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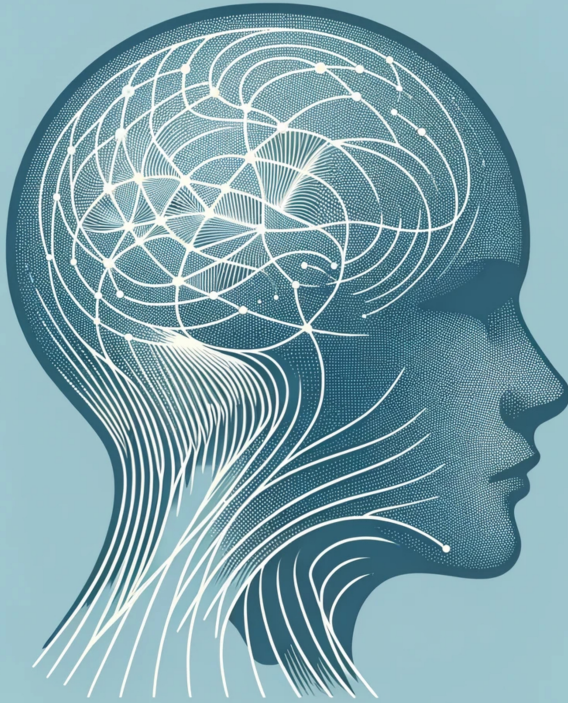
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Handbook for Higher Education

Volume 2

# Linguistic Pragmatics and Contextual Language

Scientific Foundations and Principles in Language  
Proficiency and Communication

Tobey Gross

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# **Linguistic Pragmatics and Contextual Language**

A handbook on scientific foundations and  
principles in language proficiency and  
communication

Volume 2

**Tobey Gross**

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This handbook serves as a supportive resource for higher education courses in communication sciences and language proficiency. While it is not intended to be exhaustive, it focuses on theories and concepts, that I, through my own experience in higher education, find especially valuable.

The understanding and application of the knowledge in this book have repeatedly shown to contribute to the aforementioned fields.

The domain of communication is fast-paced and ever-evolving, as well as it plays a significant role in a myriad of scientific fields, such as psychology, general language education or management.

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*This book series is dedicated to my parents.*

# Foreword

The current era is marked by fast-paced, multi-faceted, global, cross-cultural communication on a daily basis, and communicative studies are rightfully part of many programs in higher education. I have taught a number of differently-focused language education programs and have read countless brilliant works on the matter. However, there are several common denominators, as well as there is probably an essence of what the most influential aspects in communication sciences are, that should be considered and respected in interdisciplinary domains. This book aims to serve as a resource for what I consider the essential theories and concepts, that crucially contribute to the broader domain of language proficiency. These selections are based on my personal experience in educative environments, and there are certainly a whole lot more excellent frameworks and concepts on the topic. The chosen content reflects a blend of theoretical knowledge and equally its practical applicability, hence the term "*handbook*" – attempting to integrate the essential insights from psychology, rhetoric and cultural studies, as well as pragmatics and discourse analysis.

While it is certainly meant to be material especially tailored to educators and students, I deliberately tried to maintain a digestible language throughout this work, so any interested reader would have the opportunity to draw their conclusions and understand the key takeaways.

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# **Introduction to Communication Sciences and Language Proficiency**

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## **The multidimensional nature of language proficiency**

In characterizing, what language proficiency consists of, we must first eliminate the misconception, that it only means the correctness and fluency of a language. There is much more to the topic of language proficiency than only correct grammar and a well-established lexical range.

There are different approaches to the definition, because there has been no general consensus about what characterizes a general language proficiency in a way that would have suited each and every scenario. Therefore, we want to perceive it as multidimensional in nature.

## **Aspects of language proficiency**

The Council of Europe (2001) acknowledges linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural factors for a broader definition. ACTFL for example, define common denominators, that have to be fulfilled, in order to reach different levels of language proficiency. Other than that, they agree with the broader consensus, that language proficiency is mostly defined by the four core competency domains listening, speaking, reading and writing (ACTFL, 2012).



