Chapter Seven

PRAGMATICS, INTENTION, AND IMPLICATION

Many linguists have tried to sweep pragmatics under the rug as not being “true” linguistics, an attitude that is happily changing. Language production and comprehension can be analyzed only in the pragmatic usage. All analyses of language data have to proceed from a consideration of the discourses that sentences, both uttered and written, are embedded in. Realizing that all language is discourse based empowers analyses of speech and writing. Context-free explanations do not work. Pragmatic analyses include intention and implication, both of which impel actual speech forms and also guide the hearer’s interpretation of meaning.


Those aspects of meaning which cannot be explained by the breakdown of words in relation to syntactic forms are often relegated to PRAGMATICS. Gordon and Lakoff (1975, p. 83) succinctly characterize this by noting “... under certain circumstances, saying one thing may entail the communication of another.” In practice, it has proven difficult to the point of impossible to draw borders which delimit the scope of semantics, semiotics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics itself (Levinson 1983, pp. 1–15; Fillmore 1984). As Kearns (1984, p. 163) avers “... we do not begin with syntax and then add semantics; the semantics is prior.”

Many linguistic scholars have labored long and hard to maintain a boundary between language itself and the practical rules for its use (Fromkin 1975). Nevertheless, it has been abundantly clear for a very long time that there is no way to divide the two (Chaika 1977, 1981, 1982b; 1989). Fauconnier (1985) emphasizes that language is pragmatics and is structured for pragmatic purposes. He gives as an instance that there is an assumption that there is a link between an author and his works, so that “Plato is on the top shelf” typically means “the book by
Plato..." In Fauconnier’s terms, a TRIGGER, the antecedent of the statement, is linked to the TARGET, what is intended to be referred to. These linkages are pragmatic functions. In disrupted psychotic speech like word salads, it is precisely these kinds of triggers toward targets that are lacking.


Because language is essentially pragmatic, meanings are not always derivable by dissecting the words into their component features, nor by matching the syntax used with actual meaning. For instance,

1A. S (in a friend’s kitchen): Mmm. Something smells good.

pragmatically means “I’d like the food that smells so good.” Note here, also, that although the speaker uses the indefinite something and there is a universe of good-smelling nonfood items, in fact 1A will be understood to mean “food.” The reason for this is that it is socially unacceptable to ask for food in our society. Hence, typically we ask for food in language which does not directly request, but which nevertheless is unambiguously a request; therefore elicits a response as if it were a straightforward request. Note, for instance, one possible response to 1A.

1B. H: I’m sorry, but it’s for Mary’s birthday party.

This would appear to be a bizarre response to the actual message of 1A in terms of a conventional semantic interpretation according to the features of meaning of the component words. There has been nothing overtly declared in 1A that the speaker of 1B could be apologizing for. However, if one knows the social restriction on directly asking for food, as well as the fact derived from experience (Kearns 1984, pp. 85–121) that good smelling food tastes good, such an exchange quite ordinarily means what it does. All that is needed for proper interpretation is reliance on the discourse rule that one does not state what is known to all parties in the context, unless one wishes to imply something else. In this instance, the hearer usually infers that the speaker commented on the odor because he or she wishes to eat (Sacks 1964–1972; Chaika 1989, p. 125).

Since we are talking about common, uneventful speech events, we cannot exclude them from linguistic analysis by throwing them into a wastebasket labelled pragmatics or semiotics. Language is pragmatic. It is semiotic.

We have already seen that languages contain orderly syntactic rules that these rules in and of themselves describe how we produce our language. The do-support rule demonstrated in Chapter 4 is a prime example. The rules for forming questions seem quite evident and unyielding:

in order to form questions in English invert the first member of the verb auxiliary before the subject, but if there is no auxiliary substitute do in the number and tense appropriate to the rest.

The problem is that many questions in social interaction do not appear in question form, nor are all syntactically well formed questions really questions. Syntactic rules exist, but without reference to motive, context, and social rules of obligation, one cannot explain how syntactic forms are actually interpreted in given interactions. For instance, it is common to hear questions like:

2A. Is the Pope Catholic?
2B. Does a bear live in the woods?

These apparent questions aren't questions at all. They are answers, specifically the answer “yes.” Moreover, such answers also imply “the answer should be obvious to you.” In order to know that, one must

- share cultural knowledge with the speaker.
- assess the context as appropriate for bantering

Although they are regarded as stringently rule-governed, overt syntactic forms such as questions and declarative statements may actually take on different roles in actual discourse, roles not accounted for in their rules. A statement can actually be a question, as in 2A and B above. There is nothing in the actual words and syntax used that would enable the correct semantic interpretation. Rather, the two social conditions explain the meaning. The first condition is fulfilled because we know who the Pope is and that he has to be a Catholic; therefore, the answer to 2A is “yes.” Instead of saying this, the speaker has offered an obvious question to which “yes” is the answer. We will shortly see an analogous situation in which a syntactically declarative sentence is a question. Then, too, a question can really be an imperative.

Although people usually think of speech as a way of stating propositions and conveying information, it frequently fulfills neither of these functions. Much speech serves the purpose of social bonding, just shootin' the breeze and passin' the time of day (Chaika 1989, pp. 43, 44, 61, 96, 117). These are out of the provenance of this discussion.

Austin (1962) delivered a now famous series of lectures entitled *How to Do Things with Words* which introduced the idea of speech acts. This has been refined and expanded by numerous scholars, notably Searle (1969), Gordon and Lakoff (1975), Bach and Harnish (1979), and Kearns (1984), drastically changing our minds about how meaning is given and gotten. Austin claimed that much speech actually is a way of doing things like betting, guaranteeing, in warning, describing, asserting, commanding, ordering, requesting, criticizing, apologizing, censuring, welcoming, promising, objecting, demanding, and arguing.¹ These they called the *illocutionary forces* of language.

Certain verbs known as *performatives* have been isolated as those that explicitly state the illocutionary force. This does not mean that such verbs have to precede or follow a statement for it to have an illocutionary force. Typically, they don't appear at all, but one way to test for illocutionary force is to preface a utterance with "I hereby" + the appropriate performative, as in "I hereby warn you..." If the meaning and force remain the same, then the original utterance is considered to have had the illocutionary force denoted by the performative. For instance, one can say

3A. Get out of here

This admits of the paraphrase

3B. I hereby command you to get out of here.

If, indeed, 3A means 3B, then we can say that 3A has the illocutionary force of a command. This does not mean that "Get out of here" always has that force, however. For instance, if my husband is teasing me, and I laughingly say, "Get out of here," that can't be paraphrased by 3B; therefore, in that instance, the "get out of here" is not a true command. It has the force of a compliment on his bantering.

3C. Someone's a little noisy.
3D. This place stinks.
Both of these can mean 3B “get out of here,” in one of their possible senses. That is, both are paraphrasable as “I hereby command you to leave.” 3C can also mean “I hereby warn you to keep quiet.” 3D can mean “I hereby warn you to clean up.” Actually, these paraphrases are almost absurdly strained, and many native speakers who can easily understand the illocutionary force and can easily paraphrase it accurately would never think of the hereby-test. I would say a better one is to paraphrase using the canonical syntactic form. 3C can be restated by, “get out of here.” This is the canonical syntactic form of an imperative. In another circumstance, it could be “be quiet,” another imperative.

