

*Communication as a Pragmatic Action:
Evidence from Grice's Cooperative Principle*

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Abstrait

In very general terms, the understanding of how people communicate effectively has increased since pragmatics has become part of linguistics. Grice (1975) is one of those who has been interested in identifying the reasons behind successful conversations. He assumes that when we communicate we assume, without realising it, that we, and the people we are talking to, will be conversationally cooperative - we will cooperate to achieve mutual conversational ends. This conversational cooperation even works when we are not being cooperative socially. So, for example, we can be arguing with one another angrily and yet we will still cooperate quite a lot conversationally to achieve the argument.

These principles are the cooperative principle and the four maxims. They are used to understand how people communicate and to see why and when they are uncooperative. He argues that a generated implicature is one result of non observances of the cooperative principle and the four maxims. Therefore, this chapter deals with those notions in detail, and provides concrete examples of how people manage their conversations in relation to them.

The aim of the present work is twofold:

- To review Grice (1975) principles including the cooperative principle and the four maxims
- To apply the above parameters on the Algerian context, to gauge its plausibility and feasibility.

Key words:

Communication, cooperative principle, maxims, conversation, Algeria, culture.

ملخص

ازداد فهم كيف يمكن للناس التواصل بشكل فعال، بصورة عامة، منذ أن أصبح الاهتمام ببراهماتية اللغة. جريس (1975) هو واحد من أولئك الذين كانوا مهتمين بتحديد الأسباب الكامنة وراء الحادثات الناجحة. فقد ذكر أنه يفترض أننا عندما نتحدث، نفترض، دون إدراك ذلك، أننا، والأشخاص الذين نتحدث معهم، سنكون متفاعلتين في الحادثة، وسنتعاون لتحقيق غايات التخاطب المتبادلة. هذا التواصل يتحقق حتى عندما نكون غير متواصلتين اجتماعياً. لذلك، على سبيل المثال، يمكننا أن نتجادل مع بعضنا البعض بغضب ولكننا سوف نبقى متواصلتين بشكل كبير في الحادثة لتحقيق غاية النقاش.

من المبادئ التي اعتمدها جريس، في هذا الإطار، مبدأ التعاون بثوابته الأربعة. يتم استخدام هذه المبدأ لفهم كيفية التواصل بين الناس، ومعرفة لماذا ومتى يكون الناس غير متواصلتين. ويذكر أن الإخفاق الذي يمكن أن يحصل، سيكون نتيجة لعدم ملاحظة مبدأ التواصل بثوابته الأربعة. وبالتالي، فإن هذا المقال يتناول هذه المفاهيم بالتفصيل مع إيراد أمثلة ملموسة عن كيفية إدارة الناس أحاديثهم اليومية.

والهدف من هذا العمل يتحدد في شقتين:

- الإشارة إلى مراجعة جريس (1975) لمبادئه بما في ذلك مبدأ التواصل بثوابته الأربعة.
- بغية تطبيق المعايير المذكورة أعلاه في السياق الجزائري لقياس مدى المعقولية والجدوى.

1-Introduction:

In every society, people converse, chat, and gossip about the events of the day and the personalities of the community. They give and receive orders, chide and scold, argue, make and change plans, conspire, cajole, and otherwise organize both their actions and social worlds. We pass our time, in grand measure, talking; as a result, we largely negotiate, maintain, and transform our social relations through talk. To learn to speak the language of a community is thus not simply a methodological tool which allows a socio-linguist to extract "data" (through, perhaps, the semantic analysis of words or phrases); it is the basic technique for understanding a social life, since

language is itself a central element in the *production* of social life.

There are inevitable constraints--of power and economy, of control of production and access to resources--that circumscribe and configure the details of social life, where and with whom people talk, eat, work, joke, and love. But our contact with these material preconditions is ordinarily mediated by the interactions we have, face to face, with one another. At this level, abstract “social organization” comes to life as sociability, and “the social relations of production” are played out in the daily interpersonal interactions between friends, workmates, and neighbors. Whenever we talk, we use forms of language which have themselves been produced and molded by the forces of history; we confront one another in circumstances constrained by material facts, and with motives which take their form from such facts. Thus, speech responds to the same factors which influence other aspects of social life.

While speaking , we use the norms of verbal interaction ; including the choice of topic, setting , interlocutor , factors that Fishman (1971) summarized in his famous formulation :

‘Who Speaks What Language and to Whom?’

Interestingly enough, Carol Myers-Scotton(1993) described her Markedness model in the book *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa* (1993), in which each language in a multilingual community is associated with particular social roles, which she calls rights-and-obligations (RO) sets . By speaking a particular language, a participant signals her understanding of the current situation, and particularly her relevant role within the context. By using more than one language, speakers may initiate negotiation over relevant social roles. Myers-Scotton (1993) assumes that speakers must share, at least to some extent, an understanding of the social meanings of each available code. If no such norms existed, interlocutors would have no basis for understanding the significance of particular code choices. This model is inspired from Grice’s Principles of conversation.

