

Grice's Conversational Hypothesis (Purposes and Challenges)

MA Linguistics

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Abstract:

The English language philosopher Paul Grice proposes the conversational hypothesis. The foundation for the theory lay down from his 1967 William James Lectures on "Logic and Conversation". Grice theory has the most influential contribution to philosophy and linguistics.

According to philosophers and Linguistics, it's been very difficult to make a decision and find out the purpose of conversational hypotheses and what are the major challenges for been success.

This study aims to discuss the content of conversational hypothesis. Also, describe the main purpose and the major challenges accordance to the Linguists and philosophers opinion about his theory. The study has found out that most of the researchers on the opinion that the Grices conversational theory has made a universal claim about human behavior rather than be a specific or local claim.□

Introduction

The work of the late Paul Grice (1913-1988) exerts a powerful influence on the way philosophers, linguists, and cognitive scientists think about meaning and communication. The theory of conversation is based on the work of H.P. Grice's William James Lectures at Harvard (1976). Grice postulated a general Cooperative Principle which is said: "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 1989: 26) and four maxims specifying how to be cooperative. It is common knowledge; he asserted that people generally

follow these rules for efficient communication. As noted that Grice's original writing appeared at a time when sociolinguistics was still in a very developing stage and when there was no talk as yet of conversation analysis.

The purpose of this study is to find answers concerning purposes of conversational hypothesis and what are the major challenges to its success. This paper is firstly discussing the content of conversational hypothesis by outlining the theory and the maxims. Secondly is describing the main purpose of the conversational hypothesis as Grice (1975) suggests and said: "One of my avowed aims is to see talking as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational behavior" (cited in Green 1990: 419)". Lastly, it will justify the major challenges of the issue of universality of Gricean conversational theory explaining how some writers have understood the cooperative principle and maxims in relation to making universal claims about human behavior rather than specific claims about what goes on into one country or culture and what into another.

Grice Theory and the maxims

Conversational Hypothesis was first described by the philosopher Paul Grice. Grice's original article 'Logic and conversation' as he claimed, aims at representing and accounting for 'a certain subclass of nonconventional implicatures' (also known as 'conversational implicatures') as 'essentially connected with certain general features of discourse' (Sarangi and Slemmrouck 1992: 118). Grice introduced the notion of implicature (both conversational and conventional) in the William James lecture delivered at Harvard in 1976. Referring to the notion of implicature Grice says:

Suppose that A and B are talking about a mutual friend, C, who is now working in a bank. A asks B how C is getting on in his job, and B replies, Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn't been to prison yet. At this point, A might well inquire what B was implying, what he was suggesting, or even what he meant by saying that C had not yet been to prison (Grice 1989: 24).

Grice's theory is considered to explain how hearers get from level one to level two, from what is said to what is implied. Steps one and two drops within the realm of pragmatics; the third step depends on more than linguistic factors and needs to be explained within a universal theory of social interaction(Thomas 1995).

In the William James lecture, Grice presented a panorama of his thinking on meaning and communication –what he called his 'tottering steps'. On general Gricean account of meaning and communication, there are two theories: a theory of meaning and a theory of conversational implicature. Grice suggested that there is an underlying principle that determines the way in which language is used with maximum efficiency and effectively to achieve rational interaction in communication. He called *Cooperative Principle* (Huang 2007). The Cooperative Principle is revealing and important, but because of its generality, it is not terribly informative. In order to understand the structure of conversation, we need to know what specific rules the participants observe. Grice mentions a number of rules of this sort, which he calls "Conversational Maxims". It subdivided it into nine maxims of conversation classified into four categories: (Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner) (Martinich 1984).

- Quantity

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

- Quality

"Try to make your contribution one that is true"-and two more specific maxims:

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

- Relation: "Be relevant".