Recognition of the illocutionary force, expressed explicitly or implicitly, explains the polysemy of any given utterance, and provides us with a heuristic for determining which meaning is to be taken in a given instance. For instance, if a friend, X, asks me to dinner, I might reply “I’m eating with Gwendolyn tonight.” What this actually means depends on the relationship between X and Gwendolyn. If Gwendolyn irritates X, then X will take my utterance as a warning. If I say the same thing to another friend who is also friendly with Gwendolyn and likes her, then the same utterance would have the force of an invitation. To yet another who doesn’t know Gwendolyn, it becomes merely an apology.

Additionally, as Silverstein (1987) demonstrates, there are illocutionary functions in language which do not have a corresponding illocutionary verb. One example is insult. There is no way to say “I hereby insult you that . . . ” although one can clearly insult another by overt words or by such matters as intonation and stress. Often insults are more indirect since insulting is an overt act of aggression. Still, one can speak of the act of insulting.

We can usually recognize an insult directed at others or ourselves. Certainly, people sometimes fail to recognize a particular insult, just as they sometimes think an insult was intended when it was not. Paranoids, for instance, constantly misinterpret utterances as constituting threats or insults, even though the speaker denies such intent and others present do not find a judgment of insult to be warranted. It is true after all that speakers pretend they didn’t mean to insult or threaten when, in fact, they did. At some times in his or her life, the paranoid individual may well have been justified in assuming insult in the face of the insulter’s denial. The major difference between a person who is paranoid and one who is not is that the former more readily judge remarks as being
insulting or threatening. If speech acts were not essentially polysemous, then perhaps people would not be paranoid.

Silverstein (1987, pp. 26–28) insightfully declares that explicit performative constructions can be used nonperformatively as well. When this occurs, the performative “... constitutes the way one can DISCOURSE ABOUT [caps his] ... events of social action ...” An instance is warn in its illocutionary function as in “I hereby warn you ...” This has quite a different force than when it is used in the preterit, as in “I warned you.

There are many details of Austin’s and Searle’s formulations which have been validly questioned, but the basic premises hold. Language is essentially social. It is not necessarily utilized to inform, although it can be. Lecturing, for instance, is speech primarily to inform. As such, lecturing typically occurs in settings like classrooms and auditoriums, which exist for the function of informing. The degree to which society restricts language in its informative function is illustrated by our avoidance of a person who habitually lectures, that is, informs us all of the time. Such a person is a bore. Informing is a part-time function of language.

Given the social purposes of language, one might well expect that psychotic speech shows rather too little illocution. Johnston (1985, p. 81) claims that developmentally disordered children, notably the autistic, show an inability to handle illocutions effectively, a finding consonant with the general social disability of such children. The disordered speech most typically considered schizophrenic also lacks illocutionary force. That is one of the problems with it. We can find no social purpose in much of it. In other words, a measure of schizophrenic social disability is seen in the infrequency of illocution in peculiarly schizophrenic language. This does not mean that schizophrenics suffer only from a social disability, as claimed by Rutter (1985).

Because speech act theory demonstrates that utterances can mean something quite different from what a segmentation of words and syntax would yield, some people have mistakenly assumed that one can willy-nilly supply “missing” phrases and sentences in highly deviant discourse to make it all come out normal. The reasoning seems to be, “if speech acts show us that much is not actually stated, then let us assume that deviant schizophrenic speech is deviant only because they left out a bit too much.” However, speech act theory allows one to fill in unspoken items only by principled means.

Meaning is dependent on perceived intent. Sanders (1987, p. 75) goes so far as to say that it is a truism that "uttering an expression of language is always volitional and therefore purposeful." Needless to say, he was not talking of an impaired population, although, independently, psychiatry has traditionally operated on this presumption as well.

Searle (1983, p. 150) gives a pragmatic view of intention, showing that rules become progressively irrelevant as one becomes proficient, so that one's rules become "progressively irrelevant" and one concentrates on one's intended goals. He was speaking directly about physical skills like skiing, but this view can be applied to language skills as well. Many linguistic processes do become internalized. Neural pathways get forged. Lieberman (1984) says this had to have happened in order for language to have evolved. Clearly much of our language expertise is automated. We don't have to think about the initial sound in a word we intend to retrieve. If we intend to talk about a car, we don't have to stop to think of its first sound, then the second, and the last. Years of teaching phonetics have shown me how difficult it is even to analyze the actual sounds one uses in words. Similarly, for ordinary spoken sentences, we don't have to think about the grammar rules we have to apply. All we do is intend to convey a message and our language processors take over. It is only when encoding new or difficult things that conscious choices have to be made once one knows one's native language. Because speech is prime, most people experience difficulty when having to write their thoughts down because that function is not so automated as speech.

Searle (1983 p. 29) declares:

It is the performance of the utterance act with a certain set of intentions that converts the utterance act into an illocutionary act and thus imposes Intentionality on the utterance.

Whereas it is true that speakers may announce their intent, typically they do not. If one party does announce intent, they may use a performative, as in

4A. Look, Mabel, I'm **telling** you . . .
4B. I **promise** you that I'll go on a diet next week.
4C. I have to **apologize** to you for my behavior . . .

Besides the use of performative verbs, there are other devices to signal intent overtly such as the [Look + NAME] construction in 4A above.
Words like *please* announce a request. Expressions like *let's talk turkey* indicate an intent to *get down to brass tacks*, that is, to stop *beating around the bush* and to *get to the heart of the matter*. All of these indicate that the speaker wishes to negotiate directly without polite indirection. The reason that they sound so blunt is that in most social circumstances intention is deduced not overtly stated.

Our intention or motive shapes what we choose to say and how we are going to say it. Speech acts include intention as part of their meaning (Bach and Harnish 1979, pp. xiv–xv, 12; VanDijk 1980, p. 265; Searle 1983, pp. 26–29; 145–155). In fact, speech acts cannot be interpreted unless one comprehends the intent behind them. The rejoinder, “What did you mean by that?” challenges a speaker’s intention in saying what he or she did. This is never used to mean, “What was your meaning?” It always means “what was your motive?” It is never a way of asking the meaning of the words and syntax used. If hearers cannot ascertain that kind of meaning the correct response is “Huh?,” “Excuse me, but I don’t quite understand,” or a variety of other requests for a paraphrase or repetition of what was said.

An example of genuinely misunderstood intent was one that I observed in the faculty lounge. When a male professor said to a female one, “Lord, this place is dirty.” The female then got up and started to clear the coffee cups and napkins off the tables. The male then said, “I didn’t want you to clean up. Where’s the janitor?”

A playful misinterpretation of intent occurs if I murmur, “It’s a little noisy in here.” and my son responds, “Yes it is,” without doing anything to make the noise abate. He pretends that he has failed to perceive my intent in commenting on the noise. Like so much humor, this works as a play on ordinary pragmatic strategies which we share. He treats my utterance as a statement of fact not as a command to lower the volume. A good deal of humor depends on such misperceptions, as in the exchange:

[walking on street] S: Excuse me, sir. Do you know where the Palace Hotel is?

H: Yes. [walks on]

Silverstein (1987) maintains that illocutionary acts “represent... intents to perform effective, socially understood acts with speech” (p. 28).” Intention has to be derived as part of the meaning of the utterance. As we have just seen, the particular illocution that we understand depends on what we perceive the speaker's intention to be, so that “it’s noisy here” could
be an excuse for my leaving the room, or it could be a command to be quiet. The speech act itself is contained in the intention of its utterance.

