-13-

Co-operative Principle

In a normal conversation, a speaker tries to:

1- Give relatively <u>specific answers</u> to questions.
2- Give <u>new information</u> that the hearer doesn't already know.
3- Give information that is <u>relevant</u> to the topic of conversation.
4- Give information in a way that is <u>easy to understand</u>.
5- <u>Avoid ambiguity</u>, 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.

- Being co-operative in conversation obviously involves <u>more than simply telling the truth</u>, 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 <u>seem</u> 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 <u>you assume that I would make a **relevant** reply</u> 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**.
- The hearer reaches the conclusion that Mary is John's daughter <u>only if</u> it can be assumed that the <u>speaker is being helpful</u>.
- 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.)

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