Maxim of Relation/Relevance

**Definition**

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

Be relevant

H.P. Grice (1975)
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.

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
We find Daniel's behavior weird. Why?

Because the Maxim is violated.

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

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

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

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.

Further reading


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