Brown and Yule (1983, pp. 68–88; 77–78) contend that there is no way to analyze the topic of another’s speech without knowing why something was said; that is, its intent. Without knowing the speaker’s intent, there is no way to evaluate his or her contribution to a conversation either. We don’t even know if the person is cooperating and attempting to talk on the same subject we are. If one assumes that a speaker is deliberately being obscure, then one ascribes a lack of cooperation to him or her.

DeBeaugrande and Dressier (1981, p. 112) assert that the only way utterances can be used to communicate is if the speaker intends them to be communicated and the hearer accepts them as intended. Such acceptance is a usual practice. Hearers almost always do accept utterances as intended. Therein lies a problem. Intent is derived from what the speaker has said and the general context of utterance, such context including the relationship and mutual history of the interactors. SD productions do not provide the normal cues necessary to determine intent, hence, to determine meaning. If we misperceive intent we will misperceive meaning. Notice my contention is not that the speech is purposeless. The patient might very well have intended something, but could not say it coherently enough to be understood.

Our familiarity with the forms of speech acts also aids in our interpretation. With an SD population, utterances may not be evocative of any particular speech acts and words may be mismatched to the context. The question then becomes not so much “What was the intent?” but “Can we interpret this at all? Can we ascertain what the intent was? If so, how?” For instance, what could possibly be the intent of

5. I had a little goldfish too like a clown. Happy Halloween down.
6. St. Valentine’s Day is the official breedin’ season of birds. All buzzards can coo. I like to see it pronounced buzzards rightly. They work hard. So do parakeets.

Sanders (1987, p. 76) attempts to show that it is possible to assign meaning even when one can not determine what illocutionary force of a sentence. His example is a sign:

We will be closed for inventory Sunday and Monday, June 12–13, and will reopen at noon on Tuesday, June 14.

He maintains that we do not know whether or not this is an excuse, a warning, advice, a promise, or an invitation to return. That is, we don’t
know the intent, but we do know the meaning. It seems to me to be more correct to say that we understand the event described, but we don't understand its meaning.

Sanders is correct that the same sentence could be used in all of those illocutionary forces. It is, therefore, ambiguous. However, it would be quite strange if the reader did not consider it first and foremost as an invitation to return after those dates. If the sign were posted before those dates, and if the store sold items that people could not readily purchase elsewhere, or items that cost a great deal more elsewhere, then, most likely, people would take it as a warning and an invitation to stock up before those dates. In fact, the "what can it possibly mean in this context" strategy (Chaika 1976), kicks in so that the reader matches the sentence with the date and time, the probable intentions of the poster of the sign, and other relevant knowledge to decide the illocutionary force. The illocutionary force may be potentially ambiguous, but like other ambiguities, it is resolvable by reference to the context. If it is not so resolvable, then the recipient of the message can resort to overt questioning like, "What did you mean by that?" or "What am I supposed to be getting out of that?" SD psychotics rarely can answer such questions relevantly.

An examination of discourse regarded as particularly schizophrenic reveals a paucity in the very sorts of paraphrasing and metalinguistic comments that show a stable intention or purpose in communication. Much of the speech is not paraphrasable at all, but all normal speech is. Nunberg (p. 204) says that we assume that "... speakers have no ulterior motive for behaving in a way that is irrational from a strictly informational point of view." Many of the interpretations of psychotic speech we see (i.e., Forrest 1976; Searles 1967) proceeds from a basic strategy of assuming that irrational speech can derive from rational goals, and that the speech is merely suffering from oblique phrasing. If impairment of speech processes is so degraded that normal decoding processes do not work, we cannot assume a purpose in it.


Besides motive and intent, another vital pragmatic consideration figures strongly in interpretation. Part of meaning lies in the social circumstances in which a meaning is appropriate, the very PRECONDITION for its utterance. Austin's term for these are FELICITY-conditions (Lyons
An example is the statement perceived as a question:

7. You live in Providence.

This evokes a reply appropriate to the question “Do you live in Providence?” such as “Yes . . .” or “No, I live in Foster.”

Labov and Fanshel (1977, p. 78) explain that statements will be heard as questions, commands, or other requests if the preconditions for uttering them are met. In order to ask a question successfully, one must have the right to ask that question, the hearer must have the knowledge to answer it, and in some way must have an obligation to respond. If these three conditions are met, then, as in 7 the hearer will act as if she had been asked a question in canonical question form. Similarly, in order for a command to be successful, the commander must have the right to command and the hearer has the obligation to obey that command or is willing to. If those conditions are met, then the hearer will respond as if the command had been given in imperative form. For instance, if a boss asks “Any more coffee?” the secretary might answer, “Oh, I’ll make some right away.” Alternatively, she might say, “Oh, I’m sorry, but I didn’t get a chance to buy any beans.” An apology for noncompliance is a socially proper response in our society to what we hear as commands, even those not in overt imperative form. The essentially social rules of preconditions behind utterances override the actual syntactic form of messages.

Labov and Fanshel (1977) show how a mother manipulates her daughter by playing with these preconditions. Rhoda is locked into a power struggle with her mother. The mother goes to visit a sister, leaving Rhoda to handle the domestic affairs at home. Rhoda does not want to have to admit overtly that she needs the mother at home, so Rhoda asks, “Well, when do you plan t’come home?” The mother responds with “Oh, why?” in order to force Rhoda to admit that she needs help. The mother clinches it by saying “Well, why don’t you tell Phyllis that [you need my help at home]” Phyllis is Rhoda’s sister. Labov and Fanshel show that Rhoda has been outmaneuvered on two counts. First, the mother has forced the admission from Rhoda. Second, it is up to the mother to decide when she is coming home. It is not Phyllis’ place to do that. Considering this, the mother has also managed to tell Rhoda that Phyllis is the favored daughter, and has done so simply by manipulation of the
preconditions for questioning. Notice that the claim here is based upon
general rules for interaction.

The difference between a truth-conditional interpretation and a prag­
matic one is illustrated by:

7. Max broke the crystal stemware.

If, indeed, Max has broken the item(s) referred to in 7, this would be
considered to be in the realm of semantics. However, if this is said as
a way of commenting on Max's clumsiness or, alternatively, on his
vindictiveness, then we would be dealing with pragmatics. The actual
meaning derived depends on the context of the utterance, including
what the speaker and hearer have already said, what their topic of
conversation is, what they know about Max from other encounters both
with and without him, and what their motives are or are presumed to be.

If one accepts a dichotomy between semantics and pragmatics such
that truth conditional statements alone belong in the former category,
then semantics can virtually never account for meaning in social inter­
action. This applies mutatis mutandis to written sentences, except, of
course, those which have been deliberately fabricated to show a dichot­
omy between semantics and pragmatics.

Meaning is actuated as much by implication as by direct statements.4
By definition, implication refers to meanings not directly encoded onto
syntactic structures or on the lexical items chosen in a given expression,
but this does not mean that an utterance means whatever we wish it to.
There are strategies and recognized conventions in a language that
constrain interpretation in any given instance.

Although the necessary processes in derivation of meaning in the
sorts of actual circumstances depicted above are more than passingly
embarrassing for those committed to context-free grammars or to the
establishment of algorithms to explain syntax and semantics, we cannot
simply relegate them to some convenient bin labelled "pragmatics" or
"semiotics." Pragmatics explains the actual sentences and words that are
used in interactions. It is not peripheral to linguistics. In fact, any syntax
that doesn't include pragmatics is trivial because it doesn't explain how
people actually use grammar, nor does it explain how listeners derive
meaning. Thus, it can be seen that the semantic strategies frequently
relegated to pragmatics are part and parcel of how we produce and
interpret language.

