



FACOLTÀ DI STUDI UMANISTICI
Lingue e Comunicazione

Lingua Inglese 2

LESSON 6

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The negotiation of meaning



The constant interaction among speakers which ensures that the message is successfully conveyed and understood. Strategies employed when negotiating **meaning** include asking for clarification, rephrasing, or paraphrasing.

**THE GOAL IS TO REACH A MUTUAL
UNDERSTANDING OF MEANING,
A CONVERGENCE**

General understanding between speakers of the same L1

Importance of such negotiation in second language acquisition (SLA)

The negotiation of meaning

(adapted from Widdowson 2007, Ch. 6)



Communication: 2 kinds of knowledge

- **Schematic knowledge** -> People make sense of a text – spoken or written – by relating to the world they live in, i.e. the ideational & interpersonal **schemata** representing the customary and conventional ways which structure people's socio-cultural reality -> providing us with a set of default assumptions

Schemata: *unit of knowledge, stored information*

The negotiation of meaning

(adapted from Widdowson 2007, Ch. 6)



- **Schematic knowledge:** For example, **your schemas for the people around you might include information about their appearance, behaviors, personality, and preferences.** Social schemas include general knowledge about how people behave in certain social situations. Self-schemas are focused on your knowledge about yourself.

Schemata: *unit of knowledge, stored information*

The negotiation of meaning
(adapted from Widdowson 2007, Ch. 6)



Communication: 2 kinds of knowledge

- **Systemic knowledge** -> People also need a knowledge of what is semantically and syntactically encoded in the language system in order for the **schematic knowledge** to be pragmatically activated as appropriate.

The negotiation of meaning (adapted from Widdowson 2007, Ch. 6)



Systemic knowledge refers to the formal properties of language, comprising its syntactic and semantic aspects.

Schematic knowledge, on the other hand, is socially acquired. It is an important part of the adaptation which exists between people's culture-specific cognition and their native language. *In native language learning, the child's schematic knowledge and systemic knowledge develop concurrently.*

Negotiating convergence

- for communication to take place, the two parties should come up with an agreement to co-operate in negotiating a convergence
- A meeting of minds, mutual understanding
- Achieved meaning required by their purpose in communication
- What p1 intends to mean and what p2 interprets p1 as meaning come into correspondence
- Some rules for the co-operative negotiation of meaning(convergence)

Communicative convergence



Communication: a matter of negotiating some type of common agreement between the parties in an interaction

P1 – sender- formulates a message by drawing on systemic and schematic knowledge

P2 – receiver - brings similar knowledge to allow interpretation

There must be some knowledge correspondence between the two in order to have effective communication



- How much communication < measure of correspondence
- **PROBLEMS** < items of lg outside P2 knowledge, ideational framework P2 does not know, interpersonal convention P2 is unfamiliar with
- **Spoken language**: If immediate reciprocal interaction of conversation -> online meaning negotiation, clarifications
- **Written language**: no joint production of text: P1 should anticipate possible problems for P2

**WRITING REMAINS A MORE DIFFICULT ABILITY
TO ACQUIRE THAN READING**



- The parties negotiate a measure of convergence
- Previous shared knowledge between P1 & P2
- The closer, the easier
- Degree regulated by the purpose of communication
- Always partial convergence -> the discourse we derive from texts is always indeterminate and partial

Negotiating convergence



- P1 and P2 have to agree to cooperate in negotiating a convergence, a mutual understanding to achieve meaning, as required by their purpose in communicating.
- Diverse pragmatic meanings to be negotiated as well.
- This convergence of meaning and agreement is a very complex process, only possible to be achieved IF WE ARE PREPARED TO COOPERATE.

Negotiating convergence



BUT WHAT ARE THE ACCEPTED PROCEDURES OR BASIC RULES FOR THIS CO-OPERATED NEGOTIATION OF MEANING?

