# Pragmatic Aspects of Meaning

Ling324

Reading: *Meaning and Grammar*, pg. 196-255

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# Syntax, Semantics, and Pragmatics

**Syntax** The study of sentence structure, i.e. how words are organized to form phrases, and how phrases are organized to form sentences.

Syntax "studies the level of Language that lies between words and the meaning of utterances: sentences. It is the level that mediates between sounds someone produces (organized into words) and what the intended to say." (Carnie 2002, 4)

"The underlying thesis of generative grammar is that sentences are generated by a subconscious set of procedures [much like] like computer programs." (Carnie 2002, 5)

The goal of syntax then is to discover the set of instructions that can correctly produce all and only the grammatical sentences of particular languages.

Transformational generative grammar (TG) views a sentence "as the result of a computation producing a derivation, beginning with an abstract structural representation sequentially altered by structure-dependent transformations" (Boskovic and Lasnik 2005, 1).

But is knowing the syntactic rules that govern our language sufficient to enable us to carry out a conversation? We seem to be needing to know more: we must understand the sentences of our language. Our semantic knowledge is of two sorts. We know the meanings of the words of our language and the rules that enable us to combine these meanings to form meanings of phrases and sentences. (Davis 1991, 4).

**Semantics** Semantics is that component of a grammar that operates on the output of a syntax and provides a meaning for it. And it does so, in terms of the individual lexical items that go into the syntax.

*The Principle of Compositionality* The meaning of a compound expression is only a function of the meaning of its parts and the way in which those parts are combined (e.g. Pelletier 1994).

   (1)   a.  Dogs are animals.
          b.  Cows are animals.

We understand these sentences differently; this difference in understanding is clearly to be attributed to the fact that we understand the words dog and cow differently. They make different contributions to our understanding of the two sentences (Davis and Gillon 2004).

# What has meaning?

Consider the following examples.

(2)  a.  Smoke *means* fire.

  b.  Black clouds *mean* rain.

  c.  The way he looks at you *means* he likes you.

  d.  The butler's finger prints on the knife *mean* that he is the murderer!

  e.  This ring *means* I want to spend the rest of my life with you.

  f.  No *means* no!

  g.  No *means* yes!

  h.  C'est drôle *means* that's funny.

There are many things that are said to have meanings. For example, expressions, thoughts, *actions*, gestures, artifacts, and even natural objects not connected to humans, such as tree rings or clouds.

*But there is a difference!*

Expressions, but not natural objects, can be analytic, contradictory, logically true, ambiguous, and anomalous, and they can be homonymous or synonymous and stand in logical relations with other expressions. There is no sense in which non-human natural objects have any of these properties, properties that many theorists connect with meaning.

(Davis and Gillon 2004, 4)

# Expression Meaning

- In this course, we have been so far exploring how meaning is assigned to linguistic expressions from a formal point of view.

  For instance, we have said, the meaning of a declarative sentence is associated with its truth conditions which are expressed by set-theoretic statements.

  (3)  a.  Sam doesn't like Bill.

  b.  $[\![\neg\text{Sam likes Bill}]\!]^{M,g} = 1$ iff
      $\text{Sam}' \notin \{x : x \text{ likes Bill in } M\}$

But now consider the following dialogue.

A: Is Sam coming to Bill's party?
B: Sam doesn't like Bill.

Does B merely intend to say that Sam is not a member of the set of people who like Bill? Would that expression completely answer A's question? In fact, has B answered A's question?

Semantics only covers "literal meaning." Pragmatics has to do with language use, and with "going beyond literal meaning" (Kadmon 2001, 3).

# Pragmatics

**Pragmatics** Pragmatics is the study of language *use* (by people!) and the interaction of *context* with language structure.

Since language depends or interacts with context in many ways, one bit of language changes the environment for the next. (von Fintel and Heim, Lecture notes.)

"Pragmatics has as its domain speaker's communicative intentions, the uses of language that require such intentions, and the strategies that hearers employ to determine what these intentions and acts are, so that they can understand what the speaker intends to communicate" (Davis 1999, 11).

## Contextual Inferences, Implicatures

Together with assumptions in the context, people make inferences that a semanticist will want to be distinguished from the "hard-wired" content of the sentences that are uttered.

## Context-Dependency

There are many expressions that have context-dependent meanings. An obvious example are free pronouns whose reference can only be determined in a "live" context.