Fillmore (1981, p. 147) sums up the pragmatic approach to meaning
... an analysis [should be] carried out in sociolinguistic terms in which the identity, location, and relative social statuses of the participants in the communication act are taken into account, together with a description of the social or institutional occasion within which the discourse was observed or within which it could be produced. Of particular interest, of course, is the correlation of these items with formal linguistic phenomena.

Fillmore (1984, p. 88) goes so far as to say that “there is probably no need for a level of semantic representation...” He argues (p. 89) that one learns and understands words in contexts, and that words are used in association with those contexts. He gives as an example the term being on land, saying that this evokes a context of comparison with being at sea, whereas being on the ground evokes a contrast with being in the air. The truth conditional meaning, including the meaning derivable from dissecting each word into its component features cannot account for the actual meaning of any of these phrases. For instance, all one gains from such a dissection of being on land is that it refers to the physical state of being on dry land. In practice, however, that is not its meaning. If asked where S is phoning from, for instance, given the response “I'm on land,” H would be correct in assuming that the speaker had recently disembarked even if H did not even know S's much less S's travel plans.

Fillmore (p. 91) offers yet another such example, this time the sentence: 8. The menfolk returned at sundown.

He points out, rightly I think, this sentence wouldn't occur in an all male community of workers, as, in actual usage, the word menfolk implies a contrast with females and children. Despite the fact that the word literally means “men,” it cannot be used to refer to men unless they are in a heterogeneous community.

It is very important to take note of the kinds of arguments marshalled above to justify interpretation. While it is true that the actual meaning of an utterance may be different from what has ostensibly been said, there are clear bounds on possible interpretations. Appeal is made to statable rules of discourse interpretation, rules which include but are not limited to cultural and social facts, rules which are empirically verifiable by investigating what meanings native speakers derive from interactions presented to them. Such interpretations do not depend on theoretical constructs formulated in the absence of inquiry into actual speech behavior.

Grice (1975; 1981) spoke of implicatures arising from the violation of the four **CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS**: quality, quantity, relation, and manner (p. 45). These maxims entail such principles of discourse as

- Say what you believe to be true.
- Do not say anything for which you lack adequate evidence.
- Be as informative as required for the purpose of current exchange.
- Don't say more than required.
- Say what is relevant to the matter at hand.
- Be orderly, unambiguous, and not obscure.

It is certainly obvious that these maxims are regularly violated. People do lie, do give opinions with no evidence for them, do hold back information, are prolix, mislead intentionally or unintentionally by ambiguity, poor phrasing, and poorly sequenced narration. Then, too, what does Grice mean by *required*? How is one to know exactly how much is required? What is too little, and what too much? What will a hearer find relevant, and what is likely to strike a hearer as being not relevant or ambiguous? The partial answer to such questions is that whatever satisfies a cospeaker is enough. It is unlikely that we will ever have a firm measure which will tell us when “enough” has been achieved. There are sufficient linguistic and paralinguistic resources for cospeakers to indicate whether or not “enough” has been provided.

Grice did not say that conversants actually are cooperative, just that they are presumed to be, and from this, important facets of meaning derive. Grice (1975, p. 45) says that “Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks and would not be rational if they did.” Of course, it is just such disconnected utterances which gives us the feeling that certain speech is “schizophrenic.” The question then is whether psychotic speech flouts (Grice’s term) the maxims. Certainly normal speakers do, but there is a qualitative difference between normal flouting and psychotic SD productions. The term *flout* itself implies volition and when we examine Grice’s examples of flouting we easily understand the volition behind them. That is the flouting is a deliberate way to give an implication.
[8] Violating the Maxim of Quality.

One violation of the maxim of quality is lying. Lies do not necessarily violate language rules. They violate the larger conversational rules such as Grice’s maxim of quality, Searle’s cooperation principle, and Gordon and Lakoff’s sincerity principle (1975). Actually, the lie consists of falsifying intent, not necessarily of falsifying information. Of course, it can consist of both.

The stigma of lying inheres in its status as a violation of trust. With the exception of “white lies,” lying is considered particularly despicable. The white lie is represented as being intended to ameliorate the anguish that would proceed from full disclosure. Notice that this type of lie is representable as an innocent, hence not real, violation of the maxim of quality because the intent of S is beneficent.

But what of the violation that has neither an intent to deceive nor to ameliorate? If the S believes that the given utterance is true, then it is error or delusion. If S knows that it is not true and is not offering it as truth, then it is fantasy. A genuine lie occurs only if S knows that it is not true and intends to offer it as truth.

Carlson (1983, pp. 103-104) denies that implicature is derivable from violations, asserting that if true violations of conversation occur, then incorrect implications result. It is true that people deliberately deceive, but in that case, the speaker is banking on the hearer’s interpreting according to usual premises. The lie works only if the hearer assumes that the truth has been told.


There are always meanings left unsaid, indeed, which must be left unsaid. To specify each and every meaning and connotation intended would slow down interaction drastically. Because this would also lead to tedious belaboring of point upon point, cospeakers would get so mired in detail that they would lose the thread of organization in the communication. A plethora of information makes it difficult to get the point of what is being said. Moreover, as we have seen (Chapter 6), cohesion is enhanced by having hearers match the utterance to the context and fill in what has not been said.

Levinson (1983, p. 106) shows how the maxim of quantity adds “... to most utterances a pragmatic inference ... to the effect that the statement
presented is the strongest, or most informative that can be made in the situation." as in

9A. Nigel has fourteen children.

The implicature here is that Nigel has no more and no less than fourteen children. This is readily seen if one adds only to 9A, as in

9B. Nigel has only fourteen children.

9A and B are usually assumed to be synonymous. It would be more than passingly odd, indeed irritating, if, the speaker of 9A at a later time said, "Now, Nigel's fifteenth child..." An appropriate response to that would be "I thought you said that Nigel has only fourteen children!" This response proves the implication that has been given when using the nonmodified term of quantification, as in 9A above.

The bizarreness of some psychotic speech is explicable in terms of a violation of quantity. The following response is to a request to identify the color on a chip from the Farnsworth-Munsell disc #39 (Cohen 1978, 1-34). The comment within the parens is Cohen's).

10A. Green (SHOUTS!). Hold on, the other is too! In the garden such a green is unlikely. The other is more gardenreal, piecemeal, oatmeal green, greenreal, filmreal, greenreal.

The patient correctly identifies the disc, but then goes on to add clearly extraneous material which goes way beyond what is needed to identify the disc. Moreover, as the response continues it adds on increasingly extraneous verbiage.


The maxim of relation could well be termed the maxim of assumed relation. As part of our making sense of utterances, we assume a relevance (Chapters 9 and 10). Our doing this leads to some interesting implications. For instance, one of the ways that people waffle, is to imply relevance where none exists.

For instance, Z wishes to take a day out of work for personal reasons, but has no "personal days" left, so he informs the boss that he is not coming in Monday. When the boss asks why, he responds, perhaps with truth, "I'm having some nasty physical problems I'd rather not talk about." The boss naturally assumes that the day off is related to the problems, even if it is not. Moreover, the boss assumes that the problems
are not self-imposed, like having a hangover from a wild party Sunday. Here the maxim of relevance leads to implications based upon the hearer’s strategy of assuming relevance.