Paul Grice (1975) proposed 4 principles that people tacitly agree to when they converse (also applied to written texts)

GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES:

1. The quantity maxim
2. the quality maxim
3. The relation maxim
4. the manner relation

The condition is that both parties also recognize the purpose for which they communicate

The quantity maxim: Be informative



- Do not provide more, or less, information than is necessary
- The least effort principle in communication: we use as much lg as we need to make the required contextual connection
- No need to provide info if it is already shared knowledge
- Mistake: underestimation or overestimation of contextual knowledge



- This leads to over-textualization (redundant, pointless, verbose) or under-textualization (obscure)
- Difference on the basis of the genre considered
-> legal texts v. public notices (keep off the grass)
- Application of the principle must depend on context & purpose

“If you are assisting me to mend a car, I expect your contribution to be neither more nor less than is required. If, for example, at a particular stage I need four screws, I expect you to hand me four, rather than two or

- An example of the quantity maxim



Mum: Did you finish your homework?

Mary: I finished algebra

Mum: Well, get on with your homework and finish your English too!!

The child did not say that her English homework is not done, nor did she imply it.

Nevertheless, her mother is entitled to draw this conclusion, based on the combination of what the child actually said and the cooperative principle of quantity

People may choose not to apply the quantity maxim deliberately.



What happens then?

CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES: flouting the maxim (ex. pp. 58-59), disobeying to the quantity principle

On the basis that a speaker and listener are cooperating, and aiming to be relevant, a speaker can imply a meaning implicitly, confident that the listener will understand. Thus a possible conversational implicature of *Are you watching this program?* might well be 'This program bores me. Can we turn the television off?'

(Ref. Also, Indirect speech acts)

CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES



Conversational implicatures are pragmatic inferences: they are **not tied to the particular words and phrases** in an utterance **but arise instead from contextual factors and the understanding that conventions are observed in conversation.**

Paul Herbert Grice observed that in conversations especially **what is meant often goes beyond what is said** and that this additional meaning is inferred and predictable.

CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES: flouting the maxim (ex. pp. 58-59)



A cooperative speaker can intentionally disobey a **maxim**, as long as (s)he or the context provides enough indicators for the hearer to notice it. This is called **flouting** a **maxim** and is used to indirectly convey information.

ARE YOU WATCHING THIS PROGRAM?

- DO YOU HAVE A WATCH?

-YES, I DO

CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES: Violating or Flouting the maxim (ex. pp. 58-59)



When Grice's Maxims are violated, they have been broken surreptitiously (secretly) or covertly (undercover). This means that others involved in the conversation are unaware that a Maxim has been broken.

- The most common maxims that get violated are the **Maxim of Quality** and the **Maxim of Quantity** .
- **Maxim of Quality** is violated when an individual purposely tells a lie.
- **Maxim of quantity** is violated when an individual secretly withholds information that someone else wants to know.

CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES: flouting maxim (ex. pp. 58-59)



Flouting Grice's Maxims is a lot more common than violating maxims and is usually considered more acceptable. When Grice's Maxims are being flouted, it should be apparent to all those concerned.

Being ironic, using metaphors, pretending to mishear someone, and using a tone of voice that does not match the content of what you are saying are all examples of flouting Grice's Maxims.

The Quality Maxim: Be truthful



- Only say things you believe to be true.
- Not say things that you cannot back up with evidence.

“I expect your contributions to be genuine and not spurious. If I need sugar as an ingredient in the cake you are assisting me to make, I do not expect you to hand me salt; if I need a spoon, I do not expect a trick spoon made of rubber.” (Grice, 1975)

Flouting the maxim to add extra meaning + creativity, to create an extra effect such as irony, metaphors and other figurative language.

The Quality Maxim: Be truthful



- FLOUTING THE QUALITY MAXIM:

Zack: 'Wow, this place is awesome. Where do they keep the Archies?'

Sheldon: 'In the bedroom of ten-year-old girls, where they belong.'

In this extract from *The Big Bang Theory*, Sheldon flouts the Maxim of Quality by giving an answer that both people know is not true. Here, the maxim has been flouted for comedic effect.

The Relation/Relevance Maxim: Be relevant



Following the Maxim of relevance keeps conversations on track and helps prevent random conversations that lack continuity. This maxim also helps us to understand utterances in conversations that may not be initially obvious. When abiding by this maxim, you should:

Only say things that are relevant to the conversation.