A broader conceptual framework has been defined by Kern in 2000, who integrates further components into the assessment of language proficiency, one which I personally find more suitable, or at least, more global and exhaustive. Kern defines linguistic components, under which I count all of the aforementioned, but further he states, that cultural awareness and nuances, as well as the ability of critical thinking must be acknowledged in the regard of overall language proficiency (Kern, 2000).

### **Capturing in-depth psychological underpinnings**

My framework that I typically use for the introduction of language proficiency – you could see it as my introductory lecture in higher education – is simple and at the same time, it captures the essential aspects, that I like to treat in a course. As I already mentioned earlier, this is my personal experience and I do not claim to reinvent the wheel here, nor do I feel like my personal approach outperforms another; I am sharing experience-based knowledge, hopefully to some peers' inspiration and enrichment. No more, no less.

Students will have to master linguistic concepts, of course, so correctness and fluency form the foundation of any respective course. Stage I is essentially meant for getting rid of grammar mistakes and misconceptions, raising metalinguistic awareness and making them aware of interlingual interference in morphology and

syntax. To me, mastery of those concepts is the basic foundation of anything that is to follow, hence I assess and fly through the commonly troublesome grammar topics while at the same time I do my best to increase the lexical range.

However, this book focuses on the second stage, and in some ways I do consider it the one that makes for a much larger part of actual language proficiency. Stage II is characterized by knowledge about social cognition and psychology: the behavioral side of language, if you will, and this is where lectures get engaging, interesting, and language becomes a real powerful tool. Stage III eventually forms the synthesis of the former two, using the tools from Stage I and the building blocks from Stage II, in order to *actually* build. Now obviously, Stage II has a lot of content to it, and there might never be an exhaustive list of what is to be considered *important*, so in the following chapters, I will delve into those frameworks and concepts in psychology, general rhetoric, pragmatics and social cognition, that I consider especially valuable for students in language proficiency courses.

## **Language as a coherent system of different disciplines**

Language, in communication sciences, is to be perceived as not only forming correct morphology and syntax, but is a much broader field, that only comes to life in social context. Hence, I consider the psychosociological underpinnings of language at least as important as the actual stage of fluency and development of a lexical range and correct inflection. There is a necessary integration of a so-called *observer perspective* in behavior and context to the application of language, which makes for a large part in its proficient use (Pike, 1982). Furthermore, nonverbal communication should not fall into the cracks, either. It is an important aspect when speaking of language proficiency, as we will later see, since it makes for the even largest part of actual communication (Mehrabian, 1972). Apart from that, sociolinguistics teach us, that social conventions, participant status and many different cultural norms and other aspects contribute to language proficiency (Hymes, 1972). Discourse analysis and strategic competencies, which, on the one hand, I'd rather consider part of the synthesis, but on the other, need to be introduced in context, should at least be mentioned in this introduction's regard. Since later, from correctness in grammar, fluency style, over psychological knowledge and awareness of sociological cues, and bridging it all into style, behavior and application, it forms some sort of a flow, they cannot always be explicitly and sharply divided anyhow (Canale & Swain, 1980).

# Chapter 2: Discourse Analysis: Context and its influence on meaning and use

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## Definition and scope

Discourse Analysis is a discipline of linguistics, that delves into structures of texts and speech, especially in order to emphasize linguistic patterns and particular features, that have an impact on their interpretation, overall comprehension and usage (Kaplan & Grabe, 2002). Often referred to as "*language in use*", it envelopes various linguistic subdomains and approaches (Traynor, 1997).

It is an important discipline that sits between linguistics and communication, and therefore it can be seen as a linking part between theory in language and practical application. Through its communicative and pragmatic features, Discourse Analysis highlights the various applications of linguistic concepts in interpersonal settings (Bazarova, 2022). It is furthermore an important discipline in translation studies, where context is often more essential than mere direct translation of linguistic elements (Farahani, 2013).