Perhaps the trait many would consider most characteristic of schizophrenic speech,\(^7\) is its frequent inappropriateness to whatever task is at hand, or, rather, the difficulty in uncovering any relevance. Again using Cohen's (1978) data elicited from Farnsworth-Munsell disc #39:

10B. The eentsy beentsy spider went up his mother’s spot. Out came the rain the color of green snot.
10C. This isn't such a bad green. Reminds me of a picnic on the green. Yes! Picnic green.

One problem with 10B is that the situation called for a direct answer as the first part of the response. The patient nowhere indicates that this is an answer to the question posed. One supposes it must have been an answer only by the reference to green snot. Similarly, 10C starts with a value judgment rather than the direct labelling of the color. Then, in the reverse order of what the speaker of 10A did, he goes from the extraneous to the specific. Neither the value judgment nor the comparison is called for here, as the conventions of American questioning demand that first one must answer the question asked as directly and economically as possible.


The maxim requiring speakers to be orderly results in the implication that if actions are presented in a certain order, that is the order in which they occurred. For instance, to use his example

11A. Taking off his trousers, the King of France went to bed.
11B. The King of France took off his trousers and went to bed.
11C. The King of France went to bed and took off his trousers.

The implication is clear in the first two that the King took his trousers off first, but in the third, he went to bed before divesting himself of trousers. It is, of course, possible to present events out of their actual order, but only by using words indicating the actual order, as in

11D. Before he went to bed, the King of France took off his trousers.
11E. After he went to bed, the King of France took off his trousers.
Similarly, cause and effect can be implied by order of presentation, as in

12A. She went skiing and broke her leg.

The implication is that the skiing was the cause of the injury. Notice the change in meaning of

12B. She broke her leg and went skiing.

So strong is the assumption that the order in which utterances are given is significant for interpretation that some implications can simply occur by juxtaposing two comments. Sometimes this itself creates a lie. For instance, consider this exchange

13A. Max: Bobby’s gas station was robbed last night.
13B. Tony: I saw Melvyn there at midnight.

The implication is that Melvyn must have committed the robbery. Why else would Tony have made that remark localizing someone’s presence at a time that qualified as being the time of robbery. Note that this implication can be directly negated

13C. Max: No, dummy. Melvyn noticed the open door and went to check it out. He was the one who called the police! He couldn’t have done it.

The very denial in 13C shows the implicated meaning caused by the juxtaposition. Like the giving of false information, creations of false implication do not always proceed from the desire to deceive. There can be many sources of violations. They can be a result of poor judgment of what the context requires, of cross-cultural differences in communicative practices, of misexecution of intended speech, or of impaired faculties.

Violation of orderings abound in schizophrenic speech, so much so that even simple cause and effect relations are misordered. This occurs when there is no implication derivable from such misordering, as in

14A. She leaves the ice cream and eats it.
14B. She ate the ice cream and brought it home.

Insufficient contextualizing also causes problems of interpretation. Fauconnier (1985) lays the blame for ambiguity on uncertainties in the discourse situation itself. Context also changes our perception of presuppositions (Gazdar 1978). Carlson (1983, p. 152) claims the contrary situation: that one can almost always invent a context for any sequence of sentences
which seems unrelated. This is too strong a claim. First, in order to prove such a contention even for normal speech, we would have to present subjects with a potpourri of sentences, possibly taken from widely different sources, and then see if they could invent contexts for such a conglomerate of sources. Second, he was speaking of normal linguistic production. One of the problems with disorganized psychotic speech is that it defies our ability to provide a context to make it intelligible. A reprise of two utterances shows the problem:

15A. After John Black has recovered in special neutral form of life the honest bring back to doctor's agents must take John Black out through making up design meaning straight neutral underworld shadow tunnel (Lorenz 1961)

15B. ... you have to have a plausity of amendments to go through for the children's code and it's no mental disturbance of puterience, it is an amorition law. (Laffal 1965)

Finally, even if one can find a context in which those utterances would fit, one still cannot be sure that the speaker intended the unrelated sentences to belong to the invented context.

Along with being disorderly, schizophrenics may also appear obscure and ambiguous, Grice's term for other violations of maxim of order, seen in 15A and B above. If we assume that speech has been purposely produced in accordance with the maxims, the very terms Grice has chosen, obscure and ambiguous, carry as part of their semantic load the "deliberate obfuscating." Hence, except perhaps in scholarly writing, these terms comprise negative evaluation.


To the above maxims, Grice (1981, p. 189) later added yet another:

Facilitate in your form of expression the appropriate reply.

In other words, cospeakers assume that they are to respond according to the form and content of each others' utterances. This is both a social and a linguistic matter. Obviously, such matters as topic and lexical choice are constrained by previous utterances in an interaction, by those of previous interactions or other matters pertinent to the context of interaction. Constructions are also syntactically formed so that certain replies are both possible and invited. To illustrate, how, who, what, when,
and *where* all are words referring to specific constituents of the sentence or of the discourse, asking the cospeaker(s) to supply, respectively, a reason, a person, a thing, a time, and a place. Here, too, one sees that much speech disordered schizophrenic speech is not formed so that it controls responses. For instance

16. My mother’s name was Bill ... And coo? St. Valentine’s day is the start of the breedin’ season of the birds. . . .


The maxims which Grice proposed will generate meaning as much by their being breached as by their being honored (1975, pp. 52–56). Understanding their role in meaning equips us to explain many implicatures in a non-ad hoc manner. For instance, Grice (1982, p. 184) demonstrates the effect of a speaker’s deliberately violating the maxim of quantity by damning with faint praise when asked to give a recommendation is such an example. Consider the situation in which X has applied for a teaching job in a philosophy department, and his mentor, A, writes as a recommendation:

Dear Sir, Mr. X’s handwriting is clear and he is always neatly dressed.

This strongly implies that X is not a good philosopher. Why else would A not mention his abilities? It is not that A is uncooperative. If that were the case, then he or she wouldn’t have written at all. Similarly, if A is X’s mentor, then A must know X’s worth as a philosopher. Since A knows that the future employer is expecting to hear about a person’s abilities relevant to the job being applied for, he or she can assume that if A doesn’t mention those, but instead mentions clearly irrelevant facts, then the employer would get the implication that speaker doesn’t want to say that the person has poor capabilities. A failure to mention relevant information is clearly perceived as evasion, and evasion itself is frequently perceived as an unwillingness to give bad news, in this instance that the candidate is not fit for the job.

What the violations show is that we cannot assume that speakers always or even usually follow conversational maxims, but that *cospeakers typically assume that the maxims are being followed*. In other words, maxims characterize effects on the hearer. They don’t necessarily characterize speaker behavior.
Sanders cautions that the possibility of an implicature does not guarantee that one will be inferred (1987, pp. 67–68). Even when an implicature can potentially be achieved by a breach of a maxim, H may attend only to the propositional content of the utterance. This, of course, can also occur when H realizes that an implicature has been made, but chooses to ignore it. In this instance, H may decide to comment on or otherwise respond to an implicature at a later date as if it had actually been encoded in words.10


The very syntax of a language itself has syntactic forms designed to express the speaker’s attitude towards what he or she is saying. These are MODALITY markers. The examples that spring to mind are the MODAL AUXILIARIES like can, may, might, should, could, will, would, and must. Introductory adverbs like probably, surprisingly, doubtfully, and phrasal adverbs like it is certain that and it is supposed that all fill this function.


