

# Pragmatic Inference after Grice

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LING 405

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# What we'll cover...

- Pragmatic inference after Grice
- Writing Assignment #5
- Re: the Final

# Writing Assignment #5

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- Imagine a Thanksgiving dinner. One guest, (A), brings up a controversial topic, making other guests uncomfortable. How might another guest, (B), make use of Grice's maxims of conversation to directly or indirectly get the message across to (A) that their contribution is not welcome?
- Give an example of what (B) might say, and explain which of Grice's maxims they are violating and/or following.

Alexis: "Hey Junior, is this the same girl from last year or is this a new one?"

Other guest: "Can you pass me the pie Alexis? I've been eyeing it all day."

This situation would be flouting the maxim of relevance because while what the other guest said has nothing to do with what Alexis said, if Alexis has social skills she will understand that the other guest is trying to change the conversation because her input was not needed.

A: Whoever made the mash potatoes this year didn't do a great job on the seasoning...

B: At least it tastes better than whoever made it last year....

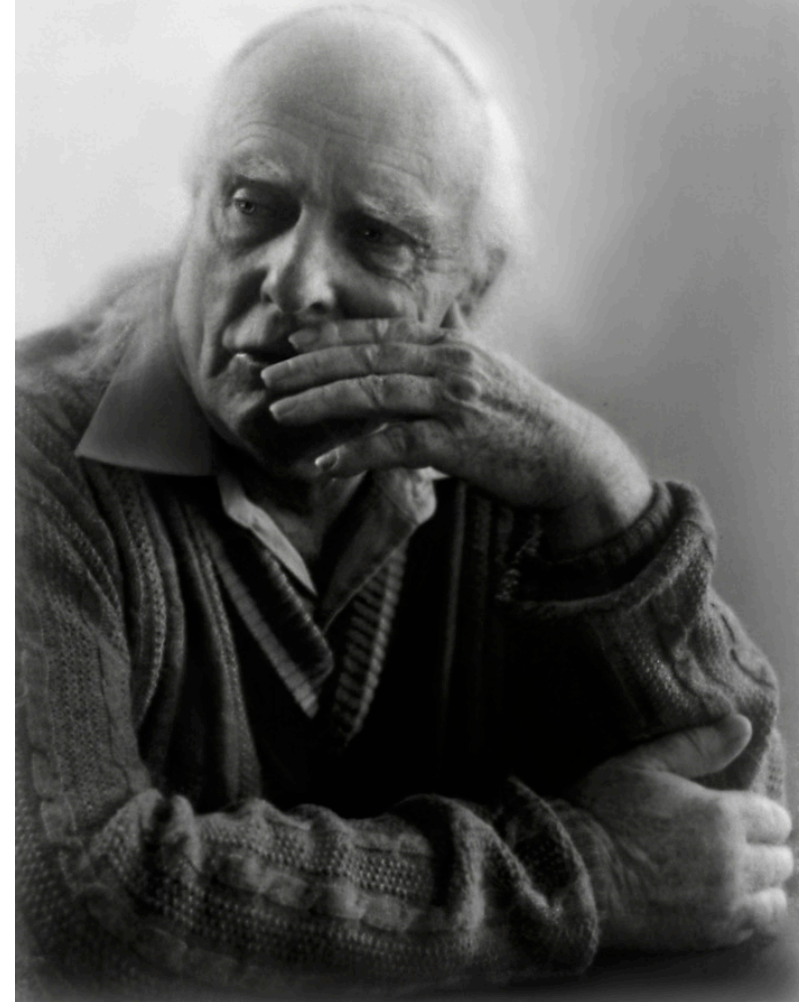
\*person A made the mashed potatoes last year but didn't make it this year\*

This conversation flouts the Maxim of Manner. The exchange involves forms of sarcasm or indirect communication, challenging the Maxim of Manner, which encourages clear and straightforward expression.

# Pragmatic Inference after Grice

# Pragmatic inference after Grice

- Grice's work, which we discussed over the last two weeks, is foundational.
- That doesn't mean it hasn't been challenged and expanded upon in the years since.



# Logical operators vs. English words

- There are some logical operators that we should be familiar with:  
 $\wedge$  'and',  $\vee$  'or',  $\rightarrow$  'if...then'
- $p \wedge q = q \wedge p$   $\wedge$  is considered commutative
- e.g. "I love dogs and cats" = "I love cats and dogs"
- Sometimes, this works quite well...

- (1)
  - a. The Chinese invented the folding umbrella and the Egyptians invented the sailboat.
  - b. The Egyptians invented the sailboat and the Chinese invented the folding umbrella.

# Logical operators vs. English words

- Sometimes, it falls apart...

Do (a) and (b) seem to mean something different?