Because it is not only applicable to written context, but also to communicative scenarios (Brown et al., 1981), it is a crucial aspect to teach in the realm of

language proficiency in higher education. Since in the previous volume of this book series, I elaborated on high-context and low-context cultures, Discourse Analysis is bound to play an increasingly important role in globalized working environments, where numerous cultural backgrounds enter collaborative settings and are involved in virtual teams around the globe.

In complex expressions, Discourse Analysis is meant to focus on mechanisms of meaning construction, as to perceive words, sentences and other linguistic concepts as "prompts" for meaning (Dancygier, 2007). Among those, regularities play an important role, especially in the context of cultural use of certain concepts, and thus the intersections with cultural awareness are plenty (Schiffrin, 1990). Tannen (1990) refers to Discourse Analysis as "*language beyond the sentence*", which I find a highly accurate term for the discipline.

Among cultural variations, according to Marra (2012), the domain refers to a wide range of qualitative frameworks that suit the empirical investigation of language in use. It involves the methodical study of a language as a form of social interaction, touching interdisciplinary fields like interactional sociolinguistics, pragmatics and Speech-Act-Theory (Schiffrin, 1997).

Higher- and professional education language proficiency courses are often structured in a way that strongly focuses on specific settings that learners will likely face in their future (or current) professional careers, but curricula frequently appear to be

oblivious of the fact, that modern professional settings can shift and change their focus and communicative demands pretty quickly and frequently. From that perspective, I often miss a more holistic approach to language proficiency, such as delving into the underlings of communication that are found in social science. I have made many experiences, where fluency and correctness was not much of an issue for learners, but even the most basic immersive settings I created during instructional lectures had them struggling. While I fully approve of tailoring language and communication proficiency to the relevant subjects, I would often wish for a syllabus, that demonstrates more awareness of the socio-psychological aspects of language, one of which is context and with it, Discourse Analysis.

Research has shown, how including Discourse Analysis has a beneficial effect on language acquisition (Boxer, 2006) and especially in low-proficiency speakers, it can illuminate particular communicative aspects, through providing necessary insights into language shift contexts (Tsitsipis, 1991). Boxer & Zhu (2017, p.11) state:

*"Novice language users would benefit from knowledge of what members of discourse se communities successfully do in various contexts. Such heterogeneous, multilingual, and transnational contexts include multilingual language practices (e.g., code switching and translanguaging), sensitivity to the constraints of the sociolinguistic variables (e.g., gender, social*

*distance, and social status) in a second language, and sensitivity to domains of usage (e.g., workplace, education, social interaction, computer-mediated communication, and new media). In analyses of the knowledge, critical discourse analysis is and will continue to be an important thrust, since issues of power and dominance necessarily come into play [...]."*

But not only language learners benefit greatly from an informed instruction in Discourse Analysis, especially in the context of groups, it is equally a valuable resource of knowledge for language teachers, as McCarthy (1991) posed in an influential work. Through various scenarios, where it can be applied in teaching grammar, vocabulary and phonology, Discourse Analysis proves useful, which I can absolutely confirm with reference to numerous course settings, where the specific "*language beyond the sentence*" was a valuable source of understanding for students, in a way such that the linguistic proficiency was well sufficient for the composition of a sentence or question construction, yet the setting contributed greatly to the correct comprehension.

## Importance in linguistic pragmatics

While Discourse Analysis as a discipline focuses on language use above the sentence level, linguistic pragmatics are seen as focusing on an utterance (Blitvich & Sifianou, 2019), such that pragmatics specifically limits its scope to the interpretation of utterances in particular contexts, while mostly focusing on their interpretation through linguistic expression as distinct sources of information (Buczowska, 2018). Especially noteworthy is the impact on the comprehension of im/politeness through the examination of interactions in mirco-, macro- and meso-levels in language use. Buczowska found:

*"Pragmatics and discourse analysis are interrelated disciplines as they are both concerned with language use. However, they differ mostly in terms of the units of analysis traditionally associated with them: pragmatics is typically concerned with the utterance whereas discourse analysis with what is beyond the utterance. Im/politeness research has drawn from both as it was initially based mostly on pragmatic notions and later, reacting to these and embracing the pragmatic turn, it turned primarily to big discourse for additional or more useful tools."*

In that regard, one of the most seminal works on pragmatics, that influences the development of the discipline within the broader domain of linguistic sciences, is the foundational *"Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage"* by Brown & Levinson (1987).