## Context-appropriateness

many expressions require the context to be a certain way. They are only felicitous/apprpriate/usable in certain contexts. An obvious example comes from context-dependent expressions which require the context to supply (some part of) their meaning. Another example are expressions that carry presuppositions, which again can be thought of as requirements imposed on the context.

(von Fintel and Heim, Lecture notes)

Ouch, oops, hello, goodbye (Kaplan 1999)

http://www.uctv.tv/search-details.aspx?showID=8593

# Speaker meaning

Grice's (1957) definition

Speaker A means that $p$ in uttering $\alpha$ to hearer B iff A intends the utterance of $\alpha$ to lead B to adopt a certain attitude toward $p$, and A also intends B's recognition of A's intention to be instrumental in producing in B the intended attitude toward $p$.

So how much freedom does a speaker have in using $\alpha$ to mean $p$?

# Humpty Dumpty on Speaker meaning

"There's glory for you!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory, Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't–till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knockdown argument for you.

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knockdown argument', Alice objected.

"When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean–neither more nor less.

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things.

"The question is, said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master–that's all."

**Question:** Which aspect of Grice's analysis is Humpty Dumpty ignoring?

# Connection between Speaker Meaning and Expression Meaning

- Semantic vs. speaker reference (Donnellan 1966, Kripke 1977)

  - **Referential use** of definite description: the speaker uses the content of the description only as a device for referring to some individual.

    (4)   The man drinking the martini likes Julia.

    Assume that John is at a cocktail party. John sees Tom with a tall glass drinking a colorless liquid with ice, and he sees Ben with a martini glass drinking a colorless liquid with an olive. Tom is actually drinking martini and Ben is actually drinking water. But John mistakenly thinks that Tom is drinking water and Ben is drinking a martini.

    In this context, if John uttered (4) to mean that Ben likes Julia, John is making a referential use of the definite description *the man drinking the martini*. And in this case, the semantic reference and the speaker reference of the definite description are different.

– **Attributive use** of definite description: the speaker wants to say something about whoever the description fits.

> (5)   The man drinking the martini will get drunk.

Suppose that John uttered (5) at a cocktail party. By uttering this, he may mean that whoever is drinking the martini will get drunk. John may have been told that one man is drinking a martini and may have no idea which one that is.

According to Kripke, *the man drinking the martini* has the same semantic reference at the party, whether it is used referentially or attributively.

However, the speaker reference of that NP may vary, according to whether it is being used referentially or attributively.

# Connection between Speaker Meaning and Expression Meaning (cont.)

- Speaker meaning from non-explicit linguistic expressions

  (6)  a.  Linda met the love of her life, and she got married.
       b.  Linda got married, and she met the love of her life.

The truth-conditional meaning of (6a) and (6b) are the same.

However, a cooperative hearer would fill in the sentences in (6) as if the speaker had actually uttered the corresponding sentences in (7).

  (7)  a.  Linda met [the love of her life]$_i$, and then she got married to him$_i$.
       b.  Linda got married to [someone]$_j$, and then she met [the love of her life]$_k$.

Speakers do not need to spell out everything in full detail. The reason is that interpretation can make use of not only linguistic knowledge but also knowledge about the discourse context, and of expectations about conversational participants as conventionally cooperative communicators.

# Context

Every utterance occurs in a *context*.

A context may include all sorts of things, such as previous utterances, the speech situation, including the location, the speaker, addressees, various salient objects, and more.

It also includes various assumptions that the participants in the conversation make about the world in general. It includes the assumptions that the interlocutors make about the beliefs and intentions of each other. And more.

The *felicity* (apprpriateness) of an utterance in terms of relevance and discourse coherence depends on the context of utterance.

(Kadmon 2001, 8-10)

# Common Ground

Stalnaker (1978) proposes one of the single most important concepts needed to characterize the context of utterance: the **common ground**. The common ground constitutes the set of propositions whose truth is taken for granted as part of the background conversation. This is the body of information which is "mutual knowledge," i.e. shared by the participants in the conversation.

According to Stalnaker making an assertion involves extending the common ground to a state that includes the information contained in the assertion (provided that the other participants in the conversation do not object to the content of the assertion).

(Kadmon 2001, 8-10)

# Possile Worlds!

Since a common ground is a set of propositions, it can be identified with a set of worlds: the set of worlds in which the propositions of the common ground are true.

Stalnaker calls this set of worlds the context set. The context set contains all the possible worlds which according to the information in our common ground are candidates for being the actual world. (They are the worlds compatible with all we know about the actual world.)

