CHAPTER 17

Implicatures

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CHAPTER 17

Implicatures

17.1 Conversational implicatures

We have already encountered conversational implicatures in Chapter 2, where they were briefly characterized as propositions or assumptions not encoded, completely or incompletely, in what is actually said. Recall the following example:

(1) A: Am I in time for supper?
 B: I've cleared the table.

Here it is obviously B's intention to convey the proposition that A is too late for supper, but this has to be worked out by the hearer. In this chapter we take a closer look at conversational implicatures and proposals for explaining how they arise. We begin by considering how they might be defined.

17.1.1 How to recognize conversational implicatures

The following are amongst the criteria which have been proposed to distinguish conversational implicatures from other semantic/pragmatic phenomena with which they might be confused. These criteria are not entirely logically independent from one another.

17.1.1.1 Context dependence

An expression with a single meaning (i.e. expressing the same proposition) can give rise to different conversational implicatures in different contexts.

(2) A: Have you cleared the table and washed the dishes?
 B: I've cleared the table.

(3) A: Am I in time for supper?
 B: I've cleared the table.

The purpose of this criterion is to distinguish conversational implicatures from, on the one hand, entailments, and on the other hand, what have been called **conventional implicatures.** Take entailments first. There is no context in which (4) does not entail (5):

(4) John killed the wasp.
(5) The wasp died.

According to the criterion (of context dependence), therefore, (5) is not a conversational implicature of (4). *Conventional implicatures* is the name given by some to non-truth-conditional aspects of meaning which are conventionally attached to particular linguistic forms. For instance, the meaning which distinguishes *but* from *and* is of this nature, as is also the difference between *I haven't cleared the table* and *I haven't cleared the table yet,* and between JbAw *killed the wasp* and *It was John who killed the wasp.* These differences are part of the meaning of certain linguistic forms, and if these forms are used without the intention of carrying the meaning, then they are being misused.

17.1.1.2 Defeasibility/cancellability

Conversational implicatures can be cancelled by additional material without contradiction or anomaly.

(6) A: Did the Minister attend the meeting and sign the agreement?
B(i): The Minister attended the meeting.
B(2): The Minister attended the meeting; a statement will be issued later with regard to the agreement.

B's first answer as it stands creates quite a strong presumption that the Minister did not sign the agreement. However, the additional material in B(2) suppresses the implicature: we are no longer entitled, or invited, to conclude that the agreement was not signed. In the case of a conventional implicature, subsequent inconsistent material simply gives rise to anomaly:

(7) ?John hasn't arrived yet: I know for a fact he's not coming.

Although defeasibility or cancellability is one of the standard criteria for CI, it is none the less questionable. The reason is that adding material changes the context: there is no way of suppressing the implicature without doing this. In other words, this criterion adds nothing that is not covered by the criterion of context dependence.

17.1.1.3 Non-detachability

The same propositional content in the same context will always give rise to the same conversational implicature, in whatever form it is expressed (that is to say, the implicature is tied to meaning, and not to form):

(8) A: Have you cleared the table and washed the dishes?
B: I've taken all the things off the table.

This is not the case with conventional implicatures. In the following, (9) implicates (10), but (11), which is usually considered to be propositionally identical with (9), does not implicate (10). In other words, the implicature (10) is tied to the lexical item *manage'.*

(9) John didn't manage to walk as far as the crossroads.
(10) John attempted to walk as far as the crossroads.
(11) John didn't walk as far as the crossroads.

17.1.1.4 Calculability

A conversational implicature must be calculable, using statable general principles, on the basis of conventional meaning together with contextual information.

The nature of the calculation will be discussed below. This criterion serves to distinguish conversational implicatures from special arrangements whereby, for instance, two people agree (arbitrarily) that whenever one of them says X, they actually mean Y. For instance, a husband and wife might fix it between them that if one of them says *Have you seen anything of Clive recently?* it will mean "Let's leave in fifteen minutes". This will not be calculable, by general principles, from the conventional meaning of the utterance together with contextual information.

17.1.2 Implicatures, 'saying', and contradictability

While speakers are to a certain extent held responsible for their implicatures, the degree of responsibility is generally less than for the content of explicature. There seems to be a difference between telling an outright lie, and conveying a misleading implicature. Consider the following again:

(12) A: Has John cleared the table and washed the dishes?
B: He's cleared the table.

Suppose that (a) A and B both know that John has washed the dishes, and (b) A is fairly certain that B knows (that is to say, we can rule out the implicature that B actually does not know whether John has washed the dishes or not). Suppose, further, that A is subjecting B to some sort of test. Under these circumstances, none of the following responses on the part of A would be appropriate:

(13) Yes, he did. (i.e. did wash the dishes)
(14) You said John hadn't washed the dishes.
(15) That's a lie—John did wash the dishes.

Sentence (13) shows that an implicature cannot be the intended source for the recovery of ellipted material, as can the same information expressed explicitly:

(16) B: He has cleared the table, but he hasn't washed the dishes.
A: Yes, he has.

Sentence (14) shows that B cannot be held to have ***said*** that John hadn't washed the dishes, but it would be appropriate to say *You implied that John hadn't washed the dishes*. Sentence (15) shows that B cannot be held to have told a lie. It seems that the most B can be accused of is being misleading. Notice, however, that unexpressed parts of explicatures can constitute lying:

(17) A: What time is the train for London?
B: 2.30.

Suppose that B knew the train was at 2.15 and wanted A to miss it. All the following are then possible retorts:

(18) No, it isn't.
(19) You said it was at 2.30.
(20) You told a lie.

even though, in one sense, B did not actually *say* that the train for London was at 2.30.

This criterion can be adapted to distinguish implicated commands and questions, too. The following illustrates how it might work for commands. Suppose that B receives a cheque for £200, and A issues the following command:

(21) Put it into the bank.

In normal circumstances, this can be taken to implicate:

(22) (Put it into the bank and) leave it there.

Suppose, now, that B puts the cheque into the bank, but then immediately withdraws the money from the cash-dispensing machine. The following would seem to be the case:

(i) A did not actually TELL B to put the money into the bank and leave it.
(ii) B has not strictly disobeyed A.

17.1.3 The relation of conversational implicatures to propositions expressed

Relevance theorists explain the difference between the implicit parts of the explicature of an utterance and the implicatures of the utterance as follows. Let us assume we are talking about declarative sentences, so the presumption is that some proposition is being expressed. However, in many, in fact, probably in the majority of cases, the proposition or propositions which constitute the explicature are not fully encoded in explicit linguistic form: the information conveyed by the overt linguistic form of the utterance needs to be supplemented by processes of completion and/or enrichment. (The proposed mechanism underlying this process of enrichment is essentially the same as that which gives rise to the generation of implicatures; this will be dealt with below.) The process can be illustrated as follows:

(23) **A:** What time is your train?
B: 10.30.

To retrieve B's explicature, we need first of all to fill out his utterance to something like:

(24) My train leaves at 10.30.

