



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
Terms used in Linguistics
presents

Maxim of Quality



Definition

When engaged in conversation, the Maxim of Quality requires that you

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



H.P. Grice (1975)

H.P. Grice



Basic Idea

- The Maxim of Quality requires information provided in **conversations** to be **genuine** and **justified**.
- It is one of the four conversational maxims of the **Cooperative Principle**.
- Grice proposes this maxim as an explanation for a certain kind of regularity in conversational behavior with respect to the **authenticity** of information provided at each turn of a conversation.

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Example 1

Jim, do you know where the Big Ben Clock Tower is ?



It's in London.

One finds this normal.
Why?

Jim does **not** contribute what he believes to be **false** and to be **unsubstantiated**.

–e.g. “It’s in Hong Kong.”

Because the
Maxim is observed

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Example 2

Oh, I like the red cover.



Jenny, how do you like this novel?

Why do we find Jenny's reply strange?

Because the Maxim is violated.

Jenny says something that evidently she does not believe in (i.e. she told a lie).

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Example 2

Oh, I like its red cover.



Jenny, how do you like this novel?

The cover is clearly not red, and Jenny's response is not what one would expect when deciding if one likes a novel.

Deliberate and apparent violation of maxims is called "flouting".

We do not expect the Maxim to be violated. Flouting must be motivated.

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Example 2

Oh, I like its red cover.



Jenny, how do you like this novel?

Inferences obtained from flouting of maxims are called **implicatures**.

Jenny may be implicating that *there is nothing about the novel that she likes, not even the cover.*

Note: Implicatures do not have to be necessarily true, since the inferences are guessed at rather than derived by formal logic.

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Further reading

- Davis, Wayne (2009) Implicature. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2008 edition. Retrieved 15 March 2009 from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/implicature/>
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- Tserdanelis, Georgios and Wai Yi Peggy Wong (eds.) (2004) *Language Files: Materials for an Introduction of Language and Linguistics*, 9th edition, File 8.4. The Ohio State University Press.
- Wardhaugh, Ronald (2006) *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 5th edition, Chapter 12. Blackwell Publishers.
- Yule, George (1996) *Pragmatics*, Chapter 5. Oxford University Press.

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The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)
An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.
Hong Kong Baptist University. <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/library>