To add a proposition p to the common ground is equivalent to kicking out of the context set all the worlds that are not compatible with p (these worlds are no longer candidates for being the actual world). Thus, as the common ground grows, the context set shrinks.

(Kadmon 2001, 8-10)

# Performative Utterances

In "Performative Utterances," Austin (1962) introduced the idea that to say something is to *do* something.

Austin's idea was important because people often think that there is an important distinction between talking and doing, as indicated by the fact that people often say "Don't talk about it; do something."

(Martinich 2001, 123)

# Some background

During the 1920's and 1930's, a group of influential philosophers called the *logical positivists* maintained that only statements–sentences that have a truth-value–are meaningful. This idea is the result of their belief that philosophy ought to be scientific, that science only describes the world, that all descriptions are either true or false, and hence that only those utterances that try to describe the world, namely, statements, are meaningful.

Sentences of ethics ('Murder is evil'), aesthetics ('Michelangelo's Moses is beautiful'), and religion ('God is good') were taken to be pseudostatements, neither true nor false. They should not be thought of as attempting to describe the world, because the physical world does not contain values, and the physical world is the only thing that exists. Value-utterances and religious utterances were in fact designed, according to the logical positivists, either to express emotion or to induce an emotion in the audience.

(Martinich 2001, 123)

# Performative Utterances and Speech Acts

Austin (1962) sets out to refute the claims made by the logical positivists with examples such as the following.

(8)   a.   I apologize for stepping on your foot.

       b.   I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth.

       c.   I bet that Argentina will win the World Cup.

These sentences are clearly meaningful, but not true or false. Austin called them 'performative utterances' because their function is not to describe something but to perform an action. Talking is a kind of doing. As John Searle would make explicit later, a general theory of speech is a part of action theory.

(Martinich 2001, 124)

# Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts

In *How to do things with Words* (1975), Austin distinguishes between three kinds of linguistic acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

# Locutionary Acts

Austin divides locutionary acts into three subgroups:

1. *Phonetic acts* are acts of producing sounds, whether or not these sounds are part of a natural language or used to communicate.

2. *Phatic acts* are acts of producing sounds that both are part of a language and are intended as being construed as parts of a language.

3. *Rhetic acts* are acts of using sounds with a certain sense and reference. A person who says "The cat is on the mat" in order to express that a certain cat is on the mat is performing a rhetic act, because he or she is referring to things in the world and saying something about them.

Clearly, performing a rhetic act involves performing a phatic act, and performing a phatic act involves performing a phonetic act. But the converse relation does not hold.

# Illocutionary Acts

Illucutionary acts are such things as promising, betting, swearing, and stating.

An illocutionary act for Austin is the *force* of a rhetic act. It is an act performed *in* speaking. For example, promising is an illocutionary act, because it makes sense to say, "In saying 'I promise', the speaker promised."

  (9)   The final exam will be difficult.

The above sentence could be involved with the performance of various illocutionary acts, depending upon the intentions of the speaker and the circumstances of the utterance.

(10)   a.  The final exam will be difficult. That is a threat.
          b.  The final exam will be difficult. I guess.
          c.  The final exam will be difficult. I am warning you.
          d.  The final exam will be difficult. Let me remind you.

# Perlocutionary Acts

Austin would consider illocutionary acts conventional acts in contrast with perlocutionary ones, which are nonconventional in the sense of causing some natural condition or state in a person. Boring, harassing, irritating, pleasing, or persuading someone is performing a perlocutionary act. A perlocutionary act is an act performed by speaking.

For example, announcing that the final exam will be difficult may cause you to get nervous (and lose your appetite), or it may make you study harder for the exam. It may even prevent you from going to that party the night before. These *effects* would be considered perlocutionary.

# More on Performative Utterances

- A performative utterance does not simply convey a message, but performs some action or initiates a state that the content of the declarative describes.

  That is, the primary meaning of a performative utterance seems to be coming from the illocutionary force associated with it.

  (11)  a.  We find the defendant guilty as charged.
  
            b.  I bid three clubs.
  
            c.  I promise to split any lottery winnings with you.
  
            d.  You're fired.
  
            e.  You may have dessert tonight.
  
            f.  Gentlemen are requested to wear jackets and ties to dinner.

- Performative utterances do not make statements, unlike ordinary declaratives. Rather, by uttering (11b), the speaker is making a bid and by uttering (11c), the speaker is making a promise.

- It doesn't make sense to say that performative utterances are true or false.

