

Discourse Analysis /Lecture Handout/Third Lecture

Implicatures

An implicature is an additional conveyed meaning. With the co-operative principle and the maxims as guides, we can start to work out how people actually decide that someone is “implying” something in conversation. Consider the following example.

- **CAROL:** Are you coming to the party tonight?
- **LARA:** I’ve got an exam tomorrow.

- Apparently, Lara’s statement is not an answer to Carol’s question. Lara doesn’t say Yes or No. Yet Carol will immediately interpret the statement as meaning “No” or “Probably not.” This is based on the assumption that Lara is being relevant and informative, adhering to the maxims of Relation and Quantity. Carol then can work out that “exam tomorrow” conventionally involves “study tonight,” and “study tonight” precludes “party tonight.” Thus, Lara’s answer is not simply a statement about tomorrow’s activities, it contains an **implicature** concerning tonight’s activities.

□ Schemas and scripts

- A **schema** is a general term for a conventional knowledge structure that exists in memory and is used in the interpretation of what we experience and what we hear or read about. For example, we have a “supermarket schema” (food displayed on shelves, arranged in aisles, shopping carts and baskets, check-out counter, and other conventional features) as part of our background knowledge.

- Similar in many ways to a schema is a **script**. A script is essentially a dynamic schema. That is, instead of the set of typical fixed features in a schema, a script has a series of conventional actions that take place. You have a script for “Going to the dentist” and another script for “Going to the movies.”
- Indeed, crucial information is sometimes omitted from important instructions on the assumption that everybody knows the script. Think carefully about the following instructions from a bottle of cough syrup.

- Fill measure cup to line and repeat every 2 to 3 hours.

- No, you’ve not just to keep filling the measure cup every 2 to 3 hours. Nor have you to rub the cough syrup on your neck or in your hair. You are expected to know the script and drink the stuff from the measure cup every 2 or 3 hours.
- Clearly, our understanding of what we read is not only based on what we see on the page (language structures), but also on other things that we have in mind (knowledge structures).