

# Implicatures

## **Definition**

To start with, during our previous lesson (Cooperative principle and Grice maxims), we have seen that hedges are good indications that the speakers are not only aware of the maxims, but that they want to show that they are trying to preserve them. However, there are some circumstances where speakers may not follow the expectations of the cooperative principle. For instance, in court-room and classroom witnesses and students are often called upon to tell people things which are already well-known to those people, thereby violating the QUANTITY maxim. another example is what can happen in any conversation when the speaker opt out of the maxim expectations by using expressions like "no comment" or "my lips are sealed"... etc. in response to a question. Thus, sometimes in naturally occurring sentences speakers violate some maxims in order to imply or intend to say something else by their utterances; this last is what we can call an implicature.

Lyons (1977) points out that an implicature is not part of the meaning of the expression; it is rather dependent on the prior knowledge of that meaning. Another point is that an implicature is not carried by what is said in content; it is rather carried by the saying of it or by the entire speech act. That is why the list of possible implicatures of an utterance is always open (Malmkjar, 1998). Grice (1967) defines implicature as the way hearers find out or discover the complete meaning of what speakers imply in their utterances. The following utterance is an example of what Grice wants to say about implicature.

Have you got any change on you?

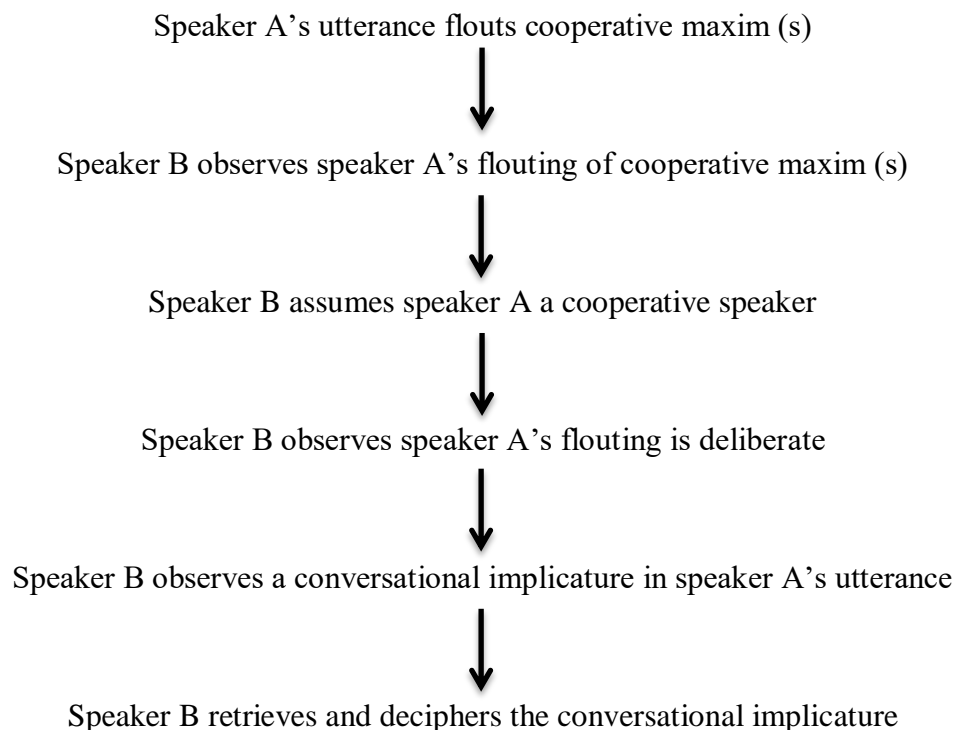
The speaker's utterance conveys more than what is said in the utterance. The speaker wants the hearer to understand the meaning: can you lend me some money? I don't have much on me. This is one possible implicature for what the speaker says in case this utterance occurs during a conversation between two friends in a shopping mall when the speaker runs out of money while shopping. In this utterance, the maxim of quantity is violated by the speaker in order to generate an implicature. As it was mentioned previously, there are several possible implicatures for one utterance (Grice, 1967).

