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Act 1988 certain protections obtain only if the author has made this assertion. It appears to be an example of a brand new performative (perhaps it should be patented!).

33. For the information on courts martial, I am grateful to Lieutenant Commander S. R. M. Crozier, R.N., Barrister-at-Law.
34. Letter from trustees to a woman who had worked as a foster mother for 25 years (reported on *Face the facts*, BBC Radio 4, 16 June 1994).
35. *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 18 July 1994.
36. Observed outside 'Country Pine', Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire 25 June 1994. Chipping Campden is a village in the Cotswolds popular with tourists. It should be noted that on the other shops the signs said: *You are welcome to come in and look around — no obligation!*
37. From *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.
38. Dorothy L. Sayers (1937) *Busman's honeymoon*. Victor Gollancz, London, pp. 60-1.
39. The difficulty of specifying precisely the illocutionary force will be discussed in chapter 7.
40. Adapted from Levinson (1983).

CHAPTER 3

Conversational implicature

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 2 I discussed the relationship between **sense** and **force**, between what speakers say and what their words mean. In this chapter I want to explore this relationship further. Consider these three examples:

Example 1

The following incident, which occurred at a seaside resort in Kent, was reported in several national newspapers in July 1994.

Kent Coastguard reports that a girl, drifting out to sea on an inflatable set of false teeth, was rescued by a man on a giant inflatable lobster.¹

Example 2

'We must remember your telephone bill', she said, hinting that Louise had talked long enough. 'Goodbye', said Louisa, ringing off. It takes the rich to remind one of bills, she thought.²

Example 3

Late on Christmas Eve 1993 an ambulance is sent to pick up a man who has collapsed in Newcastle city centre. The man is drunk and vomits all over the ambulanceman who goes to help him. The ambulanceman says:

'Great, that's really great! That's made my Christmas!'

In example 1 the reporter has written exactly what he means, neither more nor less. The speaker in example 2 means

more than her words say; in uttering the words: *We must remember your telephone bill*, she is hinting that she wants to close the telephone conversation. In example 3 the ambulanceman means exactly the opposite of what his words say. None of these situations is linguistically unusual; the most casual observation of people talking (and to be good at pragmatics you must become a committed eavesdropper!) will produce similar examples. There are times when people say (or write) exactly what they mean, but generally they are not totally explicit. Since, on the other occasions, they manage to convey far more than their words mean, or something quite different from the meanings of their words, how on earth do we know, on a given occasion, what a speaker means? For we do, on the whole, communicate very successfully. In this chapter I am going to look at the work of Paul Grice, who attempted to explain how, by means of shared rules or conventions, competent language-users manage to understand one another.

3.2 H. P. Grice

H. P. Grice had worked with J. L. Austin at Oxford in the 1940s and 1950s and his work on the Cooperative Principle (see section 3.4) and its related conversational maxims (see section 3.5) arises from the same tradition of ordinary language philosophy. Like Austin before him, Grice was invited to give the William James lectures at Harvard University, and it was there in 1967 that he first outlined his theory of implicature (a shorter version of which was published in 1975 in a paper 'Logic and conversation'). In papers published in 1978 and 1981 Grice expanded upon this earlier work, but he never fully developed his theory — there are many gaps and several inconsistencies in his writings. Nevertheless it is this work — sketchy, in many ways problematical, and frequently misunderstood — which has proved to be one of the most influential theories in the development of pragmatics. In chapter 2 we saw how Austin made the distinction between what speakers say and what they mean. Grice's theory is an attempt at explaining how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of **implied meaning**.

3.3 Implicature

The additional or different meanings which we observed in examples 2 and 3 are conveyed by means of **implicature**. Grice distinguished two different sorts of implicature: **conventional implicature** and **conversational implicature**. They have in common the property that they both convey an additional level of meaning, beyond the semantic meaning of the words uttered. They differ in that in the case of conventional implicature the same implicature is always conveyed, regardless of context, whereas in the case of conversational implicature, what is implied varies according to the context of utterance.

