

Socialising Grice: on interlocutors' reasons for co-operating in conversation

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A way of extending the applicability of Grice's Co-operative Principle to non-co-operative exchanges is suggested. The argument builds on the premises of rationality and interlocutors' face wants (Goffman 1967; Brown and Levinson 1987 [1978]), which yield different degrees of co-operation depending on the cultural and situational context. More specifically, it is proposed that, in cases of non-co-operation, the correct results are obtained by applying the maxims not just to what is said, but also to what is implicated. What prompts this extended application of the maxims is interlocutors' reciprocal sensitivity to face-wants. Rather than being independently stipulated, the Co-operative Principle now falls out from rationality and interlocutors' mutual face-wants, affording us with a glimpse into interlocutors' reasons for abiding by this principle.

1 INTRODUCTION

Grice's (1989a [1975]) theory of conversational implicature is built on the assumption that interlocutors share some basic goals, captured under the rubric of the Co-operative Principle: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (henceforth CP; 1989a [1975]: 26). The CP is a pre-condition of linguistic communication: it is because it is assumed to be in operation at a deeper level that inferring the speaker's intended meaning (which, as much recent work in pragmatics convincingly argues, may well include