

WHAT IS GOVERNING OUR COMMUNICATION?

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I would like to investigate standards in communication in the existing literature and argue that a cognitive-based concept called Relevance theory is the most appropriate one in that only this concept covers data adequately. First, I will present the co-operative principle and its maxims advocated by Grice (1975). Then, I will analyse exchanges and point out the inadequacies of Gricean maxims. Second, I will show that the idea of mutual knowledge (Shiffer 1972) is inappropriate in explaining utterance interpretation which will necessarily lead us to a cognitive-based idea of mutual manifestness. In section 4, I will discuss the issue of the notion of 'truth' as there are so many cases in which utterances are not produced as true propositions. Finally, I will show how Relevance-based ideas will explain utterance-interpretation, including the explanation of the classic issues; problems of solving indexical indeterminacy, ambiguity, ellipses, and the implicit meaning of utterances etc.

2. Co-operative principle

According to Grice (1989: 26), "Our talk exchanges...are characteristically, to some degree at least, co-operative efforts..." and he formulates what he calls, the Co-operative principle and its maxims.

The Co-operative principle

Make your conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Grice 1989: 26).

Maxims of Quantity: 1. Make your contribution as informative as required.

2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxims of Quality: 1. Do not say what you believe to be false.

2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxims of Relation: Be relevant.

Maxims of manner: 1. Avoid obscurity of expression.

2. Avoid ambiguity.

3. Be brief

4. Be orderly

Let us show how these maxims explain the following exchanges.

(1) A: Do you know where Susan lives? B: Somewhere north of England.

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(2)A: Can she swim well?

B: Oh, she is a fish.

(3)A: Is she back home?

B: I saw a red Toyota in the garage.

(4) (Family dining in a restaurant)A: What shall we get for dessert?

B: Fruit. Not C H O C O L A T E C A K E.

The hearer of (1)B assumes that B is being co-operative. The apparent infringement of the maxim of quantity i.e. not being informative enough, will lead the hearer A to infer that B does not in fact know the exact name of the town, but at her best B is being informative. In (2) the speaker B is obviously violating the maxim of quality, i.e. truthfulness, since (2)B is a metaphor. However, on the assumption of co-operation, the hearer A, according to Grice (1975), infers a proposition which is logically related to the proposition given by (2)B: i.e. a simile that she is like a fish.

In (3), B's answer to A's question does not seem to bear any relevance. However, the assumption of the maxim of relation will lead the hearer A to infer that if a red Toyota is in the garage, the person in question is most likely to be back home as she drives a red Toyota. That way, B answers the question A asks. In (4)B where B spells out 'chocolate cake', the speaker is violating the maxim of manner, not being clear of what she is saying. However, the hearer A can easily infer B's intention that B does not want the word 'chocolate cake' to be heard by the children at present. The hearing of 'chocolate' will excite the children too much.

The conversational maxims are claimed to be used to boost inference on A's i.e. the hearer's part in search for relevant implicatures in the above examples: in (1) that B does not know where exactly Susan lives, in (2) that she swims like a fish, in (3) that she is most likely to be back home and in (4) that B does not want the word 'chocolate cake' to be heard by the children. The utterances (1)-(4)B could give rise to different interpretations when different contexts are given, and maxims might be observed differently to explain the different interpretations.

For example, (1)B can be an informative answer to A if A is just curious about Susan's accent. In this case, the implicature that B does not know where exactly Susan lives is not the relevant answer that the hearer recovers. The relevant answer is the proposition expressed by the utterance, i.e. that Susan lives somewhere north of England. In the former, the quantity maxim is used to infer the implicature. In the latter, however, is the quantity maxim used at all to recover the propositional content?