- (2) a. She gave him the key and he opened the door.  
b. He opened the door and she gave him the key.

- (3) a. The Lone Ranger jumped onto his horse and rode into the sunset.<sup>3</sup>  
b. ?The Lone Ranger rode into the sunset and jumped onto his horse.

- (4) a. The janitor left the door open and the prisoner escaped.  
b. ?The prisoner escaped and the janitor left the door open.

- In these examples, *and* seems to mean “and then...” or “and therefore...”



# Logical operators vs. English words

“Grice argued that each of the English words actually has only a single sense, which is more or less the same as the meaning of the corresponding logical operator, and that the different interpretations arise through pragmatic inferences.” (161–162)

So, is it the case that *and* has several separate senses:

- and (“dogs *and* cats”)
- and then (“he jumped on his horse *and* rode into the sunset”)
- and therefore (“he left the door open *and* the prisoner escaped”)

OR is Grice right?

What do you think?

What arguments have been made? (Hint: see pages 164–165)

# Logical operators vs. English words

Taken together, these arguments seem quite persuasive. They demonstrate that English *and* is not polysemous; its semantic content is logical *and* ( $\wedge$ ). The sequential 'and then' use can be analyzed as a generalized conversational implicature.

# Explicatures

- What is sentence meaning?

“the semantic content of the sentence” (139)

- What is utterance meaning?

“the totality of what the speaker intends to convey by making an utterance” (139)

- What is an implicature?

the elements of the utterance meaning *other than* the sentence meaning.

- To Grice, the speaker meaning – the sum total of what the speaker intends to convey – is the sentence meaning plus implicatures.
- Implicatures do not impact the truth value of the sentence.

# Explicatures

But what about when we can't assess the truth value from the meaning of the words?

- a. She visited me here yesterday.
- Who is *she*?      When was *yesterday*?  
Where is *here*?
- b. Old men and women gathered at the bank.
- Old men and old women?*  
Or *old men and women* of any age?

The referents in (a) and ambiguities in (b) must be sorted out before we can assess the truth value of either sentence.

# Explicatures

- Some sentences are harder to resolve, requiring “more significant pragmatic reasoning” (167).
- Kent Bach identified two sorts of sentences requiring this:
  1. SEMANTIC UNDER-DETERMINATION: “sentences which fail to express a complete proposition (something capable of being true or false), even after the referents of pronouns and deictic elements have been determined and ambiguities resolved” (167–168).
  2. Those in which “there is already a complete proposition [...] albeit not the one that is communicated by the speaker” (168–169).
- The inferences necessary to resolve these issues are called **explicatures**.

# 1. Semantic Under-Determination

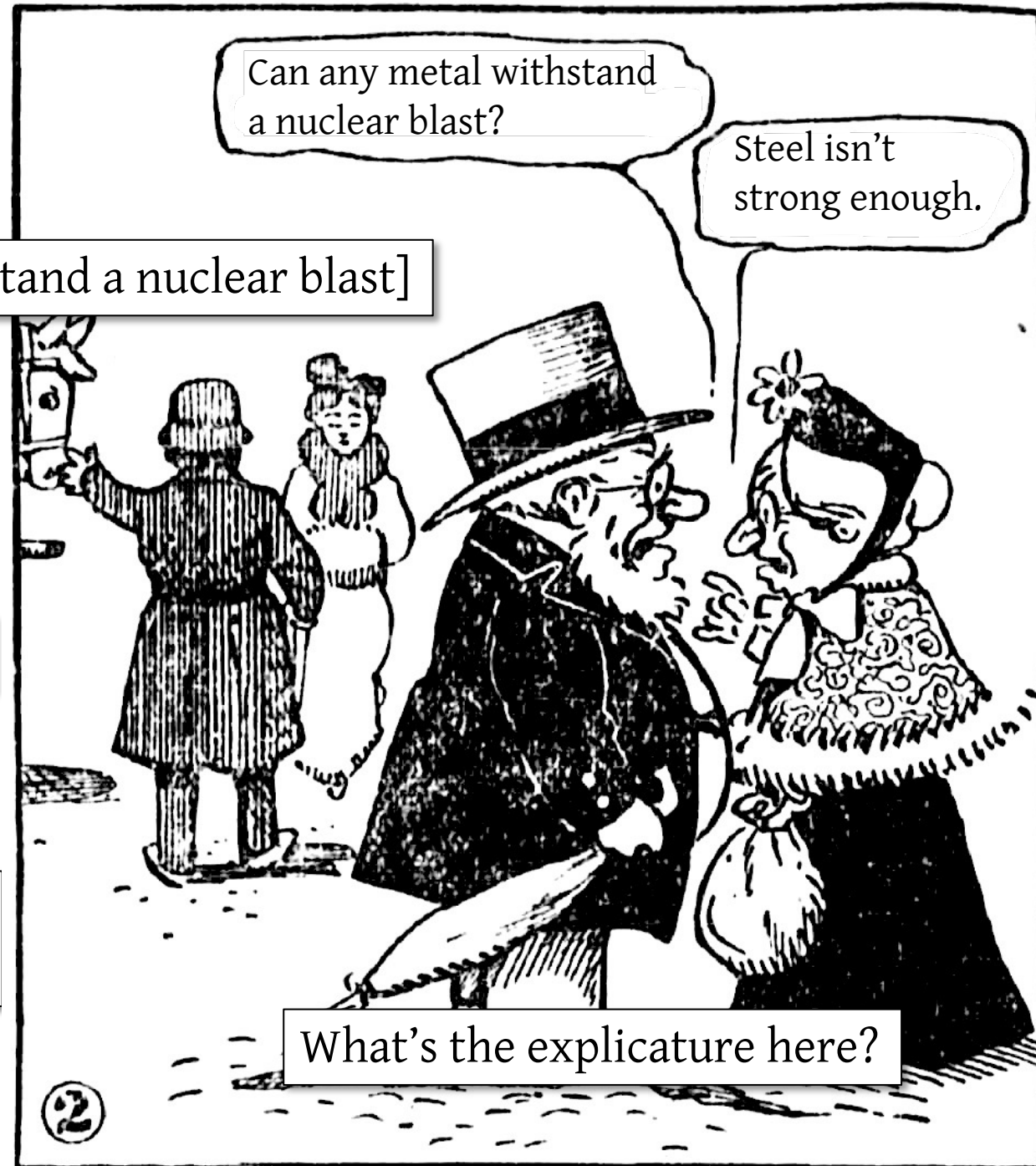
- a. Steel isn't strong enough [to withstand a nuclear blast]
- b. Strom is too old.
- c. The princess is late.
- d. Tipper is ready.