This is closer to a propositional form and we can call the process which leads to it **completion.** But more is needed than this. Sentence (24) contains the definite referring expressions *my train* and *10.30* and before the expressed proposition can be identified, referents in the extralinguistic world must be assigned to these expressions. The expression *my train* refers to some specific rail service, and *10.30* refers to a specific time (either a.m. or p.m.) on a specific day. Supplying this extra information involves **enrichment.**

Now, according to relevance theorists, none of the above involves implicatures: implicatures are inferred assumptions which cannot be directly derived from overt linguistic form by completion or enrichment. Consider the following example from Blakemore (1992):

(25) **A:** Did I get invited to the conference?
B: Your paper was too long.
(26) Speaker A did not get invited to the conference.

According to Blakemore, (26) is an implicature because there is no connection between it and the linguistic properties of B's reply in (25), that is to say, as I understand it, that (26) cannot be derived from B's reply in (25) by completion or enrichment. Presumably Grice's (1975) example illustrates the same point:

(27) A: (stranded motorist) I've run out of petrol.
B: (passer-by) There's a garage just round the comer.

(28) The garage sells petrol.

17.1.4 Some problems

If we compare the three types of criteria, it seems, first, that the first set will not discriminate between true implicatures and implicit elements of the explicature, at least as these are defined in relevance theory, since these are context sensitive, non-detachable, and calculable. (It is not clear how to apply the test of defeasibility, but since it was shown above that this falls under the criterion of context sensitivity anyway, perhaps we can disregard it.) With regard to the relevance-theoretical distinctions one might wonder if the stated criterion is adequate to explain their own examples. Take the case of (25) and (26). Why don't we say that B's answer in (25) must be enriched/completed to (29):

(29) You didn't get invited to the conference because your paper was too long.

Similarly, B's answer in (27) could be enriched/completed as in (30):

(30) There's a garage that sells petrol just round the comer.

The difficulty is that it is not clear exactly how much enrichment is allowed for elements of explicature; it looks as though, in the absence of some other criterion, there is a danger that an arbitrary cut-off point will have to be applied. Notice, however, that the latter two cases do not satisfy the second criterion:

(31) A: Did I get invited to the conference?
B: Your paper was too long.
A: That's a lie. (can only mean that the paper was not too long, not that the speaker believes he was invited to the conference)

(32) A: I'm out of petrol.
B: There's a garage just around the corner.
A: *No, it doesn't, it's only for repairs.

Whether this criterion is adequate on its own is not at present clear. However, it does seem that it would make a useful addition to the armoury of criteria for separating explicatures and implicatures.

17.1.5 Approaches to explanation

Assuming that we now have some idea as to what implicatures are, a natural question is how to explain their generation. Implicatures clearly play an important part in communication, and equally clearly, there is a great deal of consensus as to what the implicatures of particular situated utterances are. There must therefore exist a principled mechanism (or mechanisms) which licenses a set of inferences, given an utterance and its setting. It is this mechanism, and various proposals as to its nature, which form the main topic of the rest of this chapter.

There are two main lines of contention among those for whom this area of meaning is a major concern. The first is between those who see the rules involved in the generation of implicatures as no different in principle from those involved in computing semantic representations of explicatures on the basis of lexical entries and grammar, except that they make reference to features of context. On this view, messages are coded in their entirety, and communication is a matter of encoding and decoding according to a (admittedly very extensive) set of rules whose observance guarantees a successful outcome. (This is known as the **coding hypothesis.)** The alternative view restricts the coding mechanism, with its strict, explicit algorithms, to the explicature, and explains implicatures by a much more fluid mechanism, governed by more general principles capable of responding to totally new situations. On the second view, there is no set of rules whose observance will guarantee success: success is simply not guaranteed, but the system works well enough in practice.

The second line of contention is between what might be called maxim-based accounts and relevance-based accounts. Maxim-based accounts propound a general principle, and a set of more specific maxims. Implicatures are explained as the result of the resolution of conflicts between specific maxims in the light of the general principle. Relevance-based accounts essentially dispense with the maxims, claiming that a satisfactory general principle can handle everything.

We shall begin by looking at Grice's maxim-based approach, then at additions proposed by Leech. Finally, we shall consider Sperber and Wilson's relevance-based approach.

17.2 Grice's conversational maxims

17.2.1 The co-operative principle

One of the most influential accounts of implicature is that of Grice. Grice framed his account as an account of conversations; it can be extended in obvious ways to other communicative situations, but we shall confine ourselves for the sake of economy to conversations. Let us think in terms of a prototypical conversation. Such a conversation is not a random succession of unrelated utterances produced alternately by participants: a prototypical conversation has something in the nature of a general purpose or direction, and the contributions of the participants are intelligibly related both to one another and to the overall aim of the conversation. By participating in a conversation, a speaker implicitly signals that they agree to co-operate in the joint activity, to abide by the rules, as it were. Grice's version of what a conversationalist implicitly endorses (by accepting to take part in the conversation) runs as follows:

(i) 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.

This principle is elaborated by means of a set of maxims, which spell out what it means to co-operate in a conversational way.

17.2.1a The maxim of quality

The maxim of quality is concerned with truth telling, and has two parts:

(i) Do not say what you believe to be false.
(ii) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

One could argue that the second sub-maxim entails the first: there will obviously not be adequate evidence for a false statement. We can paraphrase this maxim as *Do not make unsupported statements.*

It may strike some that in real life, this maxim is honoured more in the breach than the observance. However, a moment's reflection should convince anyone that without a default truth-telling presumption of some sort, that is, unless we can count on at least a tendency for utterances to correspond to states of affairs, language would be unleamable and unworkable. This does not necessarily mean that Grice's formulation is the optimum one. We shall return to this point in due course.

17.2.1.2 The maxim of quantity

The maxim of quantity is concerned with the amount of information (taken in its broadest sense) an utterance conveys.

(i) Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange in which you are engaged.
(ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Imagine a conversation between Mother and Daughter:

(33) M: What did you have for lunch today?
(34) D: Baked beans on toast.
(35) D: ?Food.
(36) D: ?I had 87 warmed-up baked beans (although eight of them were slightly crushed) served on a slice of toast 12.7 cm. by 10.3 cm. which had been unevenly toasted...

(34) is a 'normal' answer; (35) gives too little information; (36) gives too much.

17.2.1.3 The maxim of relation

The maxim is very simple:

Be relevant.

The point of this maxim is that it is not sufficient for a statement to be true for it to constitute an acceptable conversational contribution:

(37) A: Have you seen Mary today?
B: ?I'm breathing.

Notice that this maxim is implicated in the Maxim of Quantity, which could easily be reformulated as in Levinson (1983: 106, fn.):

[Make] the strongest statement that can be relevantly made.