According to Vanesyan (2019), it is especially crucial in understanding the universal principles of politeness within pragmatics.

This has a foundational meaning for our defined scope of language proficiency and communication science with special regards to higher education, as we are striving to focus on scenarios that may touch upon cultural awareness and communicative competency in group settings, in order to look beyond mere language fluency.

As for the analysis of deeper social contexts, Discourse Analysis can be highly valuable to situate language use and context in social structure. Context has a high influence not only on text production, text consumption and socio-cultural aspects revolving around them, but it also affects the use of symbols and figurative language, as well as the overall meaning of texts. In that regard, contextual factors may also vastly influence the interpretation of poetry (Effendie, 2017). On the other hand, the specific analysis in media can reflect power dynamics [*which is another standalone topic within this series*], ideology and social reality (Maricar, 2018). While we will briefly touch upon the topic of ideology within the discussion of political rhetoric, this is not a distinct part of the topic right here. Social reality according to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, is the consensus of attitudes, opinions, and beliefs held by members of a group or society (APA, 2018). In the broader context of language teaching, it has been found, that cultural factors, as well as the contextual settings influence teaching of a language as

well as Discourse Analysis, which was examined in TEFL<sup>1</sup> settings; a very suitable scenario to be adopted into this chapter. Relational bonds between Discourse Analysis and TEFL are perceived through the lens of their common denominator of speech acts and language as acting (*social interaction*). As Bayat and Nowroozadeh (2016) accurately affirm, the application of Discourse Analysis in TEFL concerns the pedagogical trend which aims to inform the language practitioners on how to know and use functional capabilities of language as a socio-linguistic means. This already shows, how language (*and thus, language proficiency*) must be perceived as a tool ready to use in various distinct contextual scenarios, rather than a task at which to achieve a certain level. Moreover, the authors rightfully state, that what Discourse Analysis as a relatively newly established discipline of applied linguistics is trying to convey, is that language as a communicational product of the human mind is a form of social action.

Thus, in order to make sense of linguistic pragmatics, Discourse Analysis is crucial for understanding specific phenomena and their intended interactions in sociology-cultural context, which in turn is an essential aspect of language proficiency, given the assumption that language (*in this case written and spoken*) is perceived as a tool for direct social interaction. Being closely related, a certain awareness of pragmatic phenomena is a necessity in performing Discourse Analysis, particularly in the 21st century (Alba-Juez,

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<sup>1</sup> *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*

2016). As English is a *lingua franca* for science and business, it lies in its nature, that it has probably been one of the most investigated target languages when it comes to putting language into specific context and analyzing it accordingly. As sub-disciplines of linguistics, pragmatics and Discourse Analysis show how important it is for English language learners, to perceive various perspectives of contexts in order to develop comprehensive communicative competence (Lwin, 2019).

As I have highlighted in my previous volume of this book series, intercultural environments at the workplace and in education are becoming increasingly common, which is a fact that makes for an increasing requirement for students to learn about cultural awareness and -sensitivity. In order to develop not only language fluency and correctness, but also to apply their communicative skills to various intercultural settings, knowing about the meaning of pragmatics is not an asset but a requirement. Research concerned with pragmatics and Discourse Analysis is mainly relatively young, so that findings may well translate to timely actual settings in the realm of multicultural working environments and appropriate teaching approaches.

## **Comparing formal and informal discourse**

In the context of social groups, formal discourse is found to be shaped by mainstream social groups, which in this case equals the largest portions of a certain part of society and means that a general agreement on formality of discourse is dependent on collective perception. Informal discourse however, evolves from the formal and creates new and distinct forms (Nagrockaitė, 2016). Historical changes in the use of formal words appear to mirror those in rational words, on account of an overall shift to a lesser degree of formality. Moreover, language parallelly appears to shift from collectivistic to individualistic and from fact-based to emotional (Sun, 2022). This shift is sometimes referred to as colloquialization.