In (2)B, is the inferred simile based on the maxim of quality, the only implicature the hearer is supposed to infer? If so, why did not the speaker B utter the simile instead of the metaphor? Intuitively, there is a difference between a metaphor and a simile. It is often perceived that a metaphor is a more powerful means of expression than a simile. That is, a metaphor seems to communicate a wider range of implicatures (weak and strong) than a simile. Relevant implicatures are that she swims very well, that she is very comfortable in water, that she spends hours in water etc. rather than that she has gills, that she is a cold-blooded animal etc. those that are also associated with a fish. It seems as if the maxim of relevance is observed to give rise to these relevant implicatures. The maxim of quality i.e. truthfulness does not seem to explain these aspects of a metaphor.

In (3)B, apart from the maxim of relevance, the maxim of quality must be observed by the speaker B, since the speaker has not seen the person in question at home but just seen a red Toyota in the garage which is most likely hers. So the speaker B is not

definitely saying something for which she lacks adequate evidence. In this example, the maxim of relation leads the hearer to infer the relevant implicature that she is most likely at home. The maxim of quality, on the other hand, does not give rise to an implicature such that the speaker does not know, the kind that (1)B could give rise to. So maxims are not always used to boost the hearer's inference for relevant implicatures.

In (4)B the maxim of manner is used to lead the hearer to infer the implicature that the speaker B does not want the word 'chocolate cake' to be heard by the children. However, this implicature is not the point of the utterance (4)B. The point of the utterance is that the speaker B wants to get fruit for dessert but not chocolate cake. In (1)-(3)B, the derived implicatures might be the points of these utterances. That is, the implicature that the speaker does not know where exactly Susan lives, is the answer to A's question in (1). In (2), kinds of implicatures that yes, she swims very well, that yes, she is very comfortable in water, that yes, she spends hours in water and so on, are the strongly communicated implicatures. In (3) the implicature that she is most likely to be home, is the answer to A's question.

In the next section, I will introduce a notion 'mutual manifestness' (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 41-60) and show 'mutual knowledge' is not prerequisite for communication to be successful. When we observe actual communication, it becomes evident that 'mutual knowledge' is not assumed at all.

3. Mutual manifestness and human communication

The speaker and the hearer have their physical environments, and abilities to recognize the environments. As a result, we can talk about their cognitive environments. However, the physical environments that their minds process are not the same, nor are their cognitive abilities for processing the environments. Despite these differences, there is an intersection of the speaker and the hearer's cognitive environments (e.g. they are physically present in the same place), and they are aware of the shared cognitive environment. In this mutual cognitive environment of the speaker and the hearer, all 'manifest' information is mutually manifest information to the speaker and the hearer.

Being manifest is not same as being known. That is, if something is known, its truth is presumed. However, manifest information does not have to be true. It can be information that is not yet entertained but potentially inferable. For example, the information that my mother and the Japanese prime minister never had breakfast has never come to my mind until I have thought about it just now. However, it can be said that it has been manifest in my mind as it is inferable information. So obviously, 'being manifest' is a much weaker notion than 'being assumed' or 'being known'. In order for 'mutual knowledge' to be cognitively established, the truth of (6) relies on the truth of (5), and the truth of (7) relies on the truth of (6) and so on. This is cognitively impossible as this is an infinite regress.

(5) The speaker and the hearer know that P. (P = proposition)

(6) The speaker and the hearer know that the speaker and the hearer know that P.

(7) The speaker and the hearer know that the speaker and the hearer know that the speaker and the hearer know that P.

Instead we have the following in which the truth of (9) does not rely on the truth of (8), nor does the truth of (10) rely on (9) and so on, as there is no truth-based relation among the assumptions (8)-(10).

- (8) It is mutually manifest that P.
- (9) It is mutually manifest that it is mutually manifest that P.
- (10) It is mutually manifest that it is mutually manifest that it is mutually manifest that P.

.....(adapted from Sperber & Wilson 1995: 42)

Now I will show that 'mutual manifestness' is an adequate notion to describe human communication. Let us consider (11) which is uttered as a BMW has just passed.

- (11) I'm going to buy a BMW of that type.