3.3.1 Conventional implicature

There are comparatively few examples of conventional implicatures; Levinson (1983: 127) lists four: *but*, *even*, *therefore* and *yet* (to these we might add some uses of *for*, as in: *She plays chess well, for a girl*). Consider the following example:

Example 4

... she was cursed with a stammer, unmarried but far from stupid.³

Notice that although it is not actually asserted that unmarried people (or, perhaps, people who stammer) are stupid, the word *but* definitely implies that this is the case. The word *but* carries the implicature that what follows will run counter to expectations — this sense⁴ of the word *but* **always** carries this implicature, regardless of the context in which it occurs ('My friends were poor, but honest', 'He is small, but perfectly formed'). And, in everyday life, people readily respond to such conventional implicatures, as the following extract illustrates:

Example 5

*The American actress, Kathleen Turner, was discussing perceptions of women in the film industry.*⁶

'I get breakdowns from the studios of the scripts that they're developing ... and I got one that I sent back furious to the studio that said "The main character was thirty-seven but still attractive." I circled the *but* in red ink and I sent it back and said, "Try again!"'

3.3.2 Conversational implicature

This contrasts with the implicature generated in example 3. It would be absurd to argue that saying 'Great, that's really great! That's made my Christmas!' always generated the implicature that the speaker was furious because someone had just vomited over him! On other occasions a person producing this utterance might be genuinely expressing delight over a gift or event, or anguish because the dog has eaten the turkey. This type of implicature, which Grice termed (particularized) **conversational implicature** arises only in a particular context of utterance.⁷

3.3.3 Implicature and inference

Before I go further into Grice's theory of conversational implicature, I want to interpolate a discussion of the difference between implicature and inference, implying and inferring. There are two reasons for doing this. The most important is that it is the confusion of these two levels of interpretation which is at the root of some misunderstandings of Grice's theory. The second is that in Britain, if not in other parts of the English-speaking world, there is widespread misuse of the terms themselves — people frequently say *inferring* when they really mean *implying*.⁸ To imply is to hint, suggest or convey some meaning indirectly by means of language. We have seen how this operates in example 2, where the speaker hints or indicates indirectly that she wants to finish the telephone conversation; an implicature is generated intentionally by the speaker and may (or may not) be understood by the hearer. To infer is to deduce something from evidence (this evidence may be linguistic, paralinguistic or non-linguistic). An inference is produced by the hearer. Let us begin with a simple example:

Example 6

The following extract is taken from a children's book, set in Holland under William the Silent, during the wars with Spain. Maurice was a boy caught up in the events; Theo was his manservant.

Tears filled his eyes; he cried easily in these days, not having full control of himself, and Theo's fate caused him great grief. The Duchess had told him that she had been able to discover nothing, and therefore it was assumed that he had been released as entirely innocent. Maurice was convinced that nothing of the kind had happened, and

assumed that the Duchess had found out that Theo was dead and had invented the agreeable solution in order not to distress him. He could not do anything about it and had accepted the statement in silence, but he fretted a great deal over Theo's death.

This extract illustrates neatly the distinction between implicature and inference. The Duchess implied that Theo was all right. Maurice understood what she had implied, but nevertheless inferred the opposite (that Theo was dead). The next example is slightly more complicated:

Example 7

Some years ago, I went to stay with my brother and his family, including his son, aged about 5. I had with me an electric toothbrush, into which I had recently put new batteries. My brother asked to see the toothbrush, but when he tried to operate it, it would not work.

Me: That's funny. I thought I put in some new batteries.

Nephew: [Going extremely red] The ones in my engine still work.

