Three Suggested Theories to Improve the Cooperative Principle

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Abstract: This paper introduces the classic and neo-Gricean pragmatic theory of conversational implicature and a formulation of the relevance theory. Then it gives exploration of the three pragmatic theories from its own principles, concluding that the above theories are in favour of their own principles for the goal of a more powerful interpretation of communication.
Key words: Cooperative principle; Grice's theory; neo-Gricean theory; relevance theory;

1. INTRODUCTION

Grice's theory of conversational implicature has revolutionized pragmatic theorizing and remained one of the cornerstones of contemporary pragmatics. Grice thinks, in daily communication, people are observing a set of basic rules of cooperating with each other so as to communicate effectively through conversation. He calls this set of rules the cooperative principle (CP) elaborated in four sub-principles (maxims), that is the cooperative principle. The four maxims are the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner. The co-operative principle and its component maxims ensure that in an exchange of conversation, the right amount of information is provided and that the interaction is conducted in a truthful and perspicuous manner, which revolutionizes and places an important role in the pragmatic theory.

However, with the development on the basis of Grice's cooperative principle and its sub- maxims, there have also been attempts to challenge the validity of this basis and suggest some other principles in their stead. On Horn's (1988:130) account, the Grice's original framework is clearly at best incomplete and at worst inadequate beyond repair to the task of predicting sets of non-logical inferences in conversation. The redundancy of the maxims, however, has provided more problems, or at least more challenges, for post – Gricean theorists. Of their theory models, the most influential are the neo-Gricean theory (especifically the Hornian and Levinsonian theories) and the relevance theory.

2. THE NEO-GRICEAN THEORY

(1). The Q- and R-principles
Horn (1984) has developed an account which maintains Grice's Quality maxims(truthfulness and evidencedness) but replaces all his other maxims with two general principles:
A. The Q-principle: Make your contribution sufficient; say as much as you can (given both Quality and R)
B. The R-principle: Make your contribution necessary; say no more than you must (given Q)
The Q-principle is taken to be a principle biased in favour of the hearer's interest (to be given as fully articulated a verbal message as possible on the topic at hand) and is assumed to encompass Grice's first maxim of Quantity (Make your contribution as informative as is required) and to mop up the first two Manner maxims ("Avoid obscurity of expression" and "Avoid ambiguity").
The R-principle, on the other hand, is taken to be a principle biased in favour of the speaker's interest (to expend as little articulatory [and cognitive] effort as possible) and is assumed to subsume Grice's second maxim of Quantity ("Do not make your contribution more informative than is required"), his maxim of Relation and the other two Manner maxims ("Be brief" and "Be orderly") (see Horn 1989, 194).
So he sees these principles as pulling in opposite directions and as reflections within the sphere of communication of deeper contradictory forces at work in language change: Zipf's principle of least effort (speaker's economy), on the one hand, which taken to its logical extreme would result in a single vocal encoding all meanings, and his "force of diversification" (hearer's economy), on the other hand, which taken to its logical extreme would result in a vast vocabulary of distinct words, one for each meaning.
Both principles help to strengthen what is communicated by a sentence. The Q-principle induces inferences from the use of one expression to the assumption that the speaker did not intend to communicate a contrasting, and informationally stronger, one. This principle is thus essentially metalinguistic in kind, and accounts for both scalar and clausal implicatures. It allows us, for instance, to conclude from 'John ate some of the cookies' to 'John didn't eat all of the cookies' (scalar implicature), and from 'A or B' to 'A or B, but not both' (clausal + scalar implicature). The I-principle allows us to infer from the use of an expression to its most informative or stereotypical interpretation. It is used, for instance, to enrich the interpretation of a conjunction to a temporal sequential, or causal,

relation, and it allows us to interpret a conditional like 'John walks, if Mary walks' as the biconditional 'John walks if and only Mary walks'.

(2). The Q-, I- and M-principles

Arguing for a clear separation of pragmatic principles governing an utterance's surface form and pragmatic principles governing its informational content, Levinson (2000) defines three basic principles linked to three of Grice's maxims (here in abridged form):

Q-Principle:

Speaker's maxim. Do not provide a statement that is informationally weaker than your knowledge of the world allows.

Recipient corollary. Take it that the speaker made the strongest statement consistent with what he knows.

I-Principle:

Speaker's maxim. Produce the minimal linguistic information sufficient to achieve your communicational ends.

Recipient corollary. Amplify the informational content of the speaker's utterance, by finding the most specific interpretation, up to what you judge to be the speaker's . . . point.

M-Principle

Speaker's maxim. Indicate an abnormal, non-stereotypical situation by using marked expressions that contrast with those you would use to describe the corresponding normal, stereotypical situations.