Here, *the strongest relevant claim* is not materially different from *as much information as is required.* The close relationships among the three maxims of Quantity, Quality, and Relation have led some scholars to combine them into a single maxim. For instance, Levinson's version could easily be extended to '[Make] the strongest statement that can be relevantly made that is justifiable by your evidence.' Here, *justifiable by your evidence* corresponds to the Maxim of Quality. The relative 'strength' of two statements can be judged by the entailment relations between them: the stronger of the two entails the weaker. Hence, *John captured a badger* is stronger than *Somebody caught an animal.*

The Maxim of Relation can be understood on the everyday interpretation of the notion of relevance. But so much hinges on it, that it really ought to be more explicitly defined. Leech's version will suffice for the time being:

'An utterance U is relevant to a speech situation to the extent that U can be interpreted as contributing to the conversational goals of S or H.'

Relevance theorists have their own version, which will be outlined below.

17.2.1.4 The maxim of manner

The maxim of manner has four components:

(i) Avoid obscurity
(ii) Avoid ambiguity.
(iii) Avoid unnecessary prolixity.
(iv) Be orderly.

It is generally regarded as being less important than the others. It is largely self-explanatory, except that:

(i) *ambiguity,* of course, means "ambiguity in context": it is virtually impossible to avoid potential ambiguity;
(ii) not everybody knows what *prolixity* means! The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* has "lengthy, tediously wordy";
(iii) the orderliness Grice had in mind was recounting events in the order that they occurred (if temporal relations are not explicitly signalled). A well-known infringement of this sub-maxim is:

(38) The lone ranger rode off into the sunset and jumped on his horse.

(Of course, there is nothing wrong with: *The lone ranger rode off into the sunset after jumping on his horse*—well, not *much* wrong with it.)

17.2.2 The nature of the maxims

A number of points need to be made about the nature of the maxims. The first is that they are not rules, after the fashion of grammatical rules. They are much more flexible, more like guidelines. Infringing a rule of grammar leads to an ill-formed utterance; the maxims can be creatively infringed, frequently conflict with one another, and are to be followed by and large, to the best of one's ability.

Grice is at pains to emphasize that the maxims are not culture-bound conventions like table manners: they are rationally based, and would hence be expected to be observable in any human society. In fact, Grice claims that similar maxims govern any co-operative activity. So, for instance, if workman A asks fellow workman B to pass him a chisel, B does not hand over a saw (maxim of quality), give two chisels (maxim of quantity), hand over a saw when none has been requested or seems necessary (maxim of relation), nor does he indicate the location of the chisel by means of a riddle (maxim of manner). This does not entail, however, that there are no cultural differences to be observed. One way in which cultures can differ is in the relative importance allotted to the maxims. For instance, a strict adherence to the maxim of quality may lead to no information at all being given. In some cultures, this may come across as rudeness, and to avoid this result, it may be preferable to provide fictitious information in order to make up a seemly response.

17.2.3 How implicatures arise

It is now time to consider the question of how implicatures arise. In Grice's system, there are two main mechanisms. The first, which gives rise to what are sometimes called **standard implicatures,** requires the assumption that the speaker is doing their best to follow the co-operative principle, even though the result may not be the best, from the point of view of the hearer. The second mechanism involves a deliberate **flouting** of the maxims, which is intended to be perceived as deliberate by the hearer, but at the same time as none the less intending a sincere communication, that is to say, without abandonment of the co-operative principle. Let us look first of all at the first type.

17.2.3.1 Standard implicatures

In some cases, a single maxim seems sufficient to explain an implicature. Examples of this are easiest to find with the maxim of relation. One such is Grice's own example (already quoted: repeated here for convenience):

(39) **A:** (stranded motorist) I've run out of petrol.
B: (passer-by) There's a garage just round the comer.

On the assumption that the speaker is obeying the relation maxim, B's reply in (39) implicates that the garage both sells petrol and is open, to the best of the speaker's knowledge; if neither of these were the case, the utterance would not be relevant in this context. Another example might be the implicatures of questions in various contexts. Let us assume that the conventional force of an interrogative is to induce the hearer to produce an utterance with certain aspects of its content specified (as we saw in Chapter 16, this is not the only possible interpretation of interrogatives). A likely implicature of *What's the time?,* on the assumption that the speaker is observing the maxim, would be that the speaker did not know what the time was. However, in the context of an exam, it is not a plausible implicature of *What are the reasons for the decline of the Roman Empire?* that the utterer does not know the answer. It is more likely that they wish to assess the quality of the hearer's answer.

In most cases (probably), more than one maxim is involved. A number of implicature types can be attributed to Levinson's conflated maxim (expanded and repeated for convenience):

[Make] the strongest statement that can be relevantly made that is justifiable by your evidence.

Consider the following:

(40) **A:** Where's the corkscrew?
B: It's either in the top drawer in the kitchen or it's fallen behind the piano.

The information given here is not really enough to satisfy the questioner, but if we suppose that B is doing his best to follow the co-operative principle, then we must conclude that something is preventing him from giving more. A likely possibility is that he doesn't actually know any more than he says, and to say more would violate the last clause of the (conflated) maxim.

Another related type of implicature goes under the generic heading of **scalar implicature.** For instance:

(41) A: Have you read any of Hardy's novels?
B: I've read some of them.

B's reply implicates that he has not read all of them. If he had, in fact, read all of them, in the context of the question this would have been (a) relevant information, and (b) stronger than what was said, and the maxim would require it to have been given. Since the stronger statement was not made, there is an implicature that something prevents it. In this case, the most likely possibility is that it would not be true. In the following case, B would be seriously misleading the police officer (although perhaps not actually telling a lie) if he had in addition drunk five double whiskies:

(42) A (police officer): How much have you had to drink, sir?
B (motorist): **A** half pint of lager, officer.

The implicature is that no relevant, true, stronger statement could be made, that is, B's alcohol intake was limited to half a pint of lager.

Yet another type of case explicable (partly) by Levinson's maxim is the following:

(43) **A:** What do you think of Mr X's candidacy for the post of Professor of Brain Surgery?
B: Well, he's an excellent golfer, and a damn nice chap.

The implicature here is that surgical skill and experience do not figure amongst Mr X's qualities, otherwise they would be mentioned. However, to explicitly point out their lack would be insulting. It could be argued that the co-operative principle cannot wholly account for this, and a politeness principle is needed. This will be taken up below.

An example involving the maxims of relation and manner is the following:

(44) In order to obtain a ticket, take up a position with the feet no more than 50 cm. from the base of the machine, bending slightly from the waist towards the machine. Take a 20p coin, holding it vertically between thumb and forefinger. Insert the coin carefully into the slot indicated, and release it when inserted more than half-way. The ticket will appear in the lower left-hand slot of the machine.

(45) To obtain a ticket, insert a 2Op coin into the machine.

Under normal circumstances, (44) is far more detailed than is required ((45) would be enough), and thus apparently infringes the 'avoid unnecessary prolixity' injunction. However, assuming the speaker is obeying the co-operative principle, and is not given to verbosity, a possible reason for going against the relation maxim is that what is, at first sight, redundant information is, in fact, relevant, and hence a likely implicature is that the situation is not normal, and the instructions must be followed to the letter, otherwise unpleasant consequences (or some such) may ensue.

