



FACOLTÀ DI STUDI UMANISTICI
Lingue e Comunicazione

Lingua Inglese 2

LESSON 8

Prof.ssa Luisanna Fodde

a.a. 2020-2021





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 -> provides us w a set of default assumptions

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 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.*

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
- Issues < 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
- P2 “free of the need to take part in the co-construction of conversation”

WRITING 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 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 six.” (Grice, 1975)



Application must depend on context & purpose.

People may choose not to apply it 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: 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..

The quality maxim: Be truthful



Be truthful and do not say things you know to be false

Do not say that for which you lack 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.

Conventional appropriateness & diverse genres (obituary)

The relation 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..

The manner maxim: Be clear



Be clear, avoid ambiguity and obscurity

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.

These maxims are to be considered as ground rules to negotiate some degree of agreed convergence



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.



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.