures.

However, Levinson claims that Grice was particularly interested in these generalized implicatures; thus, the GCI theory Levinson creates would be of great interest to philosophers with similar interests to Grice's.

This GCI theory is comprised of three heuristics, upon which all of the Gricean general implicatures should rest. This theory should guide the interpretation of ambiguous sentences. The three heuristics are the Q-heuristics (regarding quantity), the I-heuristic (regarding informativeness) and the M heuristics (regarding manner).

One of the main pieces of work Levinson incorporates that Grice clearly fails to provide for explicitly is his guidelines for the resolution of implicature clashes. Where Grice addresses the fact that clashes may occur, he does not explicate which of his principles will have precedence over others. This allows for the problematic situation, where one must decide which maxim is most important in any given situation, and thus, which maxim one ought to follow rather than another.

Levinson sees this problem and addresses it when he writes, 'As sentences become complex, this inference may arise from different clauses, and traffic rules will need to be established.

This theory of generative conversational implicature, though much more cohesively formed, has still been criticized by Davis, as noted, among others. One of the main issues is that, like Grice's theory, Levinson must also incorporate the cooperative principle, which may have been argued is faulty. Davis argues via counter-example that this type of system will ultimately fail.

Geoffrey Leech is another example of a Neo-Griceans. The theory presented by Leech, however, is unique from the other Neo-Griceans. Primarily, he separates himself by explicitly stating his acceptance of a goal-oriented framework for pragmatics. The second difference between Leech and many of the Neo-Griceans is his attempt to unite the Gricean cooperative principle with other principles he presents, namely his Politeness principle and Irony principle. In relation to his acceptance of a goal-oriented framework for pragmatics, many examples support this from his work.

When referring to speech situations, he states, 'I shall often find it useful to talk of a goal or function of an utterance, in preference to talking about its intended meaning, or intention in uttering it'. (Leech, 1983, 13)

This position is reiterated when Leech writes, 'The principles of pragmatics are fundamentally non-conventional, i.e, motivated in terms of conversational goals'. (Leech ,1983, 24).

Leech thinks that pragmatics are non-conventional because leech believes that a theory of motivations, with the additional principles he will add, will provide a general theory of pragmatics.

The extra principles related to the cooperative principle that Leech adds are the Politeness principle negatively, stating 'minimize the expression of impolite beliefs.' to which 'there is a corresponding positive version (maximize the expression of polite beliefs)'. (Leech ,1983, 81). This politeness principle is coupled with an Irony principle that 'is parasitic on the other two'. (Leech ,1983, 142)

Leech explains in the following way:

The [Cooperative principle] and the [Politeness principle] can be seen to be functional by direct reference to their role in promoting effective interpersonal communication, but the [Irony principle]'s function can only be explained in terms of other principles. The [Irony principle] is a 'second-order principle' which enables a speaker to be impolite while seeming polite. It does so by superficially breaking the [Cooperative principle], but ultimately upholding it. [Leech 1983, 142]

However, theever, the primary concern of thiis its insistence that, while pragmatics is goal-oriented, conversation as a whole is not goal-oriented, and a violation of maxims causes conversational implicature. These principles of politeness and irony seem quite adequate; however, his theory of conversation, in general, will not provide the explanatory power for conversations that are not cooperatively based.

12. Conclusions

This article primarily presents criticism of Gricean theory. It first illustrates Gricean theory and its principles, then showss how implicature and how Gricean theory have been dealt with through the years. It also shows how the Neo-Griceans presents a new theory that attempts to solve the problems of the Gricean framework. It shows that implicatures are conversational, but still, maxims play a role in the conversation. This article focuses on Grice theory of cooperative principle which gives importance to how effective the maxims of Grice are in real-life conversation. This paper will be helpful for further research of Gricean Maxim in the conversation for the researcher. This article tries to find out the Validity of Gricean Maxim's applicability in our daily life conversations.

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