Hence, the purpose of the present paper is two fold: first, to discuss the sociolinguistic norms of speech conversation using Grice’s Cooperative Principle, which constitutes the basis of pioneer studies in discourse analysis.

And, also, to apply such principle within the Algerian speech community, in order to test their validity.

2- Grice and the Study of Conversation:

The study of natural conversation has generated wide-ranging interest, among philosophers as well as linguists, sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, at least since the mid 1960s when H. Paul Grice, building on notions of “meaning” enunciated some ten years before (Grice, 1975), proposed a series of “cooperative maxims”: principle which, according to Grice, can be discerned in well-formed conversation against a general background of rational cooperation (Grice 1975, Grice 1978). Later in the same decade, sociologically oriented students of natural conversation found in the details of conversational sequencing a method for studying social action at its most microscopic (see Sacks 1992, and Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974).

Grice’s conversational maxims were seen to have a special importance for logic and semantics, since they appear to represent an extension of classical principles of deduction and inference (see Levinson 1983). That is, the maxims permit inferences and interpretations, based on what is said in a conversational turn, which nonetheless cannot be derived solely or directly from the literal meanings of the enunciated words or phrases. Such an extension of inferential processes by what Grice called *implicatures* follows naturally from the fact that words and phrases do not occur in a vacuum but instead form part of both a sequence of linguistic elements and a socially grounded context of action, a complex of goals and intentions within a matrix of human interrelationships. Neo-Gricean theories propose that certain facts about language meaning and use follow from general principles of rationality, information processing, and cooperative reasoning, and thus need not be accounted for at the level of grammar and lexicon .

Grice’s principle has thus been applied to the analysis of lexical structure (e.g., Horn 1984), to such syntactic phenomena as pronominal binding and control (Levinson 1987), to verbal politeness (Brown and Levinson 1986[1978]), metaphor (Levinson 1983), irony and speech acts, and indeed to a general cognitive theory of communication in general (Sperber and Wilson

1986).

The consequences of Grice's insights for a conversational "logic," a universal pragmatics, and for the radical pruning of semantics and syntax have been widely explored.

Grice (1967) argued that purposeful language use is governed by what he called the Cooperative Principle: (64) The Cooperative Principle (CP) (Grice 1967: 26):

"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 characterizes this principle as a way of spelling out what it means to act rationally while engaged in purposeful language use. And in as much as we assume that language communities do not differ in whether or not they are rational, one expects that the CP is universal. Grice further specified some families of maxims attendant to the CP that have been used extensively in pragmatic research since then: Quality, Quantity, Relevance, and Manner. Again, since these are simply more specific ways of spelling out what it means to be rational in one's language use, we expect the maxims to be universal. Grice's Cooperative Principle and its attendant four maxims can be presented as follow:

Maxim of Quantity:

1. Make your contribution to the conversation as informative as necessary.
2. Do not make your contribution to the conversation more informative than necessary.

Maxim of Quality:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relevance:

Be relevant (i.e., say things related to the current topic of the conversation).

Maxim of Manner:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary wordiness).
4. Be orderly.

As the maxims stand, there may be an overlap, as regards the length of what one says, between the maxims of quantity and manner; this overlap can be explained (partially if not entirely) by thinking of the maxim of quantity (artificial though this approach may be) in terms of units of information. In other words, if the listener needs, let us say, five units of information from the speaker, but gets less, or more than the expected number, then the speaker is breaking the maxim of quantity. However, if the speaker gives the five required units of information, but is either too curt or long-winded in conveying them to the listener, then the maxim of manner is broken. The dividing line however, may be rather thin or unclear, and there are times when we may say that both the maxims of quantity and quality are broken by the same factors. Grice's (1975) conversational implicature is an attempt to explain successful communication where there is no regular convention linking an utterance with the intention of the speaker, asking what the underlying rational process is whereby the speaker selects an utterance to convey an implicit meaning (indirect speech act) and also asking how the speaker ensures that the addressee is able to understand this meaning. In Grice's account, as in Searle's speech act theory, basic communicative success is presupposed, the question is how interlocutors go beyond the literal, speaker-independent meaning of an utterance. For Grice, the answer lies in interlocutor significantly, these maxims are not to be thought of as determining interlocutors' actions. Rather, they are 'norms' used in interpretation, which allow the speaker to opt out of following them.

In this case the addressee, instead of ignoring the speaker's utterance, may notice the significance of the transgression and use the co-operative principle to infer the speaker's intended meaning.