Let us look at these two utterances from the point of view of both the speaker and the hearers. My remark had been a genuine expression of surprised irritation, addressed to the family at large and I did not expect any response, except perhaps sympathetic murmurings about the poor quality of batteries and this is how the adults understood it. My nephew, however, misinterpreted the force of my utterance as an accusation and inferred (wrongly) that he was a suspect. We can spell out the interpretation of the boy's contribution as follows:

- Step 1 As we saw in chapter 2, the hearer's first step is to assign sense and reference to his words. In this case, this was not difficult; the boy was asserting that he had batteries in the engine of his toy train which were in working order.
- Step 2 The hearer works out the speaker's intention in uttering those words; we all understood him to have implied that he was not responsible for the fact that my batteries were flat. The pragmatic force of his utterance was to deny guilt.

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Step 3 Nevertheless, everyone present inferred from the evidence (from our knowledge of how little boys behave, from the fact that he blushed, from the attempt to deflect attention from his toy and, indeed, from the fact that he spoke at all) that he had in fact switched the batteries.

The M.P. was trying to expose dubious and possibly illegal practice.
The M.P. was trying to cause trouble for the Government.
The M.P. was trying to draw attention to himself.

Conservative M.P.s cannot be trusted in financial matters.

It was very clear what the Prime Minister, Mr Major, inferred from the speech; it was that Mr Hain could not have much evidence, or he would have gone to the police or to the newspapers instead of confining his attack to Parliament (where he could make his accusations without risking a libel action). In relation to the points put by Mr Hain, Mr Major, said:

'I have to say to you that inferences that are clearly underlying your question today under the privilege of Parliament is not a way that most people would regard as the right way to raise these matters.'¹¹

[Note that Mr Major's use of the word *inferences* here is incorrect. He should have said *implications* or (more technically) *implicatures*. This is precisely the error I criticized in the first paragraph of this section.] There are two important things to bear in mind from the discussion of these two examples. The first is that a speaker may imply something he or she knows to be untrue and hearers may understand exactly what a speaker has implied, without in any sense believing it. The second is that Grice's theory attempts to explain how people get from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning. Many misunderstandings of Grice's work stem from the fact that people wrongly assume that he was trying to explain how inferences are formed, rather than how implicatures are generated and interpreted. In the sections which follow, I shall outline Grice's theory of how this process operates.

3.4 The Cooperative Principle

In order to explain the mechanisms by which people interpret conversational implicature, in 'Logic and conversation' Grice introduced four conversational maxims and the Cooperative Principle (CP). The CP runs as follows:

Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at

Grice's theory is designed to explain how hearers get from level 1 to level 2, from what is said to what is implied. Steps one and two fall within the realm of pragmatics; the third step depends on more than just linguistic factors and needs to be explained within a more general theory of social interaction.¹⁰ Let us take another example:

Example 8

Throughout July 1994 a minor controversy was rumbling on in the British House of Commons. For five or six years investors (known as 'Names') in the huge company of insurance underwriters, Lloyd's of London, had incurred massive losses and many had gone bankrupt. A number of Conservative M.P.s are Lloyd's Names and if M.P.s are declared bankrupt they must resign their seat. Peter Hain (a member of the opposition Labour Party) was conducting a one-man campaign to show that these M.P.s had been moved (with or without their knowledge) from the most loss-making syndicates, to avoid being declared bankrupt, having to resign their seats and (since there had been a spate of by-elections around this time and the Conservatives had lost every one) possibly precipitating a General Election. In the House of Commons Peter Hain said:

'Lord Wakeham, the Leader of the House of Lords, and other leading Conservatives in 1988 were taken off selected Lloyd's syndicates which later suffered three years of catastrophic losses.'

I chose this example because Peter Hain's speech was widely reported, and so I can say with some confidence that all the political commentators were agreed that what Hain had **implied** was that knowledgeable insiders at Lloyd's had improperly tipped off Conservative sympathizers so that Conservative M.P.s could switch (or be switched) to different syndicates. But although everyone understood what Hain was implying, different listeners **inferred** a variety of different things, depending on their political persuasion, background knowledge, etc. Here is a small selection of the interpretations I came across in the days following Peter Hain's speech: