

Grice and his Maxims

WRIT 0590: Module 3.2

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Writing

Writing involves:

- ▶ Content
- ▶ (Efficient) packaging

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Sentence-level packaging:

- (2) Baseline dialogue
 - a. Vlad: How would you describe the quality of the textbook?
 - b. Tatiana (indirectly): Very high. It is printed on the very best paper and beautifully bound.

Writing

Writing involves:

- ▶ Content
- ▶ (Efficient) packaging

Sentence-level packaging:

(3) Baseline dialogue

- Vlad: How would you describe the quality of the textbook?
- Tatiana (indirectly): Very high. It is printed on the very best paper and beautifully bound.
- ~~Tatiana (directly): Quite low, I would say it's quite unremarkable.~~

Deriving the direct meaning in the context is called deriving a **conversational implicature** (what it really suggests).

Efficient interaction

- ▶ According to Grice, conversations take place in a context and must be interpreted in that same context.
- ▶ The only way to keep a discussion moving forward is to follow a set of fundamental communication principles that guarantee **efficient interaction**.
- ▶ These principles are known as Conversational Maxims and they operate under the broader **Cooperative Principle**.

Cooperative Principle

Cooperative Principle:

- ▶ 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 (Grice 1975).
 - ▶ **Maxims of Quantity:**
 - ▶ Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes.
 - ▶ Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
 - ▶ **Maxims of Quality (Reliability):**
 - ▶ Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - ▶ Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
 - ▶ **The Maxim of Relation:**
 - ▶ Be relevant.
 - ▶ **Maxims of Manner:**
 - ▶ Avoid obscurity of expression.
 - ▶ Avoid ambiguity.
 - ▶ Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 - ▶ Be orderly.

Obeying the Cooperative Principle

Many interactions involve cooperative-principle-obeying responses.

- (4) a. Vlad: Why did Kirill skip class yesterday?
b. Masha: He was sick.
c. Vlad (to himself, *implicature*): *Kirill skipped class yesterday because he was sick.*

Calculated under the following assumption: Because of the Cooperative Principle, Masha must have **properly** given the **strongest** statement she believes is both **true** and **relevant**.

Violating the Cooperative Principle

Some interactions involve cooperative-principle-violating responses (the person opts out).

- (5) a. Vlad: Why did Kirill skip class yesterday?
- b. Masha: Purple Ferrari, wow!
- c. Vlad (to himself, *implicature*): ???

Doesn't make sense under the following assumption: Because of the Cooperative Principle, Masha must have **properly** given the **strongest** statement she believes is both **true** and **relevant**.

Flouting a Maxim

Some interactions involve cooperative-principle-flouting responses (the person signals something important).

- (6) a. Vlad: Why did Kirill skip class yesterday?
- b. Masha: Purple Ferrari, wow!
- c. Vlad (to himself, *implicature*): *Masha knows what happened, but doesn't want to reveal the real reason Kirill was absent.*

Calculated under the following assumption: Because of the Cooperative Principle, Masha must have **properly** given the **strongest** statement she believes is both **true** and **relevant**.

Question 1

- (7) a. Vlad: What should I do to get rid of this awful headache?
- b. Masha: Take some medicine.

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→ **Quantity** is violated.

Question 1

- (13) a. Vlad: What should I do to get rid of this awful headache?
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- (14) Dr. Kawashima received his Ph.D. in 1986, his B.A. in 1980, and his M.A. in 1982.

Question 1

- (16) a. Vlad: What should I do to get rid of this awful headache?
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- (17) Dr. Kawashima received his Ph.D. in 1986, his B.A. in 1980, and his M.A. in 1982.

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- (19) a. Vlad: What should I do to get rid of this awful headache?
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- (20) Dr. Kawashima received his Ph.D. in 1986, his B.A. in 1980, and his M.A. in 1982.

→ **Manner** is violated.

- (21) a. Vlad: Have you finished that term paper yet?
b. Masha: It's been raining a lot lately, hasn't it?

Question 1

- (22) a. Vlad: What should I do to get rid of this awful headache?
b. Masha: Take some medicine.

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- (23) Dr. Kawashima received his Ph.D. in 1986, his B.A. in 1980, and his M.A. in 1982.

→ **Manner** is violated.

- (24) a. Vlad: Have you finished that term paper yet?
b. Masha: It's been raining a lot lately, hasn't it?

→ **Relevance** is violated.

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(25) Some of the students arrived. In fact, all of them arrived.