- Manner

“Be perspicuous”-and various maxims such as:

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

(Grice 1989: 26-27)

Grice viewed these rules not as illogical conventions, but for us instances of universal rules leading rational, cooperative behavior. For example, if a man is helping a woman build a house, he will hand her a hammer rather than a tennis racket (relevance), more than one nail when several are needed (quantity), straight nails rather than bent ones (quality), and he will do all this quickly and efficiently (manner) (Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy). Grice uses these maxims to define the notion of a conversational implicature (Soames 2003: 201). Each of these, or any of their combinations, may guide the discovery of nonlogical inferences in an utterance, on the assumption that the speaker is, in fact, being cooperative. Under this condition, then, any kind of breaching or flouting of a maxim or of maxims, will prompt the hearer to set up an argumentation (i.e. a series of linked propositions) so as to safeguard the original assumption of cooperation (Brisard 2011: 113).

Referring to the relationship between the speaker and the maxims, Grice states that a participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfill a maxim in various ways, which he mentioned to four of them. In the first place, he or she might silently and unostentatiously violate a maxim if so, in some case he will be responsible for misleading. Second, he or she may opt out from the process both of the maxim and of the Cooperative Principle. Third, he or she may face by a clash: He or she may be incapable, for example, to achieve the first maxim of Quantity and the second maxim of Quality. Fourthly, a speaker may flout a maxim; that is, he may patently fail to fulfill it (Grice 1989).

However, Thomas (1995) referred five ways of failing to observe a maxim (Flouting a maxim, violating a maxim, infringing maxim, opting out of maxim, suspending a maxim) and he said that “several writers since Grice have argued the need for a fifth category-**suspending** a maxim. Having made all these distinctions, it is extremely irritating to note that Grice himself does not always use the terms consistently and remarkably few commentators seem to make any attempt to use the term correctly”.

The purpose of the theory and major challenges

Referring to the purpose of the Grice's theory, Sperber and Wilson() (and pratt and many others) seem to think that the purpose of participant in talk exchanges which Grice refers to must be mutual, cooperative purposes, and of a knowledge-oriented nature, like understanding the economy of Rumania, or figuring out how to put together a pump. Also Green states that Grice is very vague about these purposes: how many there are, how shared they have to be. With twenty years of hindsight and close attention to this question, we can say that the purposes are first of all not unique. Conversations typically have hierarchically embedded goals (Green 1990:416).

Grice (1989: 26) introduced the notion of “cooperative principle” as follows:

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristical, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. This purpose or direction may be fixed from the start (e.g. by an initial proposal of a question for discussion), or may evolve during the exchange; it may be fairly definite, or it may be so indefinite as to leave very considerable latitude to the participants (as in a causal conversation). But at each stance, SOME possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable. We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (ceteris paribus) to observe, namely: 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. One might label this the COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE (Grice 1989: 26).

Grice suggests that Listeners and speakers must speak cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way. There is an accepted way of speaking which we all take as standard behavior. Grice's interests were in the system of language as an example of human rational, and thus to be accounted for through some variety of logic (although, perhaps, not traditional formal logic) (Davies 2007: 2309). Grice's references to discourse as purposive behavior, are regularly linked with references to the rationality of human beings, and it is fact, as we can see in an above quote and he invites us to understand the CP as something that governs not just discourses, but rational intentional behavior generally. As we can see in two separate places that Grice mentioned:

“One of my avowed aims is to see talking as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational behavior” (Green 1990: 418, cited in Grice 1975:48-49)’.

Also, he states that:

‘One feels that the talker who is irrelevant or obscure has primarily let down not his audience but himself (Green 1990: 418, cited in Grice 1975:48-49)’.

Grice indicate at several points that he sees discourse as purposive behavior. That is, he presumes that participants have goals in participating (apparently since otherwise they wouldn't be participating) (Green 1990:416). As Grice (1989) pointed out that:

“each participant recognizes in [talk exchanges], to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction (Green 1990:416, cited in Grice 1975:45)”.

Green (1990:425) points out that the spirit of Grice's theory is that behavior, communicative and otherwise, is goal-directed and is correctly interpreted only by acknowledging that it is intended to be so interpreted. The fact that Grice did not clearly articulate its breadth does not diminish its explanatory power (Green 1990: 425). Brisard (2011: 114) stats that Implicatures demonstrate the rational character of

conversational behavior in two ways: First, their calculation rests on transparent chains of propositions, which constitute an argument, the stuff that rationality is made of. Secondly, their very identification relies on an original assumption of rationality in the behavior of speech participants (Brisard 2011: 114).