  What is special about them is that the utterance itself is what makes the circumstances fit the words. That is, the utterance of sentence S brings into existence the very facts that S describes.


- While performative utterances cannot be said to be true or false, they can be said to be felicitous or infelicitous.

  Austin notes that certain conventions called felicity conditions regulate the use of performative utterances.

  If felicity conditions governing the use of a certain form fail to be satisfied, then the use of the form may **misfire**.

  For instance, one of the felicity conditions for uttering *We find the defendant guilty as charged* is that the speaker has the authority to issue a verdict.

- Performative utterances are self-verifying. By virtue of stating a performative utterance, a situation is created, and thus a true statement is made.

- We can take the performative utterance to expand the common ground like any other declaratives.

  For instance, as soon as (11b) is uttered, the proposition that the utterer bid three clubs is entered into the common ground. Subsequent utterances or actions of the players will be such that they are consistent with this proposition.

- Performative utterances are associated with various illocutionary forces, such as *promising, firing, bidding, warning*, etc.

# Felicity Conditions for Making a Promise (Searle 1965, 1969)

(12)   I promise to send you an email next week.

- Propositional content conditions

  The propositional content must describe a future act $A$ or acts of the speaker.

  An utterance of promise that does not explicitly express a proposition that describes an act of the speaker is taken to be an elliptical expression for the speaker to take an action to ensure that the promised event will occur.

  (13)   a.   I promise that our dog will not chase your cat again.

  b.   I promise to ensure that our dog will not chase your cat again.

- Preparatory conditions

  The promise that has been made by the speaker to perform $A$ is not already part of the common ground.

  The speaker must assume that the hearer would like him/her to perform $A$.

- Sincerity conditions

A promise is only sincere if the speaker intends to do $A$.

- Essential conditions

Promisers intend their utterances to be understood as placing them under an obligation to do $A$.

# Felicity Conditions for Making a Promise (Searle 1965, 1969) (cont.)

- Searl takes these conditions to be part of language user's semantic knowledge. That is, these conditions are taken to be semantic rules of the language used by speaker and hearer to correctly and sincerely utter a certain expression (*I promise ...*).

  But the act of promising can be achieved through using different linguistic forms. In many cases, the word *promise* does not even have to be used.

  (14)  a.  I will send you an email next week.

     b.  I am going to send you an email next week.

  So what Searl actually describes are pragmatic conditions that must be conventionally met when people are making promises, no matter which linguistic expression is used to achieve this effect.

# Conversational Implicature

Reading: Grice, H.P. 1975. *Logic and Conversation*

# Logic *vs.* Language

$\exists$ *vs.* "some" . . . Mary attended some of the lectures.

$\vee$ *vs.* "or" . . . Bill or Peter left.

$\exists x[F(x) \wedge \forall y[F(y) \rightarrow y = x] \wedge G(x)]$ *vs* "The F is G" . . . The cat is cute.

Neither Aristotelian nor Russellian rules give the exact logic of any expression of ordinary language; for ordinary language has no exact logic. (Strawson 1950: 344)

# Meaning and Use

'Meaning' for Grice at a basic level: a Speaker *means* something by doing something *on a particular occasion*.

In 'Meaning' (1957), Grice defends the position that meaning must be sensitive to use.

. . . it is necessary to distinguish between a notion of meaning which is relativized to the users of words or expressions and one that is not so relativized;.., of the two notions the unrelativized notion is posterior to, and has to be understood in terms of, the relativized notion; what words mean is a matter of what people mean by them. (Grice p. 340)

**Audience-oriented aspect of meaning**: An utterance U means p *iff* the speaker intends to produce in some audience A the belief p by means of A's recognition of this intention (in uttering U).

# When Harry met Sally

[Harry is setting up a blind date between his buddy Jess and his female friend Sally.]

JESS: *If she's so great why aren't YOU taking her out?*

HARRY: How many times do I have to tell you, we're just friends.

JESS: *So you're saying she's not that attractive.*

HARRY: No, I told you she IS attractive.

JESS: *But you also said she has a good personality.*

HARRY: She HAS a good personality.

JESS: [Stops walking, turns around, throws up her hands, as if to say "Aha!"]

HARRY:  What?

JESS:  *When someone's not attractive, they're ALWAYS described as having a good personality.*

HARRY:  Look, if you were to ask me what does she look like and I said she has a good personality, that means she's not attractive.  But just because I happen to mention she has a good personality, she could be either.  She could be attractive with a good personality or not attractive with a good personality.