In this utterance, the speaker does not make sure that the hearer has also noticed a BMW which passed a second before. Nor does the speaker make sure that the hearer noticed that the speaker had noticed a BMW. What is needed is the speaker's certain degree of confidence that the hearer has also noticed that the passed car was a BMW. There was no mutual knowledge of a BMW at the time of utterance. In other words, it is enough that the passed BMW was 'mutually manifest', not 'mutually known'. The hearer might have thought that the passed car was a VOLVO but the utterance (11) made a BMW manifest to the hearer.

There are many more examples which do not assume 'mutual knowledge' of certain information.

- (12)A: Do you like Rugby? B: I'm from New Zealand.
- (13)A: What time is it now? B: Newspaper is just delivered.
- (14)A: Do you like Thomas. B: I don't like politicians.

The speaker of (12)-(14)B does not make sure that the hearer knows the information given in (15)-(17). However, she has some confidence that her utterances (12)-(14)B will guide the hearer to access (15)-(17), and whether the hearer believes their truth is not a concern to the speaker. All that is important is that (15)-(17) will be mutually manifest to the speaker and the hearer at the time of processing (12)-(14)B.

- (15) New Zealanders love Rugby.
- (16) Newspaper is delivered at a certain time everyday.
- (17) Thomas is a politician.

Having looked at the utterances above, we can say that the speaker and the hearer do not share equal responsibilities for communication to be successful. The speaker is leading the role in the sense that she directs the hearer to certain interpretation with some confidence that the hearer can be led that way. The hearer, believing that the speaker is trust-worthy and not misleading him, searches for relevant interpretation. In the sections that follow, I will discuss the notions of truthfulness and then, relevance since, as observed in metaphors such as (2)B, people are not always observing the maxim of quality, but rather searching for relevant interpretations.

4. The notion of truthfulness

Many people might believe that we talk truthfully. Many of us believe that the maxim of truthfulness is a norm of conversation as represented by the Gricean maxims of quality. Anything that does not conform to this norm is considered to be a special case as, for example, metaphors and ironies are often so considered. However, this does not seem

to be the norm of conversation. Apart from metaphors and ironies, we have what Sperber & Wilson (1995: 233-7) call 'loose talk'.

(18) (Teacher to her pupils) Let's talk about the shapes of the countries we have looked at. Italy is of a boot shape. France is hexagonal and Brazil is triangular.

(19) (Tom has a tiny bit of hair left) Tom is bald.

(20) I earn 1,000 pounds a month. (when the precise amount after tax is 989,80)

(18)-(20) are not special cases of 'figurative use' but very common uses of language. Strictly speaking, the propositions given by (18)-(20) are false but these are all natural uses. These examples lead me to think if it is at all the case that the maxim of truthfulness governs our communication. The speaker of these 'false' utterances foresees that the hearer can access relevant interpretations easily. Moreover, if the speaker is supposed to talk truthfully, why is the utterance (21) odd?

(21) The pope is a bachelor.

The pope is an unmarried male adult and (21) is a true utterance. However, it is very difficult to find a context in which (21) leads to relevant interpretation. Anybody who knows the meaning of the pope would know that he is an unmarried male adult, and it is unnecessary or redundant to further describe him as a bachelor. Having looked at utterances such as (1)-(4), (12)-(14) and (18)-(21), it seems to be the case that it is not 'truth' but 'relevance' that governs communication.

Sometimes, the proposition given by an utterance is the relevant interpretation where the point of utterance lies. For example, when Susan's accent is the issue, the proposition that she lives somewhere north of England in (1) is the relevant interpretation the speaker would like the hearer to recover. Then, what follows are implicatures such that if she lives somewhere north of England, she has a northern English accent, and therefore she has a northern English accent. In (4) the implicature that the speaker does not want the children to hear the word 'chocolate cake' is also importantly relevant. However, the most relevant interpretation is the proposition that the speaker would like fruit, not chocolate cake for dessert.

Other times, implicatures are the relevant interpretations where a certain range of them is communicated as relevant. For example, the metaphor (2)B communicates relevant implicatures such that yes, she swims very well, she is very comfortable in the water, etc. In (3) strongly communicated implicatures are of two different kinds as pointed out by Sperber & Wilson (1995):

(22) If a red Toyota is in the garage, she is most likely at home.