17.2.3.2 Flouting the maxims

The other way in which implicatures arise is through deliberate flouting of the maxims in circumstances in which (a) it is obvious to the hearer that the maxims are being flouted, (b) it is obvious to the hearer that the speaker intends the hearer to be aware that the maxims are being flouted, and (c) there are no signs that the speaker is opting out of the co-operative principle. The hearer is thus given a signal that the utterances are not to be taken at face value, and that some sort of extra processing is called for. A weakness of these proposals is that no explanation or motivation is provided with respect to the exact nature of the extra processing. Any of the maxims may be violated in this benign way.

The maxim of quality

(46) The mushroom omelette wants his coffee with.
(47) **I** married a rat.
(48) It'll cost the earth, but what the hell!

In their most likely contexts of use, none of the above sentences is likely to be literally true, but equally, none of them is likely to mislead a hearer. In each case some additional interpretive process will be brought into play. In the first example, the interpretive process will be a metonymic one, and the understood message will be that the person who ordered a mushroom omelette wants his coffee served with the omelette, rather than afterwards. In the second example, the interpretive process will be a metaphoric one. In the third example, the implicatures are not so obvious, but hyperbole of this kind can implicate a relaxed, informal relationship with interlocutors.

The maxim of quantity

(49) Boys will be boys.

At first pass this gives no information at all. At second pass, we interpret the first *boys* in a subtly different way from the second *boys.* The first includes all boys, even those we thought had been tamed and could be relied on for good behaviour. The second is predicative, and presents certain stereotypic properties of boys as being innate and unavoidable.

(50) It must be somewhere.

Of course, it must be somewhere! Completely pointless? Not quite: it implicates that a more determined search will be likely to result in success.

(51) Mother: What did you do?
Daughter: (with exaggerated patience, elaborates a long list of totally uninteresting details)

This represents the inverse of the two previous examples, in that here, too much information is given. The implicature is that the mother is too damn curious, and overworried about her daughter's doings.

The maxim of relation

(52) A: I say, did you hear about Mary's...
B: Yes, well, it rained nearly the whole time we were there.

This is an obviously irrelevant comment. Assume that A and B are having a conversation about a colleague, Mary. Mary approaches them, seen by B but not by A. The implicature is: *Watch out! Here comes Mary!*

The maxim of manner

(53) A: I'll look after Samantha for you, don't worry. We'll have a lovely time. Won't we, Sam?
B: Great, but if you don't mind, don't offer her any post-prandial concoctions involving supercooled oxide of hydrogen. It usually gives rise to convulsive nausea.

The implicature arising from this unnecessary prolixity is obviously that B does not want Samantha to know what she is saying.

17.3. Politeness: principles and maxims

17.3.1 The politeness principle

There is no doubt that the co-operative principle can go some way towards explaining the generation of implicatures. But one class of implicature which receives no account under this heading concerns implicatures of politeness. For this, Leech has proposed an independent pragmatic principle, to function alongside the co-operative principle, which he calls the politeness principle.

Before we discuss this principle and its maxims, some discussion of politeness is in order. Politeness is, first and foremost, a matter of what is said, and not a matter of what is thought or believed. Leech expresses the politeness principle thus:

(I) Minimize the expression of impolite beliefs.

This is not an ideal formulation, as politeness does not essentially concern beliefs. However, it does have the merit of throwing the weight on to ***expression.*** Let us rephrase the principle as follows:

(II) Choose expressions which minimally belittle the hearer's status.

The sorts of thing which may be thought to belittle the hearer's status (or, alternatively expressed, "cause the minimum loss of face to the hearer") are:

- Treating the hearer as subservient to one's will, by desiring the hearer to do something which will cost effort, or restrict freedom, etc.
- Saying bad things about the hearer or people or things related to the hearer.
- Expressing pleasure at the hearer's misfortunes.
- Disagreeing with the hearer, thus denigrating the hearer's thoughts.
- Praising oneself, or dwelling on one's good fortune, or superiority.

The purpose of politeness is the maintenance of harmonious and smooth social relations in the face of the necessity to convey belittling messages. Of course, the nature of reality, social, psychological, and physical, constrains the scope for politeness: if our world is to 'work', we must respect this reality. We can think of the co-operative principle as a restraining influence on the politeness principle.

It is worth while distinguishing between **positive** and **negative politeness.** Negative politeness mitigates the effect of belittling expressions:

(54) Help me to move this piano.
(55) You couldn't possibly give me a hand with this piano, could you?

Positive politeness emphasizes the hearer's positive status:

(56) Thank you, that was extremely helpful.

Generally speaking, we are more concerned, as social beings, with negative politeness, as breakdowns in social harmony are much more likely as a result of the expression of belittling thoughts. Another dichotomy in politeness phenomena is between speaker-related and hearer-related effects. Generally, speaker-oriented politeness involves self-belittlement, as any aggrandizement of self implies a relative belittling of the hearer. As a general rule, hearer-oriented politeness is more salient and more crucial.

Certain language expressions are specialized for polite use, such as *please* and *thank you.* But the greater part of politeness comes across in the form of implicatures. The overall mechanism Leech proposes for the generation of implicatures via the politeness principle is similar to that proposed by Grice for the co-operative principle. Each principle, is accompanied by a set of more specific maxims.

17.3.1.1 The tact maxim

The tact maxim is oriented towards the hearer and has positive and negative sub-maxims:

Minimize cost to the hearer.
Maximize benefit to the hearer.

The operation of this maxim can be clearly seen in the context of impositives, that is, utterances which have the function of getting the hearer to do something (the term *impositive* includes commands, requests, beseechments, etc.). We can roughly order impositives in terms of the cost to the hearer, greatest cost first:

Lend me your wife.
Wash the dishes.
Pass the salt.
Say^A/
Have another sandwich.
Have a nice weekend.

We can think of this as a continuous **(cost-benefit)** scale, although, of course, there is a switch-over, somewhere in the middle of the list, from cost to benefit. How does the tact maxim work? Well, it is obvious that the linguistic form of the impositive is not going to affect the real cost or benefit to the hearer: what the maxim means is that in order to get a hearer to do something which involves a cost, a polite speaker will cast his utterance in a form which softens the effect of the impositive. Conversely, to get the hearer to do something to his benefit, a polite speaker will strengthen the impositive. What is meant by softening, or weakening an impositive is, essentially, making it easier for the hearer to refuse. This can be done by increasing optionality or by increasing indirectness. These two factors cannot necessarily be clearly separated. For instance, (57) is more polite than (58), and (59) is even more polite:

(57) Could you wash the dishes?
(58) Wash the dishes!
(59) I was wondering if you could possibly wash the dishes.

Sentence (57) does not directly encode an imposition; its literal force is to enquire about the hearer's ability to perform the task, and leaves the impositive force to implicature. It is therefore more indirect than (58). Implicatures are inherently weaker than explicatures, so the impositive force is weaker, and a refusal by the hearer would be less impolite. Sentence (59) is even more indirect, as it does not, literally, even ask a question, but merely voices the speaker's internal musings.