### Conversational and Conventional Implicature

A distinction has been made between conversational and conventional implicatures (Grice, 1975). Conventional implicatures are generated by the meaning of certain particles like 'but' or 'therefore'. Yule makes almost the same distinction. In contrast to all the conversational implicatures discussed so far, conventional implicatures are not based on the cooperative principle or the maxims. They do not have to occur in conversations, and they do not depend on special contexts for their interpretation. Not unlike lexical presuppositions, conventional implicatures are associated with specific words and result in additional conveyed meanings when those words are used (Yule, 1996: 45). Put differently, conventional implicatures are different from conversational ones in ways that conventional implicatures are not in need to occur in a specific conversation or a dialogue; they may occur in texts or articles in which they are not very related to the context of the article or the text. That is, conventional implicatures do not depend always on the context of the conversation. However Conversational implicature depends always on the context of the text in which it is used. There are specific words in English that are associated with conventional implicatures. These words or expressions implicate by themselves, most of the time not in conversations. For instance, the word 'last' when it is used in a simple

sentence such as the last page of a book, it means the ultimate item in a sequence. However, when the same word is used in a conversation such as last winter, it implies something which happened before the time of speaking (Mey, 1993).

Interestingly, Grice's name is usually related to the discussion of conventional implicature, but it was originally Frege's (1982) idea. They both claim that the meaning of some conjunctions like 'but' and 'still' makes the implication of sentences without bearing on their truth or falsity. An example to illustrate that is 'she is poor but honest'. According to Grice the contrast between being poor and being honest occurs due to the presence of the conjunction but implies the distinction between these two words (Bach, 1999).



**Observance and Retrieval of Conversational Implicature (Wa- Kai, 2007:52)**

In the case where the speaker violates a cooperative maxim in order to produce a conversational implicature, the hearer should be able to infer the implicature. The hearer has to follow a certain procedure to infer the speaker's implicature; this procedure can be summarized in five steps which are explained in the figure above.

**Practice:**

Consider the following examples and identify which type of implicature is performed in each example. Provide your answer with the necessary explanation

A: I hope you brought the bread and the cheese?

B: Ah, i brought the bread

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A: Do you like ice-cream?

B: Is the pope Catholic?

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A: Whao! Has your boss gone crazy?

B: Let's go get some coffee

## **Speech Acts and Events**

### **Speech Acts Theory**

Many linguists examined and analysed meaning in terms of the relationship between the linguistic rules, the context in which an interaction takes place, and the speaker's intention. The philosopher of language Austin made the most concrete step towards the explanation of the relationship between saying and doing by introducing the concept of speech acts which was developed later by his student Searle. Thus, speech act theory was first initiated by Austin and developed by Searle. Austin's lecture series in 1955 later published in the book *How to Do Things with Words*, proposes that people do things with words. According to him, actions such as apologizing, complaining, promising, complimenting, requesting ... etc. can be performed via utterances. Austin sees that a speech act is an act performed by a speaker when producing an utterance in order to communicate with hearers. Communication is a series of communicative acts or speech acts. Speech acts are considered the minimum functional unit in communication such as giving commands, asking questions, and making statements (Austin, 1962).

Austin (1962), claims that utterances are equivalent to actions. Uttering a sentence is performing an action. "Actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts and, in English, are commonly given more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise or request" (Yule, 1996: 47). Crystal (1993) proposes that speech acts are actions performed by means of language and defined with reference to the intention of a speaker at the moment of speaking and the effects it has on a listener. That is, a speech act represents an act that the speaker performs when uttering an utterance which serves a function in communication. Since speech acts allow people to interact in real life situations, uttering a speech

act requires not only the knowledge of a language but also the appropriate use of that language within a given culture.