Each of these sentences beg the question, *for what?*

We, the hearers, need to use a process of COMPLETION to make these into real propositions.

In other words, we can't evaluate their truth value unless we know the answers to these questions.

The stuff we fill in is an **explicature**.



# 1. Semantic Under-Determination

- a. Steel isn't strong enough [to withstand a nuclear blast]
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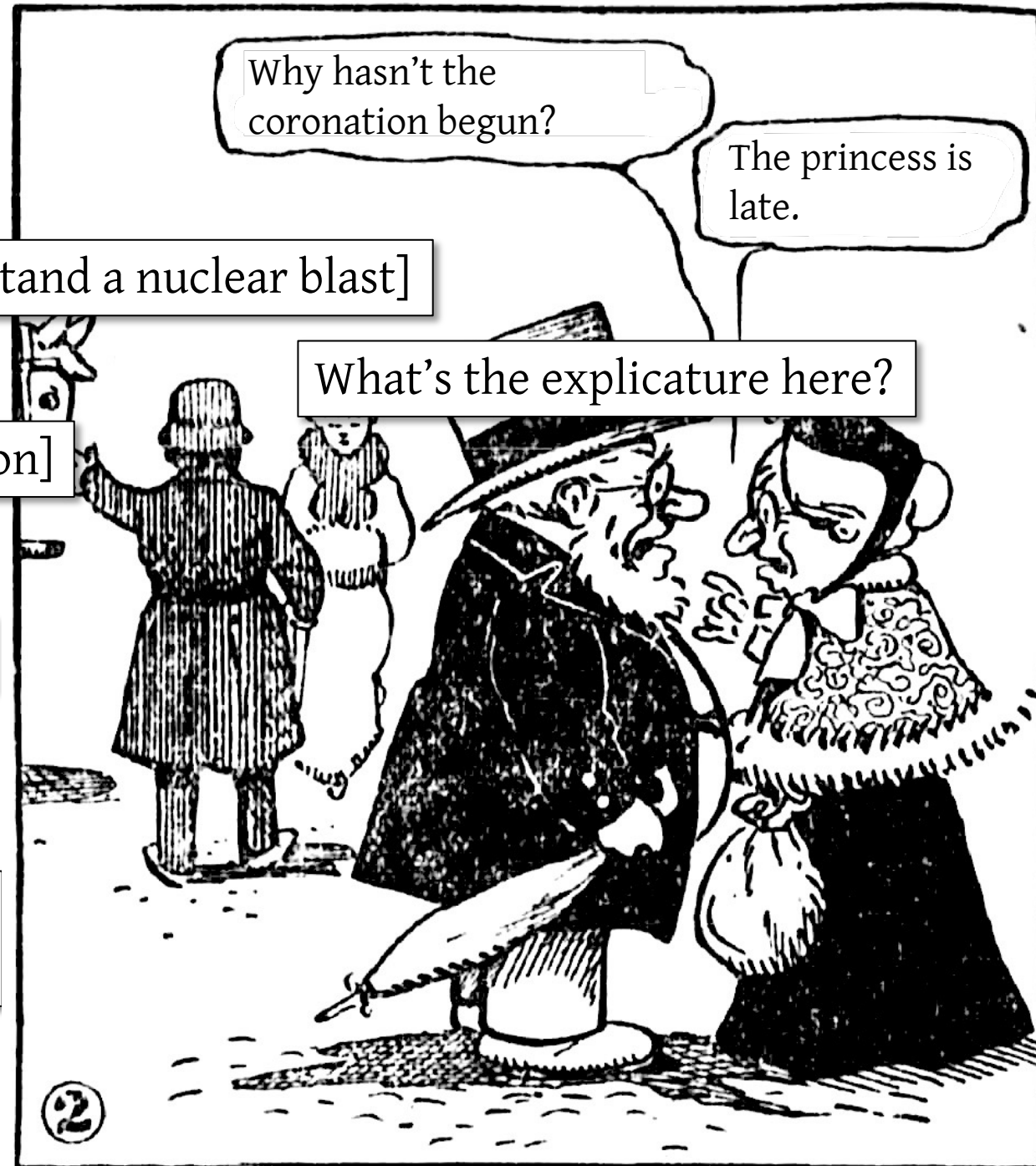
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- a. Steel isn't strong enough [to withstand a nuclear blast]
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## 2. Unintended propositions

