

Modern Learning Methods and the Effectiveness of the Communication Maxims in Education

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Annotation: Conversation is, by nature, cooperative. According to Grice (1975, 1978), individuals observe a general cooperative principle, based on the four maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. These maxims request the speaker to provide a contribution that contains the right amount of information, that is true, that is relevant to the conversation, and that is perspicuous. Actually, people communicate much more than they literally say, since part of the meaning of their utterances is implied and has to be inferred by the listener through conversational implicature requiring inference.

Key words: Grice's maxims, conversational context, interlocutors, linguistic, perceptual

The study of speaker meaning and implicature is included in pragmatics, which covers the broad range of speech acts performed by using words and sentences. The Gricean Maxims are a way to explain the link between utterances and what is understood from them.

Paul Grice outlined four main maxims of conversation, which describe how people communicate when they want to make sure that they're properly understood by others.

In accordance with the Cooperative Principle, he called these categories: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner.

Maxims of Quantity (be informative)

There are two maxims of quantity:

Make your contribution as informative as is required.

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxims of Quality (be truthful)

There is one supermaxim of quality:

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

There are two more specific maxims of quality (sometimes referred to as submaxims):

Do not say what you believe to be false. Avoid stating information that you believe might be wrong, unless there is some compelling reason to do so. If you do choose to include it, then provide a disclaimer that points your doubts regarding this information.

Do not say that for which you lack evidence.

Maxim of Relation (be relevant)

Be relevant.

Maxims of Manner (be clear)

There is one super maxim of manner:

Be perspicuous [clear].

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There are various additional maxims of manner:

Avoid obscurity of expression.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief.

Be orderly.

Criticisms - The Gricean Maxims and the Cooperative Principle cannot be universally applied due to intercultural differences.

The Gricean Maxims can easily be misinterpreted to be a guideline for etiquette, instructing speakers on how to be moral, polite conversationalists. However, the Gricean Maxims are only meant to describe the commonly accepted traits of successful cooperative communication.

Geoffrey Leech lists six maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. The first and second form a pair, as do the third and the fourth.

In fact, the speaker is not even forced to observe Grice's maxims. Relying on the addressee's cooperativeness and inferential abilities, the speaker can decide to deliberately flout any one of them, and yet convey a meaningful statement. Irony, for instance, relies greatly on the violation of the Quality maxim ("Try to make a true contribution") such as in "The meal with Edgar was a complete success" when the speaker actually intends to convey that this meal was a total disaster.

The addressee is another key piece of conversational context; while in narrative discourse the listener could be considered a passive partner, in conversation, the interlocutor is *de facto* active. The speaker has to consider what s/he believes to be the addressee's knowledge, just as the addressee has to rely on the context and on his/her beliefs about the speaker's knowledge in order to interpret discourse. This is made easier because, besides general world knowledge, interlocutors mutually share some degree of common knowledge, beliefs, and suppositions (Clark, 1985). The assessment of this common knowledge relies on three kinds of evidence: linguistic (what the interlocutors have said previously), perceptual (what happened in the conversation) and community membership (what is known, believed, supposed in the various communities to which the interlocutors both belong). Relevant utterances are then integrated by the interlocutors in their mental model of the ongoing conversation and increase their common ground.

The local coherence and global plausibility of these relevant utterances are of prime importance for topic management (e.g., opening, developing, and closing). According to Charolles (1986), coherence is based on four main rules: overlap of elements (to avoid absence of link), thematic progression (to avoid redundancy), logical noncontradiction, and pragmatic relevance to the discourse context. The speaker is forced to manage the topic and this avoids, for instance, abrupt topic changes. If the speaker wants to shift to a new topic, s/he is expected to explicitly inform the addressee of his/her will and to connect the new topic with the current topic (Crow, 1983).

In conclusion, these maxims vary from culture to culture: what may be considered polite in one culture may be strange or downright rude in another. As the maxims stand, there may be an overlap, as regards the length of what one says, between the maxims of quantity and manner; this overlap can be explained (partially if not entirely) by thinking of the maxim of quantity (artificial though this approach may be) in terms of units of information. In other words, if the listener needs, let us say, five units of information from the speaker, but gets less, or more than the expected number, then the speaker is breaking the maxim of quantity. However, if the speaker gives the five required units of information, but is either too curt or long-winded in conveying them to the listener, then the maxim of manner is broken. The dividing line however, may be rather thin or unclear, and there are times when we may say that both the maxims of quantity and quality are broken by the same factors.



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