



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
Terms used in Linguistics
presents

Maxim of Relation/Relevance



Definition

When engaged in conversation, the Maxim
of Relation requires you to

Be relevant

H.P. Grice (1975)



H.P. Grice



Basic Idea

- The Maxim of Relation 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 **relevance** of information provided at each turn of a conversation.

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Example 1

How do you like your steak cooked?

Medium rare, please.



One finds this normal. Why?

- The woman contributes **what is relevant** for the purpose of the conversation.
 - not irrelevant like “I like steak very much” or “What nice weather!”

Because the Maxim is observed

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Example 2

K h#l#d#s r#l#h#p d#q#
d#q#g#z r#u#v#r#q#w#l#p h#l

G d#q#l#h#o#l#v#P r#u#j#d#q#j#r#r#g#
d#v#d#i#l#q#d#q#f#h#p d#q#d#j#h#u#B

We find Daniel's behavior weird. Why?

Daniel's contribution is **irrelevant** for the purpose of the conversation.

Because the Maxim is violated.



Example 2

K h#l#d#s r#l#h#p d#q#
d#q#g#z r#u#v#r#q#w#l#p h#l

G d#q#l#h#o#l#v#P r#u#j#d#q#j#r#r#g#
d#v#d#i#l#q#d#q#f#h#p d#q#d#j#h#u#B

In this case, one might infer Morgan is not a good finance manager.

WHY?

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

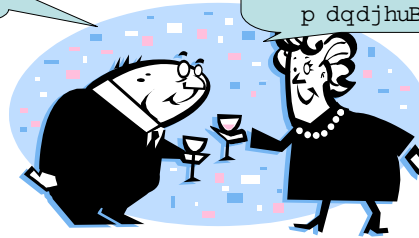
Because we do not expect the Maxim to be violated, the apparent violation must be motivated.



Example 2

K h#lv#d#s r0w#p dq#
dgg#z runv#rq#wlp hl

G dq lnc#lv#
P rujdq#j rrg#dv#
d#lkdqfh#
p dqdjhuB



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

Daniel may be implicating that

- *Morgan is no good as financial manager.*

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/>
- Grice, H. Paul (1975) Logic and Conversation. In Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics*, Volume 3 (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.
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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.
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- 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>