(23) She is most likely at home.

Obviously, (22) is an implicated premise and (23) is an implicated conclusion. The implicature (23) is inferred as a conclusion based on the utterance (3)B and the implicated premise (22). These two kinds of implicatures are also observed in (1)B when deriving that she has a northern English accent.

In (12)-(14)B, the hearer accesses relevant implicated premises (15)-(17) and implicated conclusions which are the answers to A's questions. In 'loose talk' examples (18)-(20), the speaker would not go for the literal false interpretations, but for the relevant interpretations such as the following:

(24) France is roughly hexagonal and Brazil is roughly triangular.

(25) Tom is almost bald.

(26) I earn about 1000 pounds a month.

So far we have seen that in all examples, the hearer is driven by a certain standard to access relevant interpretations, whether they are implicatures or the proposition expressed. Sperber & Wilson (1995) claim that this standard is a cognitive-based notion 'Relevance'. I would now like to discuss Relevance theory.

5. Relevance theory

Sperber & Wilson (1995) point out that humans pay attention to some phenomena rather than others: they represent these phenomena to themselves in one way rather than another, they process these representations in one context rather than another. What determines these choices is some standard governing human cognition called 'Relevance'. They suggest that humans tend to pay attention to the most relevant phenomena available; they tend to construct the most relevant possible representations of these phenomena, and to process them in a context that maximizes their relevance. Their claim is that relevance, and the maximisation of relevance, is the key to human cognition.

5.1 On the notion 'Relevance'

It is claimed that information is relevant to a human if it interacts in certain ways with his assumptions about the world. Sperber & Wilson (1995) present three cases of interaction. Let me give examples taken from (3) (repeated as (27)).

(27)A: Is she back home? B: I saw a red Toyota in the garage.

Suppose that the speaker B knows that the person in question drives a red Toyota. B assumes that A is accessing the assumption (28) (the implicated premise (22)) at the time of processing (27)B.

(28) If a red Toyota is in the garage, she is most likely to be home.

The hearer A can deduce a contextual implication (29) using the context (28) and the utterance (27)B as joint premises in a deductive inference process. (29) is not deducible from either (28) or (27)B alone, but from the union of the two. This is the first case of interaction, giving rise to a contextual implication. (27) is relevant because it leads to a contextual implication.

(29) She is most likely to be home.

Let me turn to the second case. Now, the hearer A entertains the information (29) and then, A sees her going out into the garden. Her visual presence (30) raises the degree of A's belief in her home presence. This is the case of strengthening information as (30) strengthens the credibility of (29). The newly acquired visual information interacts with (29) in this case and Relevance theory can explain why this visual information of her presence, not of the presence of the garden, is more important in this situation. (30) is relevant because it strengthens the existing information (29).

(30) She is back home.

The third case is that newly acquired information contradicts the existing one, and leads to its elimination and replacement. For example, suppose that the hearer A entertains (29) she is most likely back home, as A heard B saying that B saw a red Toyota in the garage. However, the person in question calls A's mobile phone and says she is in town, asking A to come and join her. Now the information (31) contradicts (29) and eliminates (29) by replacing it with new information (31). This is the case that new

information eliminates and replaces the existing one. (31) is relevant because it contradicts and eliminates the existing one with replacement.

(31) She is not at home but in town.

When a newly acquired piece of information interacts with a person's assumptions in any of the ways mentioned above, Sperber & Wilson (1995) say that it is 'relevant' in their technical sense and in an intuitive sense. The three cases of interaction specify what kind of effects the information can achieve, and these three types of effect are called 'contextual effects'. When information achieves 'contextual effects', it is relevant. Having contextual effects is a necessary condition for relevance, and the more contextual effects it achieves, the more relevant it will be. However, this is not a sufficient characterization as, there is another factor we have to consider, i.e. effort required for achieving the effects. It is to these that I now turn.