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- (30) Vlad and Masha live in the middle of a desert and Vlad insists on asking about the weather every morning.
- Vlad: What's the weather like?
 - Masha: Oh, today it's snowing, as usual.

Question 1

- (31) Some of the students arrived. In fact, all of them arrived.
→ **Quantity, Manner** is violated.
- (32) Vlad and Masha live in the middle of a desert and Vlad insists on asking about the weather every morning.
- Vlad: What's the weather like?
 - Masha: Oh, today it's snowing, as usual.
- **Quality** is violated.

Question 2

- (33)
- a. Lawyer: Do you have any bank accounts in Swiss banks, Mr. Bronfman?
 - b. Bronfman: No, sir.
 - c. Lawyer: Have you ever?
 - d. Bronfman: The company had an account there for about six months, in Zurich.

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→ Line of Defense: **Quantity** or **Relation** was violated.

Question 3

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Gricean Letters of Recommendation:

(37) Dear X:

I am delighted to recommend Tanya Kolomoyets for a position in your department. Tanya was my student for three years, and I can confirm that her handwriting is pristine and that she never once submitted homework late or showed up late to class. She is a real model of punctuality.

Sincerely, Y

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→ Flouting **Quantity** to signal that the student is not good enough.

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→ Flouting **Relation** to signal that the student is not good enough.

Question 4

- (41) a. Vlad: I ate most of the pizza.
- b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*): *He didn't eat all of the pizza.*

¹Note that formally speaking if it's true he ate all of the pizza it's also true he ate most of the pizza.

Question 4

- (42) a. Vlad: I ate most of the pizza.
b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*): *He didn't eat all of the pizza.*

► **Relation** is trivially followed.

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Question 4

- (43) a. Vlad: I ate most of the pizza.
b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*): *He didn't eat all of the pizza.*

- ▶ **Relation** is trivially followed.
- ▶ **Quality** is trivially followed.¹

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Question 4

- (44) a. Vlad: I ate most of the pizza.
b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*): *He didn't eat all of the pizza.*

- ▶ **Relation** is trivially followed.
- ▶ **Quality** is trivially followed.¹
- ▶ **Quantity** is at play here: making the strongest statement.
- ▶ How about **Manner**?

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Question 5

- (45) a. Vlad: Kirill didn't read all of the books.
b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*):
-

Possible readings:

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- (46) a. Vlad: Kirill didn't read all of the books.
b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*):
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Possible readings:

- ▶ Existential: There exists a book that Kirill didn't read.

Question 5

- (47) a. Vlad: Kirill didn't read all of the books.
b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*):
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Possible readings:

- ▶ Existential: There exists a book that Kirill didn't read.
- ▶ Universal: For each book, it is not true that Kirill read it.

Question 5

- (48) a. Vlad: Kirill didn't read all of the books.
b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*):
-

Possible readings:

- ▶ Existential: There exists a book that Kirill didn't read.
- ▶ Universal: For each book, it is not true that Kirill read it.

Implicature:

Question 5

- (49) a. Vlad: Kirill didn't read all of the books.
b. Masha (to herself, *implicature*):
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Possible readings:

- ▶ Existential: There exists a book that Kirill didn't read.
- ▶ Universal: For each book, it is not true that Kirill read it.

Implicature:

- ▶ The **existential** reading is implicated conversationally.
 - ▶ Quantity (think of this as the availability of alternatives to choose from)

Question 6

Maxims of Manner:

- ▶ Avoid obscurity of expression.
- ▶ Avoid ambiguity.
- ▶ Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- ▶ Be orderly.

Problems:

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Problems:

- ▶ Short utterances tend to be ambiguous, and avoiding ambiguities often requires long sentences.
- ▶ Ambiguity is a type of obscurity
- ▶ “avoid unnecessary prolixity” violates “be brief”
- ▶ Generally, this is the longest maxim.

Humor and Comedy

Flouting maxims is a standard way to derive sarcasm, humor, comedy, etc.

(50) The assignment took like 10,000 hours.

(51) A newspaper review of a newly opened play says that, in the third act, “Soap opera star Rachel Singer produced a series of sounds corresponding closely to the score of an aria from Rigoletto.”

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Flouting maxims is a standard way to derive sarcasm, humor, comedy, etc.

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(53) A newspaper review of a newly opened play says that, in the third act, “Soap opera star Rachel Singer produced a series of sounds corresponding closely to the score of an aria from Rigoletto.”

Question:

- ▶ Create two short, funny dialogues where a response humorously flouts or violates a conversational maxim.