MITIGATORS are speech forms which background their messages, lessening the possibility of overt confrontation. They may be used to deny what one feels. These are directly involved in what is called saving face (Goffman 1955), and are important determiners of how messages are given. We have already seen these in the guise of commands or questions that are couched in apparently ordinary statements. Language abounds with mitigators, such as

17A. You’ll never believe this, but . . .
17B. I know I’m no expert, but . . .
17C. And I haven’t got into that but—I don’t know—I—I just—like, you have your set way of doing things and you’re in control . . .

This last, 17C, comes from a conversation between a female schizophrenic and a medical student (Chaika 1981, 1983a). The patient is speaking, trying to indicate disagreement with the medical student. Because social and professional power clearly reside in him, she has to mitigate her expressions of doubt (Chapter 11).

Robin Lakoff (1975) documents such excessive mitigating as being typical of women, showing that they are actually inferior to men in social
status even under the best of circumstances. O'Barr (1982) amends this to include males in an inferior position as well, a discovery he made while investigating weak versus powerful language amongst witnesses in court trials.

Fowler (1985, p. 73) includes mitigators in the category of modality, a sound practice since they can often be used interchangeably, so that the following seem to be equivalent for many contexts

- I might accept his apology.
- Perhaps I will accept his apology.
- It is possible that I will accept his apology.

Fowler also shows that tag questions are mitigators, often used as expressions of doubt. Robin Lakoff pegged these early on as being softeners of assertions, as in

- You're not going, are you?
- Tastes good, doesn't it?

All of the mitigators in language are so pervasive that we frequently don't notice the effect they have on our judgments about the speaker. Sometimes our "intuitive" feeling that someone is especially uncertain and ill at ease arises because of the number of mitigators in his or her speech.

[16] Indirect Meaning.

We have already seen that meaning can be gained directly from the semantic features on words. Factorial analysis of features explains some implications as well (Chapter 5). Many words in and of themselves connote opinion: riot or demonstration; invade or land; instigate or encourage, all can be used to indicate whether or not the speaker approves of what is being spoken. Such terminology is not confined to the press. We even see it in putative objective scholarship. In his book on psycholinguistics, Mowrer speaks of Chomsky as instigating a theory of grammar. The verb alone tells us of Mowrer's disapproval of Chomsky.

Sometimes word choice can indicate far more reaching implications, as in:

18A. The tuna fishermen are still murdering the dolphins.
18B. The tuna fishermen are still killing the dolphins.

The word murder literally means that killing was done by a human to
a human. This is what distinguishes it from kill for instance. As part of the actual meaning of the expressions in 18A, simply by my choice of murder I have claimed that, in my eyes, what the fishermen are doing is as bad as killing humans. We assume that this is my belief because I have chosen that particular verb and it is always presumed that an utterance reflects the speaker’s point of view. This, of course, has tremendous implications about my belief systems, my moral codes, and my empathy.

In contrast, although 18B can be used to express my disapproval of what the tuna fishermen are doing, it does not necessarily entail my belief that causing dolphins to suffer is as wrong as causing people to. However, in context it certainly could both mean and imply what 18A does if, for instance, prior experience with me or overt statements made before 18B established such feelings.

[17] Implicature and the Sentence.

Implication can be effected on the level of the sentence by using or not using certain paraphrases. Thus, one reason for using the passive is to be able to omit the agent or cause, but all the while implying that one was there. Even if the agent or cause is omitted, the implication of a passive is that one or the other was involved, that the proposition is not about something which just happened. This is the difference between “he died” and “he was killed.”

Another implication of an agentless sentence is that the agent is not important enough to mention, or that such mention is beside the point. In this category, there is what I call the “housewifeless” passive, as in

19A. The beds got made.
19B. The dinner is cooked.
19C. The house was cleaned.

These examples of agency or its lack thereof by no means exhaust all of the resources of sentence grammars to create implications, but is sufficient to the task at hand. Kearns (1984, p. 67) maintains that sentences are fundamental in imparting inferential meaning, as we have just seen in the instance of agentless passives [not his example]. The very use of a certain grammatical form creates entailment.

My oft-quoted example (from Cohen 1978) is an interesting example of incompatibility between terms and sentences:

Clay is both a tactile and visual stimulus, so the first simile is fine, but gray is a color, not a sound, so that the "Sounds like gray" is incompatible. The subsequent sentences in this uttered passage do not add any information which would modify the oxymoronic construction entailed by the reference to gray as a sound. Nor do they give any clue as to how sounding like gray is relevant to looking like clay. The individual terms in this utterance cannot be forged into a discourse because of the their fundamental incompatibility. This is not to say that someone could never forge such incompatible terms into a coherent structure by adding other terms to it. That is not the issue. The issue is that the speaker of 20 above has not done so and has given no clues in the given utterance that would allow us to make such additions or to normalize the sequence in any way. Consequently, part of the abnormality of this utterance lies in its incompatible entailments.


Since Grice attempts to distinguish between implicated and direct meanings, he adopts verification procedures in order to provide criteria for determining whether or not a meaning is implied at all as well as for exactly what it is that has been implied. Grice naturally assumes that if there are two kinds of meaning, one inhering in lexical items and syntactic form, and another not arising from linguistic constructions per se, but derivable by implication, then these should be distinguishable by different modes of analysis (1981, p. 185). His first criterion is that what is conversationally implicated is not part of the meaning of the expressions used to convey the implicature. Obviously, if it is part of that meaning, then it is direct statement, not implication. Grice suggests three salient criteria to distinguish implicatures. They are:

- **Deniability**, e.g., they can be denied by demurring "but not necessarily in that order" or "but not in the usual meaning of that word."
- **Nondetachability**, e.g., synonyms give same implication.
- **Calculability**, e.g., they constitute a reasonable inference in the context assuming the cooperative principle; The first criterion simply means that you can deny an implication. For instance, the
implicature that the order of encoding is the order of occurrence

21. The King of France went to bed and divested himself of his
trousers, but not necessarily in that order.

The order of narration in “She ate the ice cream and brought it
home” is literally impossible. Adding “but not necessarily in that
order” does fix it, but, in this case, the fix is perceived as a correction
to a slip-of-the-tongue.

Grice’s second test (1981, p. 186) that of synonymy, says that if syno-
nyms of the expressions actually used provide the same implicature,
then it is unlikely that the implicature inhered in the original words.
Rather, it occurs because of a conversational situation that calls for the
given semantic message. Nunberg (1981), objects that nondetachability
fails as a necessary test for implication because semantic entailments of
conventional messages also are preserved if one uses the right synonym.
Thus, a test based upon synonymy does not separate out implicature
from meanings derivable directly from the expressions used.

Both of these opinions presuppose that exact synonyms can usually be
found for all or most expressions. It is important to note that it is actually
ever extremely difficult to find individual words which are truly synonymous
in the sense of complete substitutability. In the first place, it is quite
usual for synonyms to require somewhat different syntactic frames, as
shown below. Furthermore, typically, as a perusal of any thesaurus
shows, each word has its own network of meanings, and synonymy is
typically a case of partial matches of meanings. For instance, consider
this set: belief, tenet, thought and conviction. Although one can find con-
texts in which any one of these can be selected without changing meaning,
one need not stray far to find contexts in which their synonymy fails.

For instance, I can utilize each of the above nouns in the context of
expressing my belief in God as One. The sentence frame might have to
be changed in accordance with the syntactic frame the different syno-
nyms demand, but I can still say the following are synonymous:

I abide by a belief in God as One.
I hold a tenet that God is One.
I hold the thought that God is One.
I have a conviction that God is One.