Unsurprisingly, comparisons in adjacency pairs of formal conversations and interviews with informal conversations show, that both vary significantly in their use of common discourse (Chen Yao-yao, 2012). As today's era and its according discourse is significantly marked by electronic communication and conversation, it is worth to apply distinct investigations to this specific form. Formal and informal discourse are both prevalent in electronic communication, both in private settings, as well as the work environment. Electronic media has a large influence on today's communication, so that investigations of discourse markers have revealed, that they are often used as linking elements to connect text pieces, similar to informal speech, yet distinct to online conversation (Shakarami et al., 2016). Everyday communication

patterns have been explored in an influential work by Nofsinger (1977), where natural settings were observed and conversational analysis was employed in order to explain the organic nature of people's everyday communication. An important note of the study is, that slight nuances in those patterns can be easily overlooked, but they especially contribute to a detailed understanding of human verbal interaction. This, as a seminal finding, aligns with younger analyses of online communication, where there is a certain emphasis on the tiny aspects that make for meaning in conversations and can have a large influence on mutual perception, especially with a regard to cultural sensitivity. That is, communication mediums can have an impact on interactions and understanding in multicultural settings, yet the patterns and differences are complex, yet often embedded in tiny cues. In a 2008 study conducted by Magnan, she found that online communication in professional settings fosters multicultural understanding through intricate interaction patterns, that bridged cultural and linguistic gaps likewise. Thereby, effectiveness in communication could be enhanced.

## **Implications for (higher) education settings**

The previous assertions confirm the importance of context Discourse Analysis and knowledge about linguistic pragmatics for the development of deeper language understanding and likewise, its use beyond the correct construction of linguistic compositions. In this subchapter, I like to concentrate specifically on the implications I see for educational settings, in which language proficiency is the sole or ultimate goal. As mentioned earlier, I have experienced numerous examples of situations where I had to intervene as an instructor, not because of a linguistic mistake, but because the contextual use of expressions was for some reason inappropriate. Often, but not always, it was a specific simulated setting. In those cases, my subjective impression was that learners were especially interested and open for the backgrounds I provided and through subsequent discussions, it was also interesting for me to learn the conclusions they were able to draw for themselves, particularly when there were certain examples they could provide of where they had originally picked up on the phrase, expression or concept they had used. Not only did this foster a mutual sense of understanding, but it also provided important insights for their further education in language and showed a more distinct and thoughtful language use. Moreover, more often than not, I could notice two processes it triggered, one of which was a successful retention of such knowledge, and the other was a self-employed transmission process, such that upon careful consideration of the aforementioned discourse, there was a thoughtful choice of words in

similar scenarios. Even if there was quite some time between the initial raise of awareness through my intervention and a possibly similar scenario, I was made well aware of the retention, often because students asked back specifically. To me, it shows how well-accepted and appreciated discourse annotations are with learners, because they would be specifically careful and aware of potential contextual pitfalls in communication, highlighting the retention of slight corrective interventions on the one hand, and the specific desire to avoid contextual pitfalls next time.

Research in the domain of higher education confirms those observations of mine, as making learners aware of context and discourse avoids miscommunication and aids in maintaining appropriate tone. For cross-cultural communication, this is a crucial skill. Using language in varied contexts is an essential part of developing those skills, which again underscores my advocacy to not "*stop at fluency at correctness*" (Young & He, 1998). Integrating discourse into higher education curricula in language proficiency courses contributes to students' understanding of language in different contexts, which is not only a critical aspect of intercultural communication, but also facilitates language learning in the first place, because the integration of those elements enhances students' ability to build upon that knowledge and develop a more sustainable understanding of language overall (Maton, 2009). The application of context in language learning has a vast influence on language interpretation skills. Since there are numerous subtleties and more complex meanings behind utterances, that depend on the setting, making

sense of linguistic concepts *and* the setting as a unity proves crucial for understanding the real meaning, for which a basic understanding of discourse is mandatory. Although a language proficiency lecture is by no means supposed to turn into a sophisticated linguistics instruction, it is the well-rounded combination of both, that fosters the desired proficiency in language and communicative action (Moulin, 1997).