As Green (1990: 419) points out, in talking about the observance of the CP as rational, Grice implies that he takes it and the maxims to signify values universally assumed in human society. Also he says that Grice does not obviously claim universality for the CP and the maxims, but if they are to simplify discourse phenomena as a function of rationality, they have to be universal (barring societies of irrational beings), and hence potentially an outcome of some property of human nature of human society, and not just of familiar English-speaking cultures. Also he claims that the basic principle inferences are universal, and far from being specific to particular kinds of language use, are not even specific to language, rather are part of the human condition; people of all cultures cannot help interpreting each other's action in terms of a background assumption that actions are rational according to the CP and whatever "maxims" follow from it *in that context* (Green 1990: 419). According to Chapman (2011:84), Cooperative principle and maxims, are surely open to clarification as making universal claims about human behavior rather than a specific claim about what goes on in one country or culture. Moreover, Chapman said if Grice was really describing an overall feature of cooperative behavior, independent of the specifics of any particular language and its semantics, then it might be rational to assume that these features should grip across different languages and the societies that use them (Chapman 2011: 84).

Grice's theory of conversational pragmatics has revolutionized pragmatic theorizing, generating a large number of reinterpretations, revisions, and reconstructions (Huang 2007: 36). For example, in an article published in the 1970s, Keenan criticized this implicit assumption within the theory of conversation and accused Grice of concentrating on just one society and then attempting to extrapolate human universals from his observations (Chapman 2011: 84). Keenan criticized that at least one of the four Maxims is not universal, in particular, that the maxim of Quantity does not play a role in how Malagasy speakers understand one another (Prince 1982: 2). She showed that the first sub-maxim of Quantity may be overridden by some sociolinguistic principle such as the one of avoiding guilt (Huang 2007: 36).

Keenan states that 'No. 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' (Prince 1982: 2). Also, Keenan (1976:69), gives an example and he says if speaker A asks, **(1) a.** 'Where is your mother?' and B answers, **b.** 'She is either in the house or in the market', then B's utterance conversationally implies that he does not know exactly where his mother is situated. He knows only that she is situated in one of two places. If speaker B, in fact, does know in which of the two places one could find his mother, he has misled the co-present interlocutor and so violated the maxim (Keenan 1976: 69). Related to the above example Keenan says that 'B's utterance is not usually taken to imply that B is unable to provide more specific information...The implicature is not made because the expectation that speakers will satisfy informational needs is not a basic norm' (Prince1982: 4-5).

Supporting of this Prince (1982: 4-5) has examined Keenan's data and he has shown that the Maxim of Quantity is necessary to account for the understandings that obtain, at least as necessary as it is in English. Also, he states that at the first blush, this example looks convincing: A presumably leaves with no thought that B could have (or could not have) made a stronger statement. In contrast, this turns out not to be the case, from what Keenan says: '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 the others do not, one has some prestige over them'(Prince1982: 4-5).

In contrast, Green (1990: 419), claim that insofar as the maxims are only instantiations in a context of the CP, and no corollaries, discovering that one of the maxims was not universal would not invalidate claim that the Cooperative Principle was universal. However efforts to show that one or other of the maxims is not valid in some society commonly end up showing something a little different, namely that conforming to the maxims is constrained by cultural values, such as deferring to managers, being indirect or noncommittal (to keep one's "face" (or cover one's ass)), belonging to an information elite, protecting the "negative face" of others. Thus, being cooperative in making one's contribution "such as is required at the stage at which it occurs" (Green 1990: 419).

According to Green (1990:414), it is important to understand that the maxims do not *constitute* the CP either, as some writers seem to think. On the opposing, the CP is a very general principle which describes, depending on the values shared by participants, any number of maxims instantiating ways of conforming to it. Also, he says that the maxims are not rules or norms that are taught or learned, as some writers appear to believe. The maxims are just obvious ways of BEING cooperative, and not rules we have to learn, proposes that they may only come to our devotion when we encounter speech which is hard to reconcile with the assumption that they are being observed, and this seems to be the case (Green 1990: 414). Chapman(2011) stats that Grice was actually interested in accounting for how people generally behave and for the assumptions they make about other people, not in telling them how they ought to behave (Chapman 2011: 84-85).