5.2 *Processing effort and contextual effect*

Contextual effects are achieved by certain mental processes i.e. processing efforts, and this is the second factor that is considered for assessing the degree of relevance. Intuitively, the conversation (31) on the phone is more relevant than the content of the conversation plus the fact that the phone needs cleaning (i.e. the phone is very dirty). This is because the latter conjoined information requires more processing effort than the former, although both would yield the same effect, i.e. eliminating an existing assumption. The contextual effect (31) achieves would be achieved by the conjoined information because the latter subsumes the former as its part. So 'relevance' is, on the one hand, a classificatory notion in that we can talk about a newly acquired piece of information being relevant or not. And on the other, it is a comparative notion in that we can talk about a newly acquired piece of information being more relevant or less relevant. So the following comparative definition of relevance is suggested (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 125).

Relevance

Extent condition 1: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.

Extent condition 2: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small.

Now it can be said that it is desirable if information or an assumption achieves an adequate range of effects with minimally necessary effort. Sperber & Wilson call this desirable level of relevance 'optimal relevance', and further postulate the principle of relevance.

The principle of relevance:

Every utterance carries the presumption of optimal relevance.

This means that a hearer can interpret every utterance in the expectation that it is optimally relevant. However, there is a case where the speaker may be just pretending to communicate and making no point (e.g. filibustering). Or there is a case where the hearer does not accept the presumption (e.g. a husband is 'turned off' at the voice of his nagging wife). The principle of relevance does not claim that a speaker always succeeds in being optimally relevant, but rather that she intends the hearer to believe that her utterance is optimally relevant. I will show in the following section that this is enough to explain how utterances are interpreted.

Relevance and communication

(1)A: Do you know where Susan lives? B: Somewhere north of England.

Suppose that A and B in (1) are talking about Susan's accent. Then, intuitively, an easily (i.e. with less effort) accessible context will be a contextual assumption (32) rather than (33). This is because the choice of (32) and the utterance (1)B give rise to an contextual implication (34) which is an answer to A's question. The utterance (1)B can thus be said to be relevant as it achieves one of the three cases of contextual effect i.e. a contextual implication.

However, it can be argued that (33) can be accessed and gives rise to an contextual implication (35) together with the utterance (1)B. Then, the utterance (1)B can likewise be claimed to be relevant. However, what is expected here is not only 'relevance' but 'optimal relevance' i.e. an utterance is expected to achieve a range of adequate effects with minimum necessary effort. That is, because the topic is about Susan's accent, (32) is more salient in A and B's mind than (33) and therefore more accessible with less effort.

Also A might be thinking that Susan might have a northern accent, and therefore A asked where Susan lives. In this case (34) can strengthen the credibility of A's thought, i.e. further contextual effect. Or A might be thinking that she has an Irish accent. Then, (34) can eliminate A's thought and replace it with (34), i.e. further contextual effect. This way, (1)B can achieve an adequate range of contextual effects without an unnecessary effort.

(32) If Susan lives somewhere north of England, she has a northern English accent.

(33) If the speaker says 'somewhere north of England', she does not know the name of the town where Susan lives.

(34) Susan has a northern English accent.

(35) The speaker does not know the name of the town where Susan lives.

Let me now turn to the recovery of the proposition expressed. (1)B is an elliptical sentence and the recovery would be (36). Also the reference has to be assigned to the indexical 'she' as in (39).

(36) (She lives) somewhere north of England.

(37) Susan Smith 1 lives somewhere north of England.

The recovery of the proposition is done in such a way that it leads to 'optimal relevance' i.e. achieving a range of contextual effects for the minimally necessary effort. If Susan Smith 2 is assigned, the proposition will not give rise to a contextual effect (implication) (34) and further possible ones such as strengthening and elimination. Likewise, when an utterance has more than one readings as an ambiguous utterance does, the reading which is consistent with the principle of relevance is to be chosen. That is, disambiguation has to be done in such a way that it leads to 'optimal relevance'.