Looking at impositives which correspond to a benefit to the hearer, we may first note that (60) is definitely not more polite than (61):

(60) I was wondering if you could possibly enjoy your holiday.
(61) Enjoy your holiday!

For impositives beneficial to the hearer, the situation is reversed, and the stronger impositives are the more polite. Sentence (60) is actually rather rude: it suggests that the hearer is a habitually gloomy, complaining type.

Notice that the politeness in the cases discussed does not inhere in the linguistic forms: there is nothing inherently polite in *I was wondering if you could possibly V.* Politeness is an implicature arising from a three-way interaction between explicature, the context, and the politeness principle.

17.3.1.2 The generosity maxim

The generosity maxim is a sister to the tact maxim, and is oriented towards costs and benefits to the speaker:

Minimize benefit to self.
Maximize cost to self.

This maxim works in a way parallel to that of the tact maxim, except that the effects are reversed. So, for instance, offers to do something which involves benefit to her hearer, but cost to the speaker must be made as directly as possible, for politeness. Hence, (62) is more polite than (63):

(62) Let me wash the dishes.
(63) I was wondering if I could possibly wash the dishes.

On the other hand, politeness demands that requests for benefit to the speaker be weakened:

(64) I want to borrow your car.
(65) Could I possibly borrow your car?

17.3.1.3 The praise maxim

The maxims of praise and modesty form another natural duo, concerned, in this case, with the expression of positive or negative opinions about speaker or hearer. The maxim of praise is oriented towards the hearer, and goes as follows:

Minimize dispraise of the hearer.
Maximize praise of the hearer.

As usual, negative politeness is the more crucial, hence the first sub-maxim is the more likely to be brought into play. The effect is to tone down any criticism or unfavourable comment:

(66) A: Do you like my new dress?
B: *No.
Well, yes, but it’s not my favourite.

(67) A: Oh! I’ve been so thoughtless.
B: ♦ Yes, haven’t you?
Not at all—think nothing of it.

The effect of the second sub-maxim is to exaggerate praise:

(68) Thank you ***so*** much for inviting us. We had an absolutely ***wonderful*** time!

17.3.1.4 The modesty maxim

The modesty maxim is the natural partner of the previous one, being oriented towards the speaker, with the relevant ‘values’ reversed:

Minimize praise of self.
Maximize dispraise of self.

Praising oneself is inherently impolite, so negative politeness here is a matter of toning down self-congratulation:

(69) A: You did brilliantly!
B: *Yes, didn’t I?
Well, I thought I didn’t do too badly.

Positive politeness under this heading, that is, exaggerating protestations of worthlessness, tends in the direction of grovelling:

(70) Your Majesty, I am a mere worm, a disgusting toad, a dog’s turd, and I deserve no forgiveness! I throw myself at Your Majesty’s feet!

It is perhaps worth pointing out here the paradoxical fact that implicatures of politeness only arise when it is clear to the hearer that the speaker’s utterance is not completely sincere. If someone does something very well and one tells them so, although such praise is, in a sense, inherently polite, and is enjoined by the maxim, it does not seem satisfactory to say that there is an ***impUcature*** of politeness. The implicature is paradoxical because it indicates that the speaker’s opinion is in reality less complimentary, or more critical, as the case may be, and this is, of course, less polite. In other words, the message *I am being polite* is itself impolite, although indirectly and therefore weakly. This kind of paradox runs through all politeness phenomena (see Leech for more detailed exemplification and discussion).

17.3.1.5 The agreement maxim

The final two maxims do not form a pair. This is not, as Leech claims, because they do not involve bipolar scales (at least one of them does), but because they are inherently relational in a way that the others are not. That is to say, agreement is a relation between the opinions of the speaker and those of the hearer.

One cannot contrast an orientation towards self with an orientation towards hearer, as with praise, and benefit/cost: it does not matter whether agreement forms a bipolar scale or not (one could argue about agreement (i.e. whether disagreement is zero agreement, or whether there is a midpoint zero of 'no contact', with agreement and disagreement as polar extremes), but sympathy/antipathy (see next maxim) definitely is bipolar, with a central "indifference" representing zero between the two extremes). This maxim is simply:

Minimize disagreement with the hearer.
Maximize agreement with the hearer.

The sub-maxims are not clearly distinct. A typical strategy is to begin with partial agreement before expressing disagreement:

(71) A: She should be sacked immediately. We can't tolerate unpunctuality.
B: *1 disagree.
I agree with the general principle, but in this case there are mitigating circumstances.

17.3.1.6 The sympathy maxim

Sympathy is again a matter of a relation between speaker and hearer, and cannot, therefore, be differentially speaker- or hearer-oriented:

Maximize sympathy (expression of positive feelings) towards the hearer.
Minimize antipathy (expression of negative feelings) towards the hearer.

As Leech points out, this maxim renders congratulations and commiserations or condolences inherently polite acts. However, once again, it seems we can speak of implicatures of politeness only if a discrepancy can be intuited between what the speaker says and what he or she feels.

17.3.1.7 The consideration maxim

Leech presents the consideration maxim as a separate principle (the Pollyanna Principle), with, in my opinion, very little justification, as it works just like the other maxims:

Minimize the hearer's discomfort/displeasure.
Maximize the hearer's comfort/pleasure.

Negative politeness under this maxim involves the softening, by various devices, of references to painful, distressing, embarrassing or shocking events, facts, or things, etc. For instance, if someone's husband has recently died, it is more polite to say *I was sorry to hear about your husband* than *I was sorry to hear about your husband's death,* as the latter highlights the distressing event to a greater degree. Another typical manifestation of this sub-maxim is euphemism, where indirectness of various kinds is employed to avoid mention of words likely to cause offence. The following examples use a despecifying strategy:

(72) She has a lovely figure.
♦She has beautiful breasts.

(73) He exposed his parts.
♦He exposed his penis.

The following example uses a kind of frozen metonymy (at one time one had to put a penny in the door of a public toilet to get in):

(74) Hang on a minute, I need to spend a penny.
♦Hang on a minute, I need to piss.

The converse sub-maxim, concerned with positive politeness, requires one, for instance, to be more specific when referring to things the thought of which is likely to give the hearer pleasure. Thus, if the hearer's daughter, Jennifer, has just won an Oscar, then (75) is more polite than (76):

(75) That was great news about Jennifer's Oscar.
(76) That was great news about Jennifer.

17.3.2 Miscellaneous principles

Leech proposes two more principles, independent of both the politeness principle and the co-operative principle. We shall not propose additional principles, but follow the Gricean example and speak instead of deliberate flouting of the principle of politeness. There are two basic possibilities here; one can be superficially polite, but patently insincere, leading to rudeness by implicature, or one can be superficially rude, but patently insincere, leading to politeness by implicature. The insincerity must be indeed patent, for the trick to work, and the strategy carries a certain risk that one might be taken at one's word. Leech groups the following sort of example under what he calls the **irony principle:**

(77) You're a fine friend! (with appropriate intonation)
(78) Do help yourself! (to someone who helps himself unjustifiably, without invitation)
(79) Well, thank you very much! (someone parks his car in front of your drive, so you can't get out)

The opposite sort of case comes under Leech's **banter principle** (actually both involve a type of irony):

(80) Look what the cat's just brought in.
(81) You stupid bitch! (to a close friend who's just done something daft)

The implicature here is that the relationship is so solid that politeness is not necessary, and this is, of course, a polite implicature.