All of these entail an implicature that I am either a Jew, a Unitarian,
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or a Moslem, but not a Christian, because Christians believe that God is a Trinity. Although synonymy works well for the religious senses attaching to these words, it certainly doesn't work if conviction is used in the sense of a prosecutor getting a conviction, or if belief is used in the sense of my belief that the color of a tomato I am looking at is red, or if thought is used in a complaint that I just lost my train of thought.

Grice (1981, pp. 187–191) is very adamant that neither deniability nor synonymy comprise final tests for implicature. They are but rules of thumb. The final test rests on his third criterion, calculability, that one is able to give a derivation of the implication. For a derivation to be valid, a principled connection must be constructed between the overtly expressed proposition, the maxim it breached and the resulting implication (Sanders 1987, p. 61). The major obstacle in applying the test of calculability is the degree to which one can come up with an apparently consistent and all-embracing interpretation which impresses by its brilliance and originality but is not verifiable by anything except the analyzers intuitions. Chomskyan linguistics ultimately failed because of its reliance on intuition. The same problem occurs in fields as diverse as literary criticism and psychotherapy.


- specifying its conventional use
- the use to be explained
- information speaker and hearer presuppose about each others’ intentions
- background knowledge
- physical setting
- ... a demonstration, usually in the form of a set of inferences, that the use in question is the best way available to the speaker to the accomplishing a particular conversational purpose ...

I would amend this last to “…the way that works at the moment to attain one’s purpose.” If it does not, the cospeaker may indicate linguistically or not that there is a communicative glitch and the speaker can take another turn, so to speak and reformulate.

In practice, formal distinctions between implied and overtly encoded meaning may not always be easily achieved, because linguistic units do not form an algorithm from which meaning is automatically derivable. Extracting meaning directly from the expressions used relies on prag-
matic strategies (Chaika 1976) as well as syntactico-semantic factoring of meaning. Early on, Gordon and Lakoff (1975, p. 83) showed that implications have their usual literal meanings as well as their implied ones. One of their more amusing examples illustrates this beautifully. If a friend of mine comes up to me and out of the blue confides, “Your husband is faithful,” I would take that as meaning that he is, in fact, being faithful, but I would also get the implication that he has not been faithful in the recent past. If I had earlier voiced doubts about my husband’s faithfulness to this friend, then her comment would be a reassurance that my suspicions are unfounded and no negative implications would be derived. If I had not, the friend’s words would be tantamount to letting me know that I had been deceived.

Sweetser (1987, p. 45) puts it well, pointing out that implication and other indirect speech is parasitic on informational speech. In other words, the indirect meaning is based on the actual utterance in oblique but derivable ways. Some speech inappropriate enough to render usual decoding strategies inoperable may still be at least partly interpretable by reference to normal expectations combined with an analysis of what seems to have gone wrong. We will take this matter up subsequently (Chapter 11) but first other treatments of the question of maxims and implicature.

**[19] Decision-theoretic Strategies.**

Sanders (1987) declares that there is no objective rule which will tell us that a maxim is breached. Rather, in conversations, cospeakers subjectively judge whether or not each others’ contributions are irrelevant, imprecise, insufficient, or insincere. He (p. 64) offers the interesting suggestion that this is done by identifying the cospeaker’s state of mind about whatever is being communicated. For instance, if an utterance does not seem relevant, then the hearer assumes that the speaker thinks that something in the present or past shared context should be bridging the gap between what has just been said and the general topic.

Sanders (1987, p. 65) offers a similar explanation for what happens if the maxim of manner is breached, the maxim which says the speaker must be clear and precise, “... there is a state of affairs that (the speaker considers sufficient to prevent or dissuade him/her from being clearer.” Therefore, in his view, the hearer searches for the implication that results from the disparity between utterance and breached maxim.
By way of demonstration, Sanders offers scenarios, such as that in which a student asks a professor what should be done to prepare for a forthcoming exam, and the professor replies “Read the book.” Because the professor clearly knows the content of the exam, this response breaches the maxim of quantity. Therefore, it may imply at least one of the following or all three:

- it is up to the student to figure that out
- offering advice would reveal too much
- reading is the best preparation.\textsuperscript{14}

The student takes the meaning that best fits his or her view of the professor’s beliefs and attitudes.

Sanders offers an interesting and, I think, important approach to meaning. This is not to say that this is all there is to it, however. Even in such a simple scenario, other implicatures can be taken. If the professor intended to convey the second implication above, the response could easily have responded, “I’m sorry, I can’t help you with that without giving away too much.”

Certain implications arise from a curt, “Read the book.” One implication is that the professor doesn’t like the inquirer, or that the professor considers him or her stupid.\textsuperscript{15} This comes about from the very obviousness of the response. One of the working assumptions of education is that one must read the assigned book in order to prepare for an exam.\textsuperscript{16} The professor’s words can also be construed as being sarcastic, saying, in effect, “You’ve got to be pretty dumb to ask me that.”

If prior experience warrants it, the student may simply assume that the professor is in a bad mood that day. This highlights the truism that the more experience cospeakers share the more accurate they are in interpreting the other’s implicata. It is for this reason that one feels another “isn’t so bad” as one gets to know, hence to understand, him or her. This proposition entails a discussion of relevance and of mutual knowledge. Before tackling these, we must examine Carlson’s (1983) game-theoretic model of discourse and compare it to the decision-theoretic model presented by Sanders (1987). The model of social interaction as a game is a persistent one. Carlson, for instance, adopts it from Wittgenstein.
Carlson (1983, p. 102) claims that specific implicatures arise as a result of dialogical entailment. By this he means that the implication arises because it is logically binding given the position of the sentence as a move in the dialogue. That is, implication results from the dialogue as a whole and the position of each sentence within it. As true as this might be, neither context nor position within the sentence guarantees that any given implication arises as the singular logically binding one. If it did, there would be no ambiguity, no misinterpretation, and, probably, no paranoia.

Carlson's central metaphor of conversation being a game, leads him to portray specific utterances as moves in a game in order to achieve one's goals, thereby winning. If one wins, then another loses. This implies that one party to an interaction wins to the detriment of the other. In his view, a coherent text is "... (well-formed) if it can be extended into a well-formed dialogue game" (p. 146). This sounds like a debate or a jury trial, not a dialogue.

Both Carlson's teleology and metaphor are suspect. His redefinition of implication presupposes that participants always have in mind clear goals and that each sentence is produced deliberately in order to achieve those goals. It is well known that at least some conversation is produced phatically, that is for the purpose of social bonding or to conform to cultural norms. Conversations about the weather and inquiring after the health of acquaintances fall into this category, but so may discussions of the upcoming elections, the dissolution of social values, or how funny a recently seen movie is. Although there is conversation designed to achieve goals, much ordinary talking is not so ordered. Patricia Strauss (personal communication) points out that some games are cooperative, therefore do not have winners and losers. This kind of game might provide a better metaphor for conversations.