JESS:  *So which one is she?*

HARRY:  Attractive.

JESS:  *But not beautiful, right?*

(From the movie *When Harry met Sally (1989)*, quoted in Horn (2004))

# Implicature

"Implicature is a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is **meant** in a speaker's utterance without being part of what is **said**" (Horn 2004)

Conversational implicatures are not licensed by sentences, but byspeakers actions (i.e., speech acts). They serve to make sense of what the speaker is doing. They are not inherently linguistic in nature, but to be accounted for by a general theory of rational cooperative behaviour.

Conversational implicatures are *abductive* inferences.

(Geurts, The psychology of meaning, Lecture 2)

# Deduction, Induction, Abduction

**Deduction** An argument from population to random sample that is also a *necessary* inference.

1. All balls in this urn are red. (The Rule)

2. All balls in this particular random sample are from this urn. (The Case)

∴ All balls in this particular random sample are red. (The Result)

**Induction** argument from random sample to population. An inductive argument is not a necessary, but a *probable* inference. .

1. All balls in this particular random sample are red. (The Result)

2. All balls in this particular random sample are taken from this urn. (The Case)

∴ All balls in this urn are red. (The Rule)

**Abduction** Making a hypothesis or an 'educated guess'.

1. All balls in this urn are red. (The Rule)

2. All balls in this particular random sample are red. (The Result)

∴ All balls in this particular random sample are taken from this urn. (The Case)

(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry: Charles Sanders Peirce )

# Implicature

- An utterance of sentence S has $p$ as its implicature just in case in uttering S, the speaker invites the hearer to infer that the speaker is making a commitment to $p$.

- Conventional implicature: Implications on the basis of the conventional meanings of the words occurring in a sentence.

  (15)   a.   John is English, **but** he is cowardly.
              b.   John is English, and he is cowardly.
              c.   John's being cowardly is somehow surprising in light of his being English.

  Truth-conditionally, (15a-15b) have the same meaning. But only (15a) implies something along the lines of (15c).

- Conversational implicature: Implications derived on the basis of conversational principles and assumptions, relying on more than the linguistic meaning of words in a sentence.

  We will mainly focus on conversational implicatures in this section.

# Conversational principles (Grice 1975)

- Grice proposed that conversation is regulated by a PRINCIPLE OF COOPERATION between speaker and hearer to achieve the purposes at stake in their conversation:

  (16)   Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk in which you are engaged.

- To implement this principle, rational speakers choose what to say in light of the following MAXIMS:

  (17)   a.  Relation: Be relevant.
         b.  Quantity: Be only as informative as required for current conversational purposes.
         c.  Quality: Say only what you believe to be true and adequately supported.
         d.  Manner: Be perspicuous. That is, be brief and orderly and avoid obscurity and ambiguity.

# Conversational principles (Grice 1975) (cont.)

- Grice is saying that language users assume that the speakers are following these maxims to articulate a conversational strategy for cooperatively conveying information.

  Thus, hearers will assume that speakers are following these maxims, and will interpret what speakers say, under this assumption.

  This will allow hearers to infer things beyond what is actually said, deriving a certain conversational implicature.

# Characteristics of Conversational Implicature

- Implicatures are calculable from:

  (i) the linguistic meaning of what is said;
  (ii) the assumption that the speaker is observing the conversational maxims;
  (iii) contextual assumptions of various kinds.

  (18)  a.    John has a car.

  b.    John has only one car.

  c.    John has one or more cars.

(18a) entails (18c), but conversationally implicates (18b).

The hearer will assume that the speaker of (18a) is following the conversational maxims. In particular, the maxim of quantity says that the speaker should be informative enough. So, the hearer will deduce that if the speaker knew that John had more than one car, he would have said so. Also, according to the maxim of quality, the hearer will assume that the speaker knows what he is talking about. So, the hearer will deduce that the speaker has the correct information as to how many cars John has. Through this kind of calculation, the hearer will infer (18b).

# Characteristics of Conversational Implicature (cont.)

- Implicatures are defeasible/cancelable.

  Sometimes, the context (or the speaker himself) may provide a new information that effects the calculation of a conversational implicature, canceling it.

  (19)   a.  John has a car.
         b.  John has a car. Perhaps, even two.

  (20)   a.  Mary got married and got pregnant.
         b.  Mary got married and got pregnant, but not in that order.

# Scalar Implicature

- Certain group of words are related with each other with respect to a scale.