- a. You're not going to die [from this cut]
- b. I have eaten breakfast.
- c. I have eaten caviar.
- d. I have nothing to wear.
- e. I have nothing to repair.

Each of these sentences is a complete proposition.

But the meaning must be EXPANDED to express what the speaker meant in context.

The expansion that must be added is an **explicature**.



## 2. Unintended propositions

- a. You're not going to die [from this cut]
- b. I have eaten breakfast [today]
- c. I have eaten caviar.
- d. I have nothing to wear.
- e. I have nothing to repair.

Each of these sentences is a complete proposition.

But the meaning must be EXPANDED to express what the speaker meant in context.

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## 2. Unintended propositions

- a. You're not going to die [from this cut]
- b. I have eaten breakfast [today]
- c. I have eaten caviar [before]
- d. I have nothing to wear.
- e. I have nothing to repair.

Each of these sentences is a complete proposition.

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## 2. Unintended propositions

- a. You're not going to die [from this cut]
- b. I have eaten breakfast [today]
- c. I have eaten caviar [before]
- d. I have nothing to wear [nothing that is appropriate for the opera]
- e. I have nothing to repair.

Each of these sentences is a complete proposition.

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- e. I have nothing to repair [nothing at all]

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# Practice! (p. 176)

- Identify the explicatures which would be necessary in order to evaluate the truth value for each of the following examples:
  1. He arrived at the bank too early.
  2. All students must pass phonetics.
  3. No-one goes there anymore.
  4. To buy a house in London you need money.
  5. [Max: How was the party? Did it go well?]  
Amy: There wasn't enough drink and everyone left early.

Does Amy answer Max's question?

# Explicatures

“[...] **implicatures** are distinct from sentence meaning. They are communicated in addition to the sentence meaning and have independent truth values. A true statement could trigger a false implicature, or vice versa. **Explicatures** are quite different. The truth value of the sentence cannot be determined until the explicatures are added to the literal meanings of the words” (170)



# The Final

- Covers everything from after the midterm through this week.
- Review your writing assignments and quizzes as well as the slides to help you prepare.
- Graded out of 10 points.
- There will be more questions than you need to answer.
- Some multiple choice, some short answer.
- Open book, but no collaborating or using AI.
- Important topics:

Sense

Denotation

Expressive Meaning

Sentence Meaning vs. Utterance Meaning

Hyponym & Hyperonym

Gricean Maxims

Antonyms & Synonyms

Ambiguity

# For 15 December:

By 11:59pm:

- Submit the final, which will be posted to the class website on Monday, 11 December.
- Submit writing assignment #6.  
Reflecting on your semester in this class, what is one topic that you wish we could have spent more time exploring? Discuss why you are interested in that topic, and what you might have liked to learn about it. 100 words.
- The deadline for Quiz #4 has been extended by one week. It is posted on the class website.
- There will also be an extra credit quiz posted on the website by Monday, 11 December. It is not required, but strongly encouraged for everyone.

# THE SEASON'S GREETINGS

It's been great getting to know you all, looking forward to seeing you all in future semesters!

Happy Holidays!