## **Speech Acts Dimensions**

Austin (1962) identifies three distinct levels of action beyond the act of utterance itself. When someone says something, s/he performs three acts simultaneously: a locutionary act, an illocutionary act, and a perlocutionary act. According to Austin, (1962), the locutionary act is the act of saying something. Following the same line of thought, Yule, (1996) argues that the locutionary act is the first and the basic act of an utterance; it is the production of meaningful linguistic expressions. Yet, Yule (1996) sees that people generally do not just produce well-formed sentences that are grammatically correct with no purpose. People utter sentences with a function and intention; this is the second level of speech acts called the illocutionary act. The illocutionary act is what one does in saying something. At this level, the speaker expresses his/her intentions according to a number of conventions shared in his speech community (Chapman and Routledge, 1999). To know what is meant by the illocutionary act a distinction should be made between two aspects, what is said and what is meant.

It's getting late. (A husband says to his wife at a night party).

In the case of uttering or producing the utterance itself, the speaker performs a locutionary act. It is the simple reference or statement at the lateness of hour. The intention of the husband is a suggestion of a proposal of it's late so let's go home, which is here the illocutionary act. When the wife understands her husband's intention and his intended meaning from saying it's late, and accepts to leave, in this case the perlocutionary act is performed. Interestingly, a perlocutionary act refers to the effects a speaker's utterance has on hearers or readers. After performing the

locutionary and illocutionary acts, the utterance has a third dimension (the perlocutionary act) which includes the results of the speaker's utterance on the hearer/reader.

**Practice:**

Identify the speech act dimensions performed in each utterance

1. Why don't you spend less time watching TV?

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2. My sister is getting married in August

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3. This bus won't move until you boys move in out of the doorway.

**N.B.** utterances are not related, each utterance is taken from a different conversation

**Direct and Indirect Illocutionary Acts**

The relationship between the surface form of an utterance and its intended meaning is not always straightforward. Put differently, utterances are used to affect the reader in a way or another; some convey the information directly, others convey the message in an indirect way. Searle (1979) claims that a speaker can communicate to the hearer more than he actually says. On the basis of shared background knowledge, the hearer can infer what the speaker means. Moreover, Searle (1979) names the indirect illocutionary act as a primary illocutionary act and the direct one as a secondary illocutionary act. "Whenever there is a direct relationship between a structure and a function we have a direct speech act. Whenever there is an indirect relation between the structure and a function, we have an indirect speech act" (Yule, 1996: 54-55). To

illustrate this, Yule (1996) adds that when a declarative utterance is used to make a statement, it means there is a direct speech act since there is a direct relationship between the structure and function of this utterance, (the structure is declarative; its function is to make a statement). However, when the same declarative utterance is used to make a request, the relationship between the function and the structure of the utterance becomes indirect, which means it is an indirect speech act. Take the following example:

It's cold outside.

This declarative statement performs two illocutionary acts, a direct and an indirect one. If the hearer considers the utterance as a statement and understands it as a description of the weather in that place, it means that the hearer understands the direct act or meaning of this utterance. If the hearer considers this utterance as a request to close the door or the window, for example, the hearer infers the indirect meaning of the utterance (Yule, 1996).

## **Speech Events and Speech Situations**

The speaker usually expects that the listener or hearer can easily recognize her/his communicative intention through speech acts. The hearer can do that only with the help of certain circumstances surrounding the utterance, these circumstances, according to Yule (1996), are called speech events. A speech situation is the context of language use such as ceremonies, fights, classrooms, parties, etc. it is associated with speech but it is not governed by rules of speaking; however, a speech event is governed by rules of speaking and it takes place within a speech situation. Thus, speech events may be a conversation that consists of smaller units of speech acts. “A speech event is an activity in which participants interact via language in some conventional way to arrive at some outcome” (Yule, 1996:57).



A: What time is it, please?

B: It is 1 o'clock

A: Thanks

This conversation contains a speech situation which is the bus station, a speech event which is asking the time, and speech acts which are the acts of requesting, thanking and responding.