# Chapter 3: Speech-Act-Theory

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## Historical backgrounds

In 1955, originally delivered as the so-called William James Lectures, and posthumously published in 1962, "*How to Do Things with Words*" by J. L. Austin, the then-prevailing positivist linguistic theories were challenged by a new concept Austin introduced and that would later become known as the Speech-Act-Theory (further referred to as SAT). Austin argues, that there is more to an utterance than merely making a statement (which he calls a constative utterance). In his work, he introduces the performative utterance, which describes language as a tool to perform acts, beyond the statement. This newly introduced perception of his laid the groundwork for a new understanding of how language functions differently in various contexts, later leading to the iterative development of modern pragmatics. This action-oriented nature of language brought forth the understanding of how social interaction shapes and is shaped by how we use language. Austin seeks to distinguish between *locutionary* (the act of uttering), *illocutionary* (the intention behind the utterance) and *perlocutionary* (the impact on the listener) speech acts. Upon those seminal thoughts, J. Searle (1969) elaborated on the systematized and sophisticated SAT in this chapter. One could argue, that Austin's and Searle's elaborations helped understand how "language eventually becomes communication". Searle's work seeks to categorize

different types of speech acts and explains their relevance to communication. In accordance with Austin's original thoughts on language in communication acts, Searle illuminated the power of language as a means of performing actions, way beyond the conveyance of information, which sustainably influenced the fields of linguistics, philosophy and communication sciences for the future.

## Speech-Act-Theory then and now

In subsequent decades, the ideas of Austin and Searle influenced an entire generation of linguists and philosophers, and the theory began to shape further research in various domains. Until modern and recent research in language and communication, the performative nature of language is a field of busy study with numerous interesting and important findings and implications for further learning and education. In a rather recent work, Yeo (2010) reviews the development of SAT over the twentieth century and offers insights into its functions and purposes in the accomplishment of actions through language. Implications for modern communication education are plenty, for example when we seek to investigate the clarity in messages we convey. In that regard, SAT provides a framework for understanding linguistic concepts and constructions that can achieve conveyance of direct and clear messages, for example in instructions. It is important to always respect the given context and likewise a certain awareness in both listener and speaker (*or writer and reader*), as to distinguish between serious and unserious scenarios, real and fictitious (Baktir, 2014). Acknowledging intentions behind utterances is a communicative asset, that has to be part of a broader and more holistic concept of language learning, since there is a clear intention behind that process. Effective communication, according to Abbeduto (1983) requires incorporation of communicative intent – which is a foundational component of SAT. Through practicing to adapt language to certain circumstances, audiences and

contexts, language education can facilitate communicative proficiency (Fang, 2002). In language learning settings, SAT and derived knowledge proves vital in the development of abilities to properly and appropriately convey intentions, specifically in multicultural environments (Saleh, 2019). I could often observe, how this seemingly self-evident own intention collides with what I elaborated on the Theory of Mind [*Volume 1 of this book series*]. Knowing one's own intentions and conveying them in an appropriate and comprehensive manner does neither necessarily go hand in hand, nor is it something that functions without knowledge and practice. In simulated scenarios, where two or more parties have been instructed separately on their specific targets, I could often observe, how situations arose, where speaker A insufficiently conveyed their intention, much to the misconception of speaker B, and the scenario failed to produce a consensus in mutual understanding. Upon review with the parties, I could confirm that speaker A was positive about speaker B understanding their desired outcome while speaker A had either merely guessed intentions behind certain utterances or had remained unable to derive them from the communicated structures. Cohen (2006) highlights the importance of speech acts in a second language for multicultural settings. The overall development of language competence depends to an extent on the ability to navigate social communication, for which SAT is highly important (Shi, 2004).