17.3.3 General discussion

Like the co-operative principle, the politeness principle is intended to be universal, that is, not culture dependent, in its application. However, probably even more than the maxims of conversation, the politeness maxims are given different relative weightings in different cultures, with the result that politeness phenomena in speech can have a very different superficial appearance, and a knowledge of the maxims is no guarantee that one can avoid solecisms. The relative weighting of co-operative as against politeness maxims also varies. For instance, a British hostess will probably take a compliment on her cooking something like this:

(82) Guest: Oh, Jane, that was a delicious meal.
Jane: Thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

However, a Japanese hostess in a similar situation (so it is reported) is obliged by politeness rules to deny any merit whatsoever in her efforts to entertain, so that quite long 'arguments' can ensue, with the guest praising the meal and the hostess denigrating it. This can be explained by the high weighting given to the modesty maxim in Japanese culture (and the relatively low weighting to the quality maxim, since it is unlikely that the Japanese hostess actually believes her meal to have been worthless). (The rules have, I understand, been different at an earlier period in certain sections of British society, where the guest's comment in (82) would have been taken as an insult. The reason is that it would have been understood as the expression of a newsworthy proposition, that is, something unexpected! This presumably has something to do with the status of the maxim of relevance.)

17.4 Relevance theory

We have so far been discussing implicatures on the assumption that human linguistic communication is governed by a set of more or less independent maxims, and we have looked at two more or less self-consistent sets, each set subsumable under a very general principle. Let us concentrate on the Gricean maxims for a while: Leech's maxims have an important, but rather different job to do—let us say they are less to do with 'content' than with 'manner'. At several points in the discussion of the Gricean maxims it was noted that the maxim of relation had to be implicated in the interpretation of a particular maxim. For instance, the maxim of quantity boiled down to something like *maximize relevant information,* and the *avoid prolixity* sub-maxim needed to be interpreted as *don't be irrelevantly verbose.* In fact all the maxims can be disregarded, provided some relevant message can be inferred. This suggests that perhaps some reduction in the complexity of the system is possible: perhaps the only maxim that really matters, the only one that cannot be broken, is the maxim of relation. In other words, it looks as though the only requirement for bona fide communicative utterances might be that they should be maximally relevant on all salient parameters. This is the basis of relevance theory.

Relevance theory makes the following criticisms of the Gricean approach:

(i) Implicatures are derived by combining explicature and context, but it is assumed that context is unproblematic and 'given'. But how do hearers select the relevant features of context?
(ii) No definition of relevance is offered.
(iii) The methods of deriving implicatures are inexplicit and ad hoc
(iv) The notion of "flouting the maxims" is paradoxical, when in every case a relevant message ensues. If relevance is the key, perhaps the notion of flouting can be dispensed with.

17.4.1 The principle of relevance

In relevance theory, the co-operative principle is replaced by the principle of relevance, and this in turn is claimed to make the separate maxims redundant. The principle of relevance may be expressed (without too much distortion) as follows:

(IV) Every bona fide act of linguistic communication automatically carries with it, by the mere fact of its being executed, the utterer's belief in its optimal relevance.

In other words, by saying something (in the normal course of human interaction) one is telling the hearer(s) not only that one thinks that what one says is worth the time and effort it will take to process it, but also that no more easily processed utterance would give the same result.

The degree of relevance of a communicated fact is governed by two factors:

(i) Contextual effects: the more of these there are, the greater the relevance of a particular fact. Contextual effects are such things as:
   (a) adding new information;
   (b) strengthening old information;
   (c) weakening old information;
   (d) cancelling old information.

   A new fact which is totally unconnected with anything already known is probably not worth processing. A new fact which, taken together with old information, allows many new inferences, is probably worth processing.
(ii) Processing effort: the less effort it takes to recover a fact, the greater the relevance of the fact. In particular, the following general points can be noted:
   (a) More salient facts take less effort to access than less salient facts.
   (b) Direct inferences take less effort than indirect inferences.

17.4.2 The problem of context

The proper context for the interpretation of an utterance is not given in advance; it is chosen by the hearer. The correct context is the set of assumptions which yields adequate contextual effects compared with effort required when combined with new information contained in the utterance.

The speaker has the prime responsibility in communication: the speaker assumes certain facts about the hearer's knowledge and its organization, in particular, the relative accessibility of facts. The speaker produces an utterance which will enable the hearer to make the correct inferences with minimum expenditure of cognitive effort.

The hearer's role is more passive. The hearer tries possible contexts in order of accessibility, and the first one to yield relevant inferences commensurate with the effort expended up to that point is the one intended by the speaker.

17.4.3 Explicature and under-specification

In relevance theory, the **explicature** of an utterance consists of all the propositions that are explicitly communicated by the speaker through that utterance. Obviously, some of the speaker's intentions are encoded in the linguistic forms used. However, not everything that is explicitly communicated is linguistically encoded; some of it has to be inferred by a relevance-driven process like that which gives rise to implicatures. We can distinguish four aspects of explicature where recourse to inference, guided by relevance, is required.

17.4.3.1 Disambiguation

Normal language is full of potential ambiguities, but these are only rarely noticed, because they are disambiguated by context. This disambiguation process is relevance driven. Each of the following sentences contains at least one ambiguous word, but none of them is intuitively ambiguous, even out of context. In (83) and (84), the disambiguating information is at least partially given in the sentence, although relevance plays a part in both cases. In (83), the presence of *cheek* in the sentence predisposes us to select the reading "small dark spot on the skin" for *mole,* largely because the cognitive effort involved in creating a plausible scenario in which that particular proposition played a part, is significantly less than that required to construct a scenario in which a furry animal or an industrial spy was involved. Less effort entails greater relevance, hence that is the reading selected. In (84), the "small dark spot" reading of *mole* is ruled out as anomalous, but the relative difficulty of scenario construction for "industrial spy" as compared with "furry animal" ensures that the former is selected. Sentence (85) contains nothing specific to bias the interpretation towards a financial bank, but it is none the less the case that it is easier to envisage a scene where a financial bank is involved, than one where the bank of a river is involved. This is because our memories contain records of frequently encountered scenarios which can relatively easily be retrieved.

(83) She has a mole on her left cheek.
(84) They managed to place a mole in the rival organization.
(85) I can't see you now, I've got to go to the bank.

17.4.3.2 Reference assignment

A second important role for inference in the construction of an explicature is in the identification of the referents of definite referring expressions. Obviously, context is crucial here. As an illustration, consider (86) (slightly adapted from Blakemore):

(86) A: I'll make the salad dressing.
B: The oil's on the top shelf.
A: I can't see it.