To conclude, I would like to argue that the hearer is directed for accessing interpretation which is consistent with the principle of relevance and achieves 'optimal relevance'. And I believe that this notion 'optimal relevance' governs our interpretation processes. This is geared by the general goal of our cognition which is to maximize our knowledge of the world i.e. to maximize relevance. However, in actual verbal communication, it is not 'maximum relevance' but 'optimal relevance' as defined in the principle of relevance.

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PHÂN NHÁNH NHÓM PHƯƠNG NGỮ BATAN

(TÓM TẮT)

Paul Jen-Kuei Li

Phân nhóm Batan thuộc ngữ hệ Nam Đảo được định vị trong chuỗi phương ngữ đảo giữa Đài Loan và Philippin. Nó bao gồm tiếng Yami, tiếng Itbayat, tiếng Ivatan và tiếng Babuyan. Tiếng Yami được sử dụng trên đảo Lanyu (còn được gọi là đảo Phong lan trong tiếng Trung quốc, là Botel Tobago trong các tiếng châu Âu) và có những khác biệt nhỏ về phương ngữ ở 6 làng khác nhau thuộc hòn đảo này (Imorod, Iraralay, Ivalino, Iranomilek, Jayu và Iratay). Từ phía bắc xuống phía nam, vị trí địa lý của Lanyu, Itbayat, Batan, Sabtang và Babuyan gần như trên cùng đường kinh tuyến. Bài viết này là một nghiên cứu so sánh về tất cả các ngôn ngữ hay phương ngữ Batan, chủ yếu dựa vào công trình thuộc lĩnh vực chuyên môn của tôi về những phương ngữ trên, trừ tiếng Babuyan.

Trong số các phương ngữ của tiếng Yami, Iraralay là phương ngữ ít 'mặn mà' nhất trong việc dùng chung những yếu tố có cùng gốc hay cùng dạng thức với tiếng Itbayat hoặc các phương ngữ Batan khác. Ivatan bao gồm hai phương ngữ nhỏ, Ivasay và Isamorong, với những khác biệt không đáng kể về từ vựng và âm vị.

Xét trên phương diện âm vị học, tiếng Ivatan và tiếng Babuyan cùng có hai hướng cách tân chung: PAN $*R > l$ và $*l > d$ khi kết hợp với $*i$ hay $*e$. Trong khi đó, trong tiếng Yami và tiếng Itbayat hai âm vị này không biến đổi $*R > r$ và $*l > l$. Có thể tìm thấy những ví dụ như vậy trong hàng chục các từ cùng gốc trong các phương ngữ Batan. Thêm vào đó, tiếng Yami và tiếng Itbayat cùng có chung phụ âm xát lưỡi con hữu thanh [R], âm vị này đã biến thành âm xát thanh hầu vô thanh [h] ở các phương ngữ Batan còn lại. Tuy nhiên, tiếng Itbayat, tiếng Ivatan và tiếng Babuyan thì lại có 3 hướng cách tân riêng biệt: (1) PAN $*R > y$, (2) $*\eta > \text{ñ}$ khi kết hợp với $*i$, và (3) $*k > c$ cũng chỉ khi kết hợp với $*i$. Trong số nhóm phương ngữ Batan, riêng chỉ tiếng Yami có một sự cách tân độc đáo: $*R > *y > l/a-a$. Sự thay đổi đó hẳn là đã xảy ra khá gần đây, cụ thể là sau khi tiếng Yami tách khỏi tiếng Itbayat vài trăm năm trước. Cả những cứ liệu âm vị lẫn từ vựng học đều cho thấy rằng tiếng Itbayat có cùng nguồn gốc với tiếng Yami hơn bất kỳ các phương ngữ nào khác trong nhóm phương ngữ Batan.

Căn cứ vào sự phân bố và phân nhánh của nhóm phương ngữ Batan, tôi có thể suy luận ra được quá trình phân nhóm của những nhóm người nói tiếng Batan.