I see a number of scenarios, where speech acts need to be part of language proficiency instruction,

especially in regard of intercultural settings. Pragmatic awareness in making polite requests, or respectful disagreement can have numerous cultural nuances that are prone to creating misunderstanding on either side. Analyzations of dialogues with specific awareness for cultural cues in certain scenarios can be suitable preparations for role-playing activities where students test different speech acts. As mentioned earlier, giving examples of poorly executed speech acts has appeared to not only find students' approval, but also a good retention and maintenance.

# Chapter 4: Implicatures and conversational principles

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## Foundations of implicature

In 1975, H. P. Grice laid the foundation for the term implicature, which, according to his seminal work *"Logic and Conversation"*, means, that a speaker will regularly imply more with their uttering, than what is explicitly stated. His 1989 work *"Studies in the Way of Words"* deepened the understanding of implicature along several other perspectives of his.

In simple terms, the concept of implicature is a display of how complex everyday conversation can actually be, despite often being perceived as simple. Grice's idea of implicature as a concept is that a speaker often refers to specific informational cues in their utterance, even if they are not part of the actual exact linguistic construction. This is of utter importance in conversational contexts, because we rely on unspoken cues to a large extent. Imagine the following example:

*Speaker A: "Would you like to eat a steak with me?" Speaker B: "I'm a vegetarian."*

In this simple scenario, speaker B has not specifically answered the question, however, speaker A can clearly make sense of the responded utterance, in the way that speaker B implies he would not like to eat a steak. That is, we frequently rely on reading between the lines in

everyday communication. If we now scale this amount of complexity up to intercultural communication, translation issues, ingroups, low- vs. high-context and so forth, it becomes obvious, how much truth and actuality there is in Grice's perspective, today more than ever. Grice therefore suggested the so-called *Cooperative Principle*, which consists of four maxims: *quantity, quality, relation and manner*. These will be further elaborated at a later time.

The concept of implicature has grown to be extremely influential in modern linguistics and philosophy and throughout the years, it has been subject to countless investigations in countless contexts and focuses. Chapman (2013) found, that Grice's work has had a tremendous influence on the field of pragmatics and has shaped our understanding of modern communication. In the very context of this work, I want to emphasize, how often it happens, that speakers say something through a linguistic construction, that may confer a fact or an opinion, yet the meaning of the utterance can be far from the actual conveyance of that very information, or at least way beyond it. Hence, it is a crucial part to interpret context in language in order to understand "hidden" messages quite regularly. This is what makes communication (and thus, language) effective, after all. According to Blome-Tillmann (2013), effective communication lives off of understanding hidden cues and intentions. In terms of professional communication, implicature can also be an important asset, for example in addressing shortcomings, accusations or else. The indirectness of some utterances may as well convey direct messages,

yet without getting blunt (Cooren & Sanders, 2002). Another important aspect I would like to cover is the fact, that previously existing knowledge, for example from a previous conversation has a distinct influence on the overall context of utterances as well, making social situations and interactions crucial aspects of acknowledging the context (Benotti & Blackburn, 2014).

One can translate this into easy everyday scenarios, for example picture a family that has lost their home during a housefire, while at the same time you happen upon the information that one of them has also lost a 20-Dollar bill. The condolence "*I am very sorry for your loss*" is obviously referring to the housefire and not the banknote, which will most certainly be interpreted in the right way, through a common basis of knowledge, manners and contextual meaning.

At the intersection of language correctness and implicature, there is an interesting observation of how grammar contributes to the understanding of certain utterances and how slight changes can alter the meaning of a sentence tremendously, implying specific meanings in ever so slight grammatical changes. This has been thoroughly investigated for definite vs. indefinite articles, for example (Hawkins, 1991).



## **The Cooperative Principle according to Grice**

Grice introduced his Cooperative Principle by stating, that participants in a conversation aim to cooperate with one another to add meaning to the conversation and make it effective for either side. In his opinion, this principle is governed by four essential maxims. According to the *maxim of quantity*, speakers shall provide as much information as needed, but no more. This includes giving precise information according to the needs of the counterpart, but not adding irrelevant information. The *maxim of quality* essentially demands truthfulness, which translates in two ways to a conversation: on the one hand, one shall be honest as to not give false information, on the other hand no information shall be presented as a fact, unless it is supported by some sort of evidence. The *maxim of relation* demands the speaker to stay relevant to the conversation in the first place, which means there shall be no utterances that abruptly change topics or the direction of the conversation. The *maxim of manner* requires a speaker to avoid ambiguity in order to stay clear and concise, adhere to logical order and anticipate misunderstandings, as to avoid confusing language, ambiguous statements and ones that make no sense (Grice, 1975).