We shall ignore the problem of identifying the referent for *the salad dressing* and move to the question of the referent of *the oil.* No oil has been mentioned up to that point, so which oil are we talking about? Relevance requires us to maximize contextual effects, and one way of doing this is to integrate an utterance with previous discourse. In the present instance, this can be done by retrieving an item of knowledge from memory to the effect that one of the ingredients of salad dressing is oil. This is known as **bridging** and is a common discourse-processing device. In this way, an integration is accomplished, with satisfactory inferential consequences, by identifying the referent of *oil* with the oil needed to make the salad dressing. This is possible without any more contextual information.

But suppose, now, that A and B are in B's garage at the time of the utterance, and A is about to do some work on B's car. This context raises the possibility of an alternative referent for *oil,* namely engine oil. But notice that the referent of *oil* most likely would not change in the new context as described: this suggests that making connections with previous discourse has some kind of priority over making connections with immediate context—one may surmise that this is because it is more easily accessed. But then think of what would happen if A was actually working on the car, had the bonnet lid up, and the oil filler cap off, and A was looking around, scratching his head. Surely then we would interpret *oil* as *engine oil?* There must therefore be some point at which the salience (ease of access) of "engine oil" overtakes that of "salad oil", that is, when immediate situational context takes precedence over previous discourse. It seems that immediate context has to be very salient to suppress previous discourse. Clearly, too, previous discourse becomes less accessible the further back in time it is relative to the production of the definite referring expression, and presumably the easier it is for situational context to prevail.

What happens if there is no referent either in previous discourse or in immediate context (and none can be inferred by bridging)? In such a case it is possible to use general knowledge, as in (87):

(87) (Tourists **A** and B are having breakfast in a London hotel; the hotel has no tower, none has been mentioned, none is visible from where they are sitting)
A: What shall we do today?
B: Let's visit the Tower. (N.B. speech has no capital letters!)

From the above considerations it seems we can state an order of preference for domains wherein a referent might be found, and this is probably the order in which they are searched:

Previous discourse > Immediate situation > Stored knowledge

Clearly the processes of referent identification are complex and subtle, and the above discussion has no more than scratched the surface of the problem.

17.4.3.3 Enrichment

An important part of the process of constructing the explicature of an utterance is the recovery of missing components of the expressed propositions by **enrichment.** This involves fleshing out skeletal propositions, but not radically changing them (this notion is not entirely clear). Two varieties of enrichment can be distinguished: recovering ellipted elements and resolving semantic incompleteness. The first of these is straightforward enough:

(88) A: When you've finished the dishes will you post these letters?
B: I will.

Obviously, what B 'really means' is *I will post those letters when I've finished the dishes.* Any assessment of the truth value of B's utterance will take this as read. The missing portion can be reconstructed by grammatical rules.

The resolution of semantic incompleteness is less straightforward, at least in some cases, but the general idea is convincing enough. Usually, the missing information cannot be grammatically specified. The following are relatively clear examples:

(89) That one is too big.

Here we need to recover the standard against which size is being assessed: too big for what? Without this, the statement is virtually meaningless. Such examples are legion. Take (90) compared with (91):

(90) The petrol tank exploded some time after the impact.
(91) Her first suicide attempt occurred some time after her divorce.

Even if we take *some* to mean "relatively great", it seems likely to be interpreted in quite different terms in the two sentences: probably, in (90) it is to be taken as referring to minutes or even seconds, and in (91) as years. Sentence (92) is presumably to be taken as meaning that the speaker has brushed their teeth on the day of speaking, and not, for instance, at some point in their life; in (93), on the other hand, the latter interpretation could well be the speaker's intention.

(92) I've brushed my teeth.
(93) I've seen the Northern Lights.

Notice that if the last time the speaker of (92) had brushed their teeth was the day before, then *No, you haven't* would be a perfectly reasonable retort. Finally, in this connection, consider (94):

(94) The plate was hot and he dropped it.

According to Blakemore's account, the explicature here will contain information to the effect that the hotness of the plate was the cause of its being dropped. This is supported by the normality of *That's not the reason—he was drunk* as a subsequent comment.

17.4.3.4 Higher-order explicatures

According to relevance theory theorists, the specification of communicated speech acts will be part of explicature but not that of non-communicated speech acts. So, for instance, if (95) represents a bet, then that must be recovered and incorporated as part of the explicature:

(95) Jane will leave the room before John arrives.

On the other hand, whether (96) is intended as a warning or not will be a matter of implicatures:

(96) The plates are hot.

17.4.4 Implicatures

17.4.4.1 Implicature vs. explicature

The following is a sketch of the relevance-theoretical position; it sticks closely to Sperber and Wilson, and Blakemore. Sentence (98) can be regarded as the full form of what was intended by B in (97):

(97) A: Why wasn't I invited to the conference?
B: Your paper is too long.
(98) The article the hearer has written is too long to fit into a standard time-slot for the conference.

Notice that *your paper* has been disambiguated, and the reference length for *too long* has been supplied. Getting this additional information requires the use of inference based on contextual information (including general knowledge about the organization of conferences) together with the principle of relevance. But (98) has a close relationship with the linguistic form of (97B): it represents an enrichment of (97B). (Sentence 98) is therefore part of the explicature of (97B). Consider, now, (99) and (100):

(99) A: Did I get invited to the conference?
B: Your paper was too long.

(100) A did not get invited to the conference.

Here, A will infer (100) from B's answer in (99), after accessing stored knowledge such as (101):

(101) If one's paper is too long for the conference one will not be invited.

Proposition (100), says Blakemore, cannot be regarded as an enrichment of B's utterance in (99), since there is no relationship between the linguistic form of B's utterance and assumption (100). She points out that (100) can only be inferred once the fully enriched form of B's utterance (i.e. (98)) has been retrieved. Hence (100) is not part of the explicature of (99B), but is an implicature.

Suppose someone were to ask why A does not infer (102):

(102) Nigel will not attend the conference.

Neither (102) nor (100) follows logically from (98); (100) follows only when taken together with (101), an item of knowledge presumably stored in A's memory. But maybe A also has access to (103):

(103) If your paper is too long for the conference, you will not be invited.
If you are not invited to the conference, there will be no papers on pragmatics.
If there are no papers on pragmatics at the conference, then Nigel will not attend.

Why should A assume that (100) is B's intended message, rather than (102)? The reasoning goes something like this:

(i) The principle of relevance entitles the hearer to expect that they can obtain adequate contextual effects for a minimum cost in processing.
(ii) The more items of knowledge that need to be recovered, either from memory or current situation, and the less accessible they are, the greater the processing effort.
(iii) A was able to obtain adequate effects with one easily accessible item of knowledge, and is therefore entitled to conclude that no further cognitive work was required, and to accept this as the whole of B's intended message.

The question must then be asked why B did not simply say (104) in answer to A's question in (99):

(104) No, you were not invited.

After all, (99B) requires more processing effort than (104) would have done. As Sperber and Wilson point out (1986: 197): 'it follows from the principle of relevance that the surplus of information given in an indirect answer must achieve some relevance in its own right.'. That is to say, (99B) must produce more contextual effects than (104) would have done, and these must be sufficient to justify the extra effort that the speaker requires of the hearer. In this case, a reason is given for the refusal of the paper, and this could, for instance, forestall an anticipated follow-up question.

