

1. Presupposition

To *presuppose* something is to take it for granted in a way that contrasts with *asserting* it. For example, if I utter (1), I presuppose (2), but assert (3).

- (1) My brother called last night.
- (2) I have a brother.
- (3) Someone called last night.

In uttering (1), I commit myself both to what I assert and to what I presuppose. However, there are important differences between the two.

The presupposition vs. assertion distinction concerns the *discourse status* of the implication: a presupposition is something a speaker takes for granted as agreed upon among the participants of a conversation; it is old information, not up for debate. An assertion, in contrast, is information introduced as new.

As we've already seen, presuppositions can be identified empirically in that they *project* when embedded in a larger sentence, while assertions do not. This is the basis for the *projection tests*: Suppose that uttering A would normally imply B. Try embedding A in the following contexts:

- Negation (Neg): "It is not the case that A."
- Modal of possibility (Poss): "It's possible that A."
- Conditional antecedent (If): "If A, then C."

If B *projects* — i.e. the test sentence still implies B — then A presupposes (and does not assert) B.

2. Grice's Theory of Implicature

Implicatures are inferences derived from:

- (a) what is actually said (i.e., the truth-conditional content of an utterance), and
- (b) the assumption that "ordinary verbal interaction" is cooperative.

Implicatures arise because we assume participants of a conversation are being cooperative.

2.1 What it Means to be Cooperative

There are rules of conversation that specify what participants have to do in order to converse in a co-operative way.

The co-operative principle. Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs.

The maxim of Quality. Try to make your contribution one that is true:
(i) do not say what you believe to be false;
(ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The maxim of Quantity.
(i) make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange;
(ii) do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The maxim of Relevance. Be relevant.

The maxim of Manner. Be perspicuous, and specifically:
(i) avoid obscurity; (ii) avoid ambiguity;
(iii) be brief; (iv) be orderly.

We don't always follow the maxims, but "wherever possible, people will interpret what we say as conforming to the maxims on at least some level."

Speakers may *observe* the maxims, or *flout* them (by deliberately breaching one.)

2.2 Observing the Maxims

Quality. 'Do not say what you believe to be false.'

- (4) The back door is unlocked.
~~> I believe that the back door is unlocked.

Manner. 'Be orderly'.

- (5) Alfred went to the store and bought some whiskey.
~~> Alfred went to the store and then bought some whiskey.

Relevance. 'Be relevant.'

- (6) A: Is Jeanette home? B: Her light is on.
~~~~> She is home.

*Quantity.* Make your contribution as informative as is required.

- (7) There were some casualties.  
~~~~> There were not many casualties.
- (8) You answered 4 questions correctly.
~~~~> You answered no more than 4 questions correctly.

Because strength scales are reversed in certain linguistic environments (e.g., negation, *if*-clauses, *every*-relatives, *any*-relatives) scalar implicatures are predicted to disappear in just such contexts. This prediction seems to be borne out, as the implicature from '4' to 'no more than 4' disappears in the following (i.e., '4' here is interpreted as 'at least 4'):

- (9) If you answer 4 questions correctly, you will pass the exam.  
~/~> If you answer 4, but no more than 4, questions correctly, you will pass the exam.
- (10) Anyone who answers 4 questions correctly will pass the exam.  
~/~> If you answer 4, but no more than 4, questions correctly, you will pass the exam.

### 2.3 Flouting the maxims

*Manner*

- (11) It's done, and if it's done it's done.                      (Levinson 1983)  
~~~~> It's no good regretting what has already happened.
- (12) I'm not not paying attention.

Quantity

- (13) War is war. (Levinson 1983)

Relevance

- (14) A: How's your thesis going?
B: It's nice out today.

Quality

- (15) England is a sinking ship.
(16) You're the cream in my coffee.