(21)    a.   every $>$ some

          b.   excellent $>$ good $>$ ok

The meaning expressed by the weaker member of the scale is consistent with the meaning expressed by the stronger member.

However, if a speaker utters a sentence using the weaker member of the scale, the implication is that the stronger member of the scale does not hold.

(22)    a.   Some students did very well on the exam.

          b.   Not every student did very well on the exam.
               Some students did not do very well on the exam.

(23)    a.   This paper is good.

          b.   This paper is not excellent.

# Scalar Implicature (cont.)

- Calculation

  The calculation of the scalar implicature relies on maxims of quantity and quality.

  The stronger proposition that *Every student did well on the exam* is more informative than the proposition expressed by (22a). The speaker knows well how all the students did. So, if the speaker had believed that all the students did well, she must have said so. But since the speaker did not utter the stronger proposition, s/he must not believe it. And by using the weaker form *some*, the speaker intends to convey this information.

- Cancelability

  (24)  Some of the students did very well on the exam. Perhaps all.

  (25)  This paper will certainly be good. And it may well be excellent.

# Is *either...or* ambiguous between exclusive and inclusive meaning? (Pragmatic Argument)

(26)  a.  At the restaurant, John ordered either steak or fish for lunch.

b.  John didn't order both steak and fish.

- With the help of Gricean maxims, we can argue that semantically *either...or* is unambiguously inclusive, and that sometimes, it gives rise to exclusive interpretation as an implicature.

- Calculation

  In general, in restaurants, a customer orders one dish per meal. And appealing to maxim of quantity, if John had ordered both steak and fish, the speaker would have said so, using an expression more informative than *or*, perhaps *and*. But since s/he did not use *and*, s/he must be in no position to to do so. Hence, the implicature that John ordered only one dish arises.

# Is *either...or* ambiguous between exclusive and inclusive meaning? (Semantic Argument)

- Ambiguities in a sentence are matched by ambiguities in negation of that sentence.

(27)   a.  John was sitting by the bank.

         b.  John was not sitting by the bank.

(28)   a.  John saw a man with a pair of binoculars.

         b.  John did not see a man with a pair of binoculars.

If *either...or* is ambiguous, then negation of *either...or* should also be ambiguous.

Under the inclusive meaning: a sentence with negation of *either...or* is true iff both of the disjuncts are false.

Under the exclusive meaning: a sentence with negation of *either...or* is true if (i) both of the disjuncts are false; or (ii) both of the disjuncts are true.

# Is *either...or* **ambiguous between exclusive and inclusive meaning? (Semantic Argument) (cont.)**

- *It is not the case that ...*

  (29)  a.  It is not the case that John ordered either steak or fish.

        b.  # It is not the case that John ordered either steak or fish. He ordered both steak and fish.


- *neither...nor*

  A negative version of *either...or* is *neither...nor*. If *either...or* is ambiguous, then we should expect *neither...nor* to be ambiguous as well.

  But, *neither...nor* is only interpretable as negating the inclusive meaning of *either...or*.

  (30)  a.  John ordered neither steak nor fish.

        b.  # John ordered neither steak nor fish. He ordered both steak and fish.

# Conversational Implicatures Arising from FLOUTING of Maxims

- Sometimes, maxims are apparently flouted by the speaker, and yet the hearer still assumes that the cooperative principle is in play, and tries to infer what the speaker intends to convey on this basis.

- Flouting the maxim of quantity and maxim of relevance

(31) In a letter of recommendation for a student applying for a graduate school
   a. John has a nice smile and has great handwriting.
   b. John is not a smart student.

The letter writer is intentionally being not very informative and providing irrelevant information as to the quality of John as a potential graduate school candidate. The letter writer must know this, and therefore s/he must be trying to indicate that there is nothing good to say about John.

# Conversational Implicatures Arising from FLOUTING of Maxims (cont.)

- Flouting the maxim of relevance

  (32)  a.  A: I do think Mrs. Jenkins is an old windbag, don't you?
        b.  B: Huh, lovely weather for March, isn't it?

- Flouting the maxim of quality

  (33)  a.  Queen Victoria was made of iron.
        b.  Queen Victoria was hard, resilient, and non-flexible.

- Flouting the maxim of manner

  (34)  a.  Miss Singer produced a series of sounds corresponding closely to the score of an aria.
        b.  Miss Singer sang an aria (and wasn't very good).

  QUESTION: People lie and succeed all the time, violating the maxim of quality. Does this mean that the maxim of quality is incorrect? How can we reconcile the maxim of quality and the fact that people lie?