After Grice's foundational work, many adaptations and extensions of his ideas were adopted in further research and elaborations. Sperber & Wilson (1986) state, that human communication is guided by a general tendency to pursue optimal relevance. According to them, relevance is an expectation of both

listener and speaker likewise, and thus, the conversation is guided towards an optimal amount of relevance for both sides. While the listener will identify relevant information in the utterance of the speaker, upon which their interpretation will depend, the speaker will try to outline relevance in their utterings through specific schemes. Moreover, Levinson's "*Pragmatics*" (1983) suggests, that Grice's maxims adjust themselves to context, since they are not universally applicable and depend on different linguistic and cultural contexts and structures. That is, their interpretations and adaptations change as well, because they are heavily influenced by cultural backgrounds and situational factors. This is an important aspect in the realm of higher education, since we seek to combine conversational fluency and linguistic correctness with psychological knowledge, that is very much influenced by cultural sensitivity, especially in modern age communication. Since effective communication requires adaptation to cultural backgrounds, we cannot teach any conversational principles as universally true, but must respect the fact, that interpretation depends on the listener or reader. Knowledge about backgrounds can leverage the adaptation of one's conversational style to the respective context. Again, the *Theory of Mind* comes into play.

Interestingly, violation of the aforementioned communication maxims does not necessarily mean hindering the conversation. In the context of implicature, it can even be necessary to deviate from them, in order to convey deeper meaning or specific

conversational elements. Creating conversational implicatures, while made carefully, may enrich the conversation through adding elements like humor or sarcasm, given they are understood in the respective context (Bi, 2019). For higher education, that means fostering an ability to decipher those cues can aid in deeper understanding of conversational contexts and bridge that knowledge to own constructions where applicable. Of course, I have to acknowledge, that a certain level of creativity is required to act upon that knowledge with precision, especially when it comes to styles like sarcasm, and it has to be applied carefully. Yet, supporting a sense of more nuanced understanding is certainly the first step.

## Chapter 5: Pragmatic Variation

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The concept of Pragmatic Variation, and its relevance to sociolinguistics lies in the idea, that beyond having different linguistic concepts, differences in language use in speakers, are deeper-rooted and extend to context and meaning just as well. Cultural, social and situational contexts form a large part of the interpretation of an utterance. Pragmatic Variation, as introduced by Thomas (1983), tries to explain, that the differences in language use stem from the different backgrounds of people. Differences in language and its interpretation have a lot to do with thoughts on politeness and varying perspectives on polite communication. Therefore, pragmatics imply, that in different contexts, the perceived politeness can vary. Distinctions in the use of language must therefore be observed through different lenses, one of which is cultural sensitivity (Holmes, 1995). This perspective aligns with an earlier work by Leech (1983), that constitutes the *Politeness Principle*, which builds on specific maxims, similar to Grice's. According to Leech, who presents a systematic approach to politeness, indirectness and formality are important indicators in that regard. People have a natural desire to maintain social harmony and thus, choice of language can vary across social contexts. Relying on a reciprocity principle, the interpretation of language used by others strongly aligns with the cultural background, that has shaped own language use. With relevance to Pragmatic

Variation, social backgrounds that have brought forth the own understanding of one's utterances influences the perception of those made by others (Tannen, 1984).

In foreign language education, Pragmatic Variation is a key aspect of learning pragmatic conventions in the realm of societal values, because intentions may just be hidden in the context and beyond the linguistic content. Picking up on more subtle hints is something that requires practice and a nuanced understanding and knowledge on variational pragmatics (Barron, 2005; Roever, 2013).

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