Recipient corollary. What is said in an abnormal way indicates an abnormal situation.

These principles provide heuristics for interpreting utterances. For instance, when Mary answers elliptically 'some of them', she can be seen by Peter as producing the minimal linguistic information sufficient to achieve her communicational ends (following the I-Principle), and this, together with the assumption that Mary obeyed the Gricean Maxim of relation, justifies his amplifying the content of her utterance up to what he judges to be her point (see Levinson, 2000, pp. 183–4). Moreover, the Q-Principle justifies Peter in taking it that Mary made the strongest statement consistent with her knowledge, and that therefore it is not the case that she likes all of Fellini's films.

Furthermore, inconsistencies arising from the three potentially conflicting pragmatic principles can be resolved by a set of precedence in the order of Q>M>I.(Huang 2000a). In recent years, this neo-Gricean pragmatic theory has generated a new industry of pragmatic theory production and significant further progress can confidently be anticipated in the near future.

3. RELEVANCE THEORY

As a post-Gricean pragmatic theory, Relevance Theory (RT) takes as its starting point the question of how hearers bridge the gap between sentence meaning and speaker meaning. For Relevance Theory, the very act of communicating raises in the intended audience precise and predictable expectations of relevance, which are enough on their own to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. Speakers may fail to be relevant, but they may not, if they are communicating at all (rather than, say, rehearsing a speech), produce utterances that do not convey a presumption of their own relevance.

Whereas Grice invokes relevance (in his 'maxim of relation') without defining it at all, Relevance Theory starts from a detailed account of relevance and its role in cognition. Relevance is defined by Sperber and Wilson as a property of inputs to cognitive processes. These inputs include external stimuli, which can be perceived and attended to, and mental representations, which can be stored, recalled or used as premises in inference. An input is relevant to an individual when it connects with background knowledge to yield new cognitive effects, for instance by answering a question, confirming a hypothesis, or correcting a mistake.

Slightly more technically, cognitive effects are changes in the individual's set of assumptions resulting from the processing of an input in a context of previously held assumptions. This processing may result in three types of cognitive effects: the derivation of new assumptions, the modification of the degree of strength of previously held assumptions, or the deletion of previously held assumptions.

Relevance, that is, the possibility of achieving such a cognitive effect, is what makes an input worth processing. Everything else being equal, inputs which yield greater cognitive effects are more relevant and more worth processing. For instance, being told by the doctor 'you have the flu' is likely to carry more cognitive effects and therefore be more relevant than being told 'you are ill'. In processing an input, mental effort is expended. Everything else being equal, relevant inputs involving a smaller processing effort are more relevant and more worth processing. For instance, being told 'you have the flu' is likely to be more relevant than being told 'you have a disease spelled with the sixth, the twelfth and the twenty-first letter of the alphabet' because the first of these two statements would yield the same cognitive effects as the second for much less processing effort. Relevance is thus a matter of degree and varies with two factors; positively with cognitive effect, and inversely with processing effort.

Relevance Theory develops two general claims or 'principles' about the role of relevance in cognition and in communication:

Cognitive principle of relevance. Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.

Communicative principle of relevance. Every act of communication conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

As we have already mentioned, these two principles of relevance are descriptive and not normative

(unlike the principles and maxims of Gricean and neo-Gricean pragmaticists). The first, cognitive principle of relevance, yields a variety of predictions regarding human cognitive processes. It predicts that our perceptual mechanisms tend spontaneously to pick out potentially relevant stimuli, our retrieval mechanisms tend spontaneously to activate potentially relevant assumptions, and our inferential mechanisms tend spontaneously to process them in the most productive way. This principle, moreover, has essential implications for human communication processes.

In order to communicate, the communicator needs her audience's attention. If, as claimed by the Cognitive Principle of Relevance, attention tends automatically to go to what is most relevant at the time, then the success of communication depends on the audience taking the utterance to be relevant enough to be worthy of attention. Wanting her communication to succeed, the communicator, by the very act of communicating, indicates that she wants her utterance to be seen as relevant by the audience, and this is what the communicative principle of relevance states.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this section, we have three theory models, the Gricean, the neo-Gricean and the relevance-theoretic, each with its own goals and orientation, but all intersecting with each other at certain points. Their differences can, at least to some extent, be laid at the door of the disciplines they each ally with: Grice with philosophical analysis, Horn with linguistics, in particular lexis, and relavance theory with cognitive processing. Even given their different perspectives. it seems unlikely that they are simply complementary in all respects.

Considering the issue of the 'right' conversational or communicative principles，it would also be odd to find that only one set of such principles that are useful for making a pragmatic analysis of the conversation or communication.

There is no doubt that the Neo-Gricean theory and Relevance Theory are the great important contributors to the theoretical approaches to pragmatics with their original