When the speaker's intended meaning goes beyond the literal mea-

ning of the sentence, an implicature is said to be generated. Grice comments that speakers frequently violate, exploit or even blatantly flout the maxims, listing several types: covert violation (lies), where the speaker intends the addressee to assume that the co-operative principle still holds; overt suspension (jokes, story-telling); overt violations (irony, metaphor) where the hearer doesn't follow the maxim of truthfulness, but is still assumed to be following the supermaxim of quality. So, when faced by apparent violations, the hearer assumes that the speaker is still obeying Grice's CP at a deeper level, enabling the hearer to comprehend the speaker's intention.

Grice's CP is used by Levinson (1983) to argue against conceiving of communication as being reducible to a set of conventions, since the CP shows that whenever there is an expectation Grice's cooperative principle is a principle of conversation, claiming that participants expect that each will make a "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: 45). The idea of Grice's maxims is to make it clear to language users what good communication practice is and if we all make an effort to follow them we can become more effective in talking to each other. The maxims are not rules but rather conventions or right things to do.

3-Grice's Maxims within the Algerian Context:

What can the speaker do with regard to the maxims?

In the first place, he can straightforwardly observe the maxims. Second, he can violate a maxim; he may breach the first submaxim of Quality by telling a deliberate lie, or he can opt out of a maxim. It should be pointed that Grice's maxims depict a rosy, idealised and simplified language use, whereas reality is a much more complex and multi-dimensional.

In actual conversations, telling the whole truth might be seen as impolite or somehow inappropriate. There also tend to be cross-cultural differences, not always following a universal principle. It seems that some cultures/languages (the Arab culture for instance) prescript their speakers quite frequently to express things in an indirect manner, which means they are unable to follow Grice's maxims. In such cases, there is a clash between Grice's maxims and the pragmatic rules of conversation, which are culturally

sensitive.

For example, when being offered a second cup of coffee / a piece of cake, a typical Arab (Algerian for instance) would habitually say no the first time while expecting the offer would be made at least twice. This is a kind of phatic language communication, i.e. saying no and not really meaning 'no'. In this sort of situation, if someone doesn't play by the cultural norm, then he would sound odd.

A number of works have been done regarding Grice's framework, such as Kasher (1976, 1982, 1986, 1987) and Keenan (1976). It has been argued that Grice's maxims are not held by speakers of various cultures. For example, Keenan (1976) stated that people in Madagascar tend not to give information when required, which intentionally and systematically violate Grice's Quantity Maxim. Keenan questioned the feasibility that the maxims can apply universally and independently of culture, style and genre.

Accordingly, Keenan (1974) claims that speakers of Malagasy (spoken on Madagascar) do not obey the Quantity maxim: Interlocutors regularly violate this maxim. They regularly provide less information than is required by their conversational partner, even though they have access to the necessary information. If A asks B 'Where is your mother?' and B responds 'She is either in the house or at the market', B's utterance is not usually taken to imply that B is unable to provide more specific information needed by the hearer. The implicature is not made, because the expectation that speakers will satisfy informational needs is not a basic norm. (Keenan 1974: 258) Keenan explains that there are two reasons for this regular withholding of extra information:

(i) "New information is a rare commodity. . . . Information that is not already available to the public is highly sought after. If one manages to gain access to new information, one is reluctant to reveal it. As long as it is known that one has that information and others do not have it, one has some prestige [I]nterlocutors are generally aware of the reluctance to give up requested information. They expect the response of the addressee to be less than satisfactory. Normally, if the information requested is not immediately provided, the two interlocutors enter into a series of exchanges whereby the one tries to

eke out the new information from the other.” (ii) “Individuals regularly avoid making explicit statements about beliefs and activities. They do not want to be responsible for the information communicated.”

4-Conclusion:

So far Grice’s maxims are concerned , a number of questions have been raised, including the source of the cooperative principle and maxims (e.g. whether they are culturally specific or universal), definition of terminologies (e.g. vagueness of ‘relevance’) and adequate explanation of comprehension procedure (e.g. exactly how hearers identify conversational implicatures). Hence, further directions are needed in order to conceive a more comprehensive pragmatic model of speech norms in a conversation.

All in all, it seems that language use is just like driving a car; everyone on the road must follow road rules. If someone doesn’t follow the rules, then car accidents may happen. However, the problem here is what rules are truly appropriate to govern our language use. The rules for language use are not as clear-cut as road rules. Grice’s conversational maxims state what should be said and how it should be said; however, without cultural considerations, they would always remain as idealized conventions. While conversational maxims like Grice’s certainly help, it would be mistaken to think that his maxims would be able to accommodate all the communicative devices people use in reality.

Algeria, like in any speech community has its own verbal rules based on religious, historical and traditional beliefs which typify this society, and make it a distinct and fertile field for deeper anthropological, sociolinguistic and cultural studies.

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