A major problem with viewing conversation as any kind of game is that speakers can never predict the hearer's response to any conversational "move." Even in complex games like bridge or chess, there are rules which limit, hence help predict, possible actions, and in cooperative ones the goals are clear even if they aren't about winners and losers. This is not at all true in conversation. As Sanders (1987, p. 183) demonstrates, a game-theoretic model "assumes that the competing agents have to share the same finite pool of resources in pursuing their own
interests." Each person's language stock is dependent upon his or own personal histories and there is no way to know all of a cospeakers motives. The research on language acquisition has shown beyond a doubt that children figure out language by themselves from what they hear around them. It has also been known for a long time that no two people have quite the same grammatical system in their heads even if they are native adult speakers (Quirk and Svartvik 1966; Gleitman and Gleitman 1970).17

Then, too, what each cospeaker offers affects what the other will then say, and each chooses from an array of multiple messages neither known to nor always guessable by the other, although the messages are usually immediately interpretable. In any conversation, one never knows for sure where the entire is going until it has gone there, no matter how goal-directed the participants were at the outset. Even such goal-directed activities as lecturing may become derailed by unexpected comments or questions. Only in the most formal of speaking activities such as sermons or lectures by invited exalted personages can we be assured of sentences produced so that the conglomerate achieves a predicted goal. If dialogue were truly a game, social interaction would become as glacially slow as an expert chess game, with each participant mulling over possible strategies before entering his or her own move. In actual fact, dialogue with the aim of winning a point or an argument is a special activity, one not necessarily engaged in by most people much of the time. Scholars and attorneys do engage in such competition, but this is part of their professional life, and, as such, acknowledged to be a special activity.18

Carlson claims that implications do not arise from violations of maxims. Rather, he says, "...they play a prominent role only when they are brought in to account for apparent violations..." (p. 103, italics his). Therefore, he defines implicature as arising from "...an assumption that has to be made about a player's aims or assumptions in order to construe his choice of strategy as a rational one" (p. 103). The problem with this formulation is that it describes all social interaction, not just those construable as violations of maxims. As we saw in the discussion of intention earlier on in this chapter, part of the meaning we get from any utterance depends on the assumptions we make about the person's intention in saying what he or she did. This holds for even apparently uncomplicated straightforward messages like "Joey got mud on the floor."

If I call Scrooge "miserly" but his brother "thrifty" I am certainly implying quite different things, but in no sense can I be said to be
violating rules apparent or not. If I say “I always knew Max to be honorable” I am implying a doubt that is not there in “I always knew that Max was honorable.” If I say “Max was murdered,” I am implying that someone did the dastardly deed again without my violating any rules.

The overriding fact uncovered in all objective studies is that meanings are given and gotten in a very great number of ways. What we can do is chart those ways and interpret in their light, and not resort to nontestable and nonobservable phenomena. Nor should we be seduced by a metaphor purporting to explain all interaction. There are many different kinds of interactions, each yielding its own set of viable interpretations. Neither game theory nor, as we shall see, Freudian theory explains all. Each has its verities, but each is incomplete. Intensive work in socio-linguistics (Chaika 1982b, 1989) and related fields has shown us the multiplicity of interactions occurring in any society, each with its own purpose, its own strategies, and each with its own ego-fulfillment for the individual as well as its social purposes.

Notes

1John Lyons (1972, pp. 725-744) does not approve of the term speech acts for these phenomena as they don’t actually refer to an act of speech, but to a semantic phenomenon. He also demonstrates that speech acts can be carried out without speaking, as in waving someone away. However, he uses the term because, as he says, that is pretty much what everyone else uses. I agree with him on all counts.

2If the situation is one in which the speaker had agreed to allow someone to stay in the room on the condition that she be quiet, then “get out of here” is an appropriate paraphrase. In other circumstances it might simply mean, “be less noisy” or “be completely quiet.” Similarly this place stinks can mean “get out of here” or it can also mean “let [all of] us get out of here” or “clean this place up,” or “I have to clean this place up.”

3Of course, one of the reasons that paranoids can be paranoid is also that people do lie about their intent.

4There is also purely social speech such as greetings, untruths intended to “butter people up,” and ritualized complimenting as at a wedding. Such speech has been extensively studied ever since Malinowski’s insights into phatic communication. We are indebted to the extensive oeuvre of scholars like Harvey Sacks and Erving Goffman in delineating such speech (Chaika 1988).

5This is not so farfetched as one would imagine. As the wife of a trial attorney, I frequently get phone calls late at night, and, in response to questions about whereabouts, I am often given analogous answers. For instance, “I’m at the airport” tells me that they are at Greene Airport, Rhode Island’s only commercial one. If they say, “I’m at North Central,” I assume that they pilot and/or own a plane. If they
say, “I'm in Dallas,” I assume that they are likely to be in the airport, at a hotel, or in someone else's home, so that their usual home number will not be operative.

Falsehoods strike at the heart of society. Our actions are predicated upon what we perceive are the motives of cospeakers as well as upon their representation of facts.

And, to be sure, general behavior.

All speakers are sometimes ambiguous, but in pathological cases, it seems as if the speaker cannot disambiguate. Of course, we could claim that the one who cannot actually will not, so that it is a matter of cooperation, not pathology. But then we have to ask why this is so typical of schizophrenics and aphasics, but not of people adjudged not afflicted with either condition.

Meaning is not wholly derivable by reference to these maxims, as shown in the sections in this book devoted to semantics, syntax, and cohesion in sentences as well as in discourse analysis.

Although I have no hard data from experimentation on the phenomenon, I have noticed that people often store in memory an implication heard but not acted upon, later recalling it as if it had actually been said. Similarly, they will note a facial expression or kinesic cue, and store its meaning as if it had been said. This seems to account for the situation in which one is retroactively blamed for saying something which one has never said. For instance, one may be accused of having made a negative evaluative comment, when, in fact, the sole “comment” made was by implication or expression. The idiom “turn up your nose at . . .” characterizes such meanings.

As I write this in 1988, I realize that this may have changed for many women in the years since Lakoff, although my students claim that this is true in mixed gender discussions. However, since the interaction in question took place before 1977, we are dealing with a double whammy: a patient who, by definition, is in inferior status, and by being a woman as well, was in actuality in an inferior position. Hence, the extreme mitigation evidenced.

In speech, mitigation can also be effected by prosody, voice quality, amplitude, tempo, pausing, or false starts. In general, paralinguistic cues like these also indicate the speaker’s stance towards what he or she is conveying (Kreckel 1981).

Kill itself is distinguished from die in that kill means that someone or something caused something else to die.

It seems to me that this last is a direct answer not an implicature.

This is an implication that students are wont to take. They tend to interpret almost all even remotely negative speech as the professor’s not liking them. Perhaps this occurs because of the fact that the professor has to judge the student’s worth. Like the sufferer of paranoia, students seem all too often ready to ascribe dislike when it isn’t intended.

The truth of this assumption is not the issue. There are courses in which one need not read the books; however, it would be the rare professor who admits that.

For instance, in an investigation of subject-verb agreement in Brown University undergraduates, I found that people didn’t agree with their own judgments. Following Quirk and Svartvik, I first administered a written test in which students were given a test which of the same sentences, but with the verb form already selected.
They were asked to reject or accept the sentence. To my astonishment, people often rejected the very forms they had previously selected. This was not random behavior. In all such cases there were clear disparities between the meaning of the noun and the correct grammatical form of the verb. For instance, some chose a singular verb for *There has always been a time to speak and a time to be silent*, but when given this identical sentence later on, they rejected it, saying it should be *there have*. More recently, I have discovered a disjunction in acceptability of *Let no man rejoice until he find life*. About half the students in one class no longer would use that subjunctive, insisting on *Let no man rejoice until he finds life*. Those who, like me, can use both get the meaning in the first that he is not likely to find life, whereas the latter indicates he has a good chance. Others who only allow the first got no such meaning differential, and simply found the second wrong.

Additionally, those persons who treat each dialogue as a game from which they have to emerge as a victor is highly confrontational, and are often perceived as having an ego problem, not to mention obnoxious.