17.4.4.2 Implicated premises and implicated conclusions

Recall the following exchange:

(105) A: Am I in time for supper?
B: I've cleared the table.

B's reply does not directly answer A's question, but it enables A to recover information about mealtime scenarios and B's willingness to be put to a lot of extra trouble, which presumably includes at least some of the items in (106):

(106) When the table is cleared, there is no food, etc. on the table.
For someone to have supper, food, etc. must be put on the table.
Putting food on the table will require effort on someone's part.
Someone who has just cleared the table will resent having to put it back.

B's reply in (105) and (106) taken together yield (107):

(107) A is too late for supper.

The propositions in (106) are **implicated premises** of B's reply in (105); (106) is an **implicated conclusion.** All implicatures fall into one of these categories. Implicated premises are part of the context that the hearer must construct in order to recover the implicated conclusion which is the main point of the utterance. Sentence (106) plays the same role in the derivation of (106) that bridging implicatures play in identifying referents.

17.4.4.3 Strong implicatures and weak implicatures

Consider example (108) (the examples in this section are taken from Sperber and Wilson (1986:194-8)):

(108) Peter: Would you drive a Mercedes?
Mary: I wouldn't drive ANY expensive car.

What is explicitly conveyed in Mary's utterance does not directly answer Peter's question; however, Mary might reasonably assume that Peter can retrieve the information in (109) from his general knowledge:

(109) **A** Mercedes is an expensive car

and using this as context (implicated premise), will derive the implicature (no):

(no) Mary wouldn't drive a Mercedes.

Sentences (109) and (no) are **strong** (i.e. fully determinate) **implicatures,** for the following reasons:

(i) Mary expects their exact logical form to be recovered.
(ii) Mary is responsible for their truth. If Peter previously thought that Mercedes were cheap, or merely suspected that they were expensive, then Mary's reply in (108) would provide as much disconfirmation of the former or strengthening of the latter as an explicit statement.

By the principle of relevance, (no) cannot be all Mary wishes to communicate. However, the extra implicatures do not necessarily form a determinate set. Implicatures vary in strength, and it is not possible to set a determinate value below which they are not intended by the speaker.

For instance, Peter might add (in) and (112) to the context, and derive (113) and (114):

(in) A Rolls Royce is an expensive car.
(112) **A** Cadillac is an expensive car.
(113) Mary wouldn't drive a Rolls Royce.
(114) Mary wouldn't drive a Cadillac.

Or he might add (115) to the context and derive (116):

(115) People who refuse to drive expensive cars disapprove of displays of wealth.
(116) Mary disapproves of displays of wealth.

What about (117)? Can we be sure that everyone would class a BMW as an expensive car?

(117) Mary wouldn't drive a BMW.

Or, going further, would it be legitimate for Peter to use (118) to derive (119)?

(118) People who would not drive an expensive car would not go on a cruise, either.
(119) Mary would not go on a cruise.

Sentences (114), (116), (117), and (119) seem to be progressively weaker implicatures. The weaker the implicature, the less responsibility the speaker takes for their truth, i.e. the more they are the responsibility of the hearer. To quote Sperber and Wilson (1986:199):

The strongest possible implicatures are those fully determinate premises or conclusions. . .which must actually be supplied if the interpretation is to be consistent with the principle of relevance, and for which the speaker takes full responsibility. Strong implicatures are those premises and conclusions.. .which the hearer is strongly encouraged but not actually forced to supply. The weaker the encouragement, and the wider the range of possibilities among which the hearer can choose, the weaker the implicatures. Eventually.. .a point is reached at which the hearer receives no encouragement at all to supply any particular premise and conclusion, and he takes the entire responsibility for supplying them himself.

Sperber and Wilson suggest that 'poetic effects' are explicable in terms of richness of weak implicatures. There are many other ramifications of relevance theory—probably the most thoroughly worked-out theory of pragmatics currently available—which there is no space here to explore.

Discussion questions and exercises

1. By selecting suitable utterances for A, show how B's utterance can give rise to six different implicatures:

A:

B: Her black dress cost £500.

2. Each of the following conversational fragments is to some degree odd. To what extent can the oddness be explained by reference to Grice's co-operative principle and/or Leech's politeness principle?

(a) A: Have you seen Peter today?
B: Well, if I didn't deny seeing him I wouldn't be telling a lie.

(b) A: Are you there?
B: No, I'm here.

(c) A: What did you do yesterday?
B: I had a swim, changed into my swimming trunks, and went to the beach.

(d) A: Thank you for your help, you've been most kind.
B: Yes, I have.

(e) A: Can you tell me where Mr Smith's office is?
B: Yes, not here.

(f) A: We're off to Mallorca tomorrow.
B: I was wondering if you wouldn't mind enjoying your holiday.

(g) A: Would you like some coffee?
B: Mary's a beautiful dancer.

(h) A: Would you like some more dessert, or coffee, perhaps?
B: I'd like to go to the lavatory.

(i) A: Thank you for a wonderful evening. The meal was delicious.
B: No, it wasn't.
A: Yes, really, we enjoyed it enormously.

B: It was disgusting, and I was pathetic.

Q) A: Has the postman been?

B: He leant his bicycle against the fence, opened the gate, strode briskly down the path, stopped to stroke the cat, reached into his bag, pulled out a bundle of letters and pushed them through our letter-box.

3. Classify the propositions in brackets in each of the following as (i) an entailment from the explicature, (ii) a conventional implicature, (iii) part of explicature by enrichment, (iv) a conversational implicature, or (v) only possible by an *ad hoc* agreement between A and B:

(a) A: What happened to the rat?
B: John killed It.
("The rat is dead")

(b) A: Where's the corkscrew?
B: It's either in the top drawer in the kitchen, or it's fallen behind the piano.
("B doesn't know the exact location of the corkscrew")

(c) A: What's Bill's new house like?
B: The garden's beautiful.
("Bill's new house has a garden")

(d) A: Did you bring the photos?
B: I left them on the kitchen table.
("It's time to leave")

(e) A: Did you speak to John about the CD?
B: It wasn't John that borrowed it.
("Somebody borrowed the CD")

Suggestions for further reading

The seminal writings on the topic, namely Grice (1975), are a must. The commentary in Levinson (1983) provides amplification and discusses some of the trickier points. Grice's intellectual heirs are of two main sorts. The so-called 'Neo-Griceans' seek to refine his system and remedy perceived weak points. The main proponents of this approach are Hom and Levinson, and their views can be sampled in Hom (1984) and Levinson (1989). Leech (1983) uses a Grice-like approach to explain implicatures of politeness, which he claims are overlooked by the standard Gricean account. A more radical challenge is provided by relevance theory. The source text for this is Sperber and Wilson (1986); a simpler introduction is Blakemore (1992), but it is probably worth the extra effort to go straight for Sperber and Wilson.