- Speaker A: ' *Do you think Leo is dating someone new?*'
- Speaker B: ' *Well, he goes to Brighton most weekends.*'

Due to the Maxim of Relevance, we can infer that there is a link between Leo dating someone and him going to Brighton, and speaker B isn't just randomly telling us about Leo's trips to Brighton.

The Relation/Relevance Maxim:

Be relevant



Make what you say relevant to the topic or purpose of the communication. Omit irrelevant information:

«If I am mixing ingredients for a cake, I do not expect to be handed a good book, or even an oven cloth (though this might be an appropriate contribution at a later stage).” (Grice, 1975)

Compliance w this maxim is well represented by **adjacency pairs**, i.e. a pair of utterances in a conversation of which the second one is a conventional response to the first:

- Do you like my new hat?
- Looks very nice

Cooperative mood (p. 61) -> significance over and above apparent meaning: “It’s ten past eight already”

Flouting the Relevance Maxim:



The Maxim of relevance is flouted when someone pretends to mishear what has been said to change the conversation.

Much studied in film scripts and cinema dialogues

Flouting the Manner Maxim:

Be clear



The Maxim of Manner mainly refers to the choice of words you use. For example, when following this maxim, we should avoid using big or overly complex words that we know our listeners won't understand and should try our best to be concise and coherent. When abiding by the Maxim of Manner, you should:

- Avoid obscurity or ambiguity.
- Be brief and orderly.
- Try and be as clear as possible.

The Manner Maxim: Be clear



Be clear, avoid ambiguity and obscurity

The Maxim of Manner is flouted when speakers use many big words and technical jargon that they know their listeners won't understand.

Hymes's feasibility (the degree to which a linguistic form can be decoded): Unintentional violations -> comical consequences:

RED TAPE HOLDS UP NEW BRIDGE

Intentional violations -> to produce ambiguity:

VISITING AUNTS CAN BE BORING...

Note that, unlike the previous maxims, which have to do primarily with *what* is said, the maxims of manner have to do with *how* what is said is said.

Cooperative Principles



Condition: give & take on both sides -> each party has to concede some ground of their own

Individual reality, sense of self, personal territory of identity = territorial imperative v cooperative imperative.

There will always be a need to preserve and protect one's own space.

Not just meaning but human relations as well.

Cooperative Principles



Speaker and Listener (P1&P2) are not just parties seeking an impartial agreement, but individual personalities competing to establish their own position in the area of convergence.

Implicatures project a personal stance, point of view.

Assertion of the self v manipulation of the other – to persuade and control opinion.

Loss of face vs politeness

Critical Discourse Analysis



- Words are tactically effective in regulating the position of self in relation to the other
- Communication means control & persuasion to acceptance
- Writing to get the addressee think or feel in a certain way. The maxim violations can be seen as tactics used for that purpose
- Terms of reference: the prime minister – Tony Blair -> different words w the same referent -> why varying? Quantity maxim (avoiding repetition)



- Why not referential *he*? -> a matter of respect, deferential recognition, familiarity (Mr Blair, Tony) -> quality maxim
- The head of Her Majesty's government -> quantity maxim or maxim of manner (irony, respect)
- WHAT MOTIVATES one use or another? -> diverse grammatical structures & lexical items to express the same concept, attitude, personal evaluation, point of view -> diverse connotations



- What words mean by convention (as reported in a dictionary) v what people mean by them on a particular occasion
- choices are normally motivated by the persuasive purpose
- Widdowson 70-71 – CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis – the use (and abuse) of language for the exercise of socio-political power -> through texts writers build/communicate ideology and social belief



- Discourses are genres, institutionalized modes of thinking and social practice.
- Writers belong to a discourse community, they are socially constructed spokespersons.
- They are analysts investigating into the role played by schematic knowledge, but these schemata refer more to socio-political values and beliefs, to ideational and ideological representations of reality, not only to cultural but also to political constructs of the world
- The task of CDA is to discover traces of ideological bias in texts.