According to Chapman(2011:84-85), Keenan was not suggesting that Gricean implicature should be abandoned altogether, but rather that any specific preparation of it should take more account of definite ways in which language is used and be more sensitive to changes between cultures. Also, she suggested that the maxims might hold in different areas of life and to different degrees in different cultures (Chapman 2011: 84-85). Robert Harnish state that in many natures of conversation, including Keenan's examples but including also many other from different societies, one or more of the maxims may be mutually known not to be in operation without this risking the more common statement of cooperation (Chapman 2011: 84-85, Cited in Harnish 1976:340).

Thoms (1995: 76) sates that several writers have suggested that there are occasions when there is no need to opt out of observing the maxims because there are certain events in which there is no expectation on the part of any participant that they will be fulfilled (hence the non-fulfillment does not generate any implicatures) . Suspensions of the maxims may be culture-specific or specific to particular events. For example, Keenan's example does not falsify Grice's theory if it is seen a case where the maxim of Quantity is suspended. The Malagasy speaker may appear to be under informative at the level of what is said, the un informativeness is nevertheless systematic, motivated and generates no conversational implicature for the member of the

community (Thoms 1995: 76). Let us consider two examples Thomas gives (Taken from a novel set on Navajo reservation):

(2) The speaker in this example and the next is the daughter of a murdered man. She is talking to Officer Jim Chee of the Navajo Tribal Police:

'Last time you were with that FBI man-asking about the one who got killed,' she said, respecting the Navajo taboo of not speaking the name of the dead. 'You find out who killed that man?'

(3) '... they told him he could not be cured,' Bistie's Daughter said in a shaky voice. She cleared her throat, wiped the back of her hand across her eyes. 'That man was strong,' she continued. 'His spirit was strong. He didn't give up on things. He didn't want to die. He didn't hardly say anything at all. I asked him. I said, "My Father, why..."' She stopped.

Never speak the name of the dead, Chee thought. Never summon the *chindi* to you, even if the name of the ghost is Father.

(Thoms 1995: 76)

In example 2 and 3 the speaker flops on three times to perceive the maxim of Quantity. On the first occasion she mentions vaguely to 'the FBI man', thereby producing the (true) implicature that she does not know his name. Then she mentions in an equally vague fashion to 'the one who got killed' and 'that man'. Normally this would produce exactly the same implicature (that she does not know the name of the man). However, between the Navajo, this implicature would not be generated in the case of a person who had died a violent or previous death, because to mention his or her name in these circumstances is taboo. In this case, the non-observance of the maxim of Quantity generates no implicatures because the entire contributor knows that it is suspended (Thomas 1995: 77). Moreover, Thomas (1995) referred another example which showing suspending the maxims cultural-specific he said in the acting community in Britain (but not among the population at large) people abstain from uttering the name of Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* because to do so is supposed to bring bad luck (Thomas 1995: 77).

Conclusion

This research has described the main purpose of Gricean theory of conversational Hypothesis and later it has discussed the challenges toward this purpose recorded too many writers that it is very difficult to make a decision specifically what is the purpose of Grice's theory. As Green states Grice is very vague about these purposes: how many there are, how shared they have to be? With twenty years of hindsight and close attention to this question, Green adds that the purposes are first of all not unique. Conversations typically have hierarchically embedded goals (Green 1990:416).

However, Grice's references to discourse as purposive behavior are regularly linked with references to the rationality of human beings, and it is fact, as we can see in the above quote. Grice is actually inviting us to understand the Cooperative Principle as something that governs not just discourses, but rational intentional behavior generally. As he says "One of my avowed aims is to see talking as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational behavior (Grice 1989)". Grice does not clearly claim universality for the CP and the maxims, but if they are to clarify discourse phenomena as a function of rationality, they have to be universal (barring societies of irrational beings), and hence potentially an outcome of some property of human nature of human society, and not just of familiar English-speaking cultures (Green 1990: 417,419).

Contrary to the above as far as Universality is concerned, Keenan criticized the theory of conversation, she suggests that the first sub-maxim of Quantity does not play a role in how Malagasy speakers understand one another (Prince 1982: 2). However, a number of linguists have defended Grice against Keenan's proposed reform of his theory of conversation. For instance, Green claim that insofar as the maxims are only instantiations in a context of the CP, and no corollaries, discovering that one of the maxims was not universal would not invalidate the claim that the Cooperative Principle was universal (Green 1990: 419).

Moreover, Grice has listed four ways in which a participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfill a maxim: the speaker may flout a maxim, violate a maxim or opt out of observing a maxim, infringing maxim. Furthermore according to Thomas and several writers Grice have argued the need for a fifth category which is suspending a maxim.

He also suggests that Keenan's example does not falsify Grice's theory if it is seen as a case where the maxim of Quantity is suspended (Thomas 1995: 72).

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ملخص البحث :

يتقدم فيلسوف اللغة الانجليزية، باول جرايس، بمقترح الفرضية التحادثية التي بناها على محاضراته الموسومة ب: "محاضرات ويليام جيمس 1967" وكانت تحت عنوان "المنطق والمحادثة". وقد كان لفرضية جريس مساهمات مهمة في مجالات الفلسفة وعلوم اللغويات.

وأعتماداً على علماء الفلسفة واللغويات فقد تبين أنه من الصعوبة إتخاذ قرار واكتشاف الغرض من الفرضيات التحادثية وما يجابهها من تحديات في سبيل تحقق نجاحها.

تهدف هذه الدراسة لمناقشة محتوى الفرضية التحادثية وكذلك لتقديم وصف لغرض الفرضية الرئيسي وما يجابهها من تحديات رئيسية وفقاً لرأي اللغويين والفلاسفة حول نظرية جرايس. وقد بينت الدراسة توافق معظم الباحثين على أن فرضية جريس التحادثية قد أحدثت إستحقاقاً واسع الانتشار يخص السلوك البشري قاطبة وعدم محدوديته أو تخصصه الضيق.

پوختەى ئىكۆلینەوه:

فەیلەسوفى گەوره پاول گرایس هەستاوه به پیشنیارکردنی گریمانه‌ی خاوتن. بنه‌چه‌ی ئەم تیۆره ده‌گەریتەوه بۆ سالی 1967 و انه‌که‌ی له وئیه‌م جیمس ده‌رباره‌ی (لۆجیک و ناخاوتن). تیۆریه‌که‌ی گرایس کاریه‌گه‌ریه‌کی گه‌وره‌ی هه‌بوو له‌سه‌ر زمانه‌وانان و فەیلەسوفانی بواری زمان.

فەیلەسوفان و زمانه‌وانان هه‌میشه‌ پێیان وابوو که زۆرگه‌رانه‌ بریاربه‌ده‌یت له‌سه‌رده‌ستنیشان کردنی ناما‌نجی گۆنجاوی گریمانه‌ی ناخاوتن و هه‌روه‌ها دۆزینەوه‌ی ئەو هه‌وڵه‌ مه‌زنانه‌ی که بۆ سه‌رکه‌وتنی دراون.

ئامانج ئەم ئیکۆلینەوویە بریتی یە ئە گفتوگۆکردن ئە سەر ناوەرۆکی گریمانە ی ئاخوتن. هەر وەها شیکردنەووی
ئامانجی سەرەکی ئەم تیۆرەو خستنه رووی هەوئێ زمانەوانان و هەر وەها شیکردنەووی بیرورایان دەربارە ی ئەم
گریمانە یە .

ئە میانە ی ئەم ئیکۆلینەوویە ئەو خراوەتە روو کە زۆربە ی ئیکۆلەرەوان ئەو برۆایە دان کە (گریمانە ی ئوتن) ی
گرایس زیاتر بانگە شە یە کی جیھانیە سە بارە ت بە رەفتاری مەرۆف ئەو کە بانگە شە یە کی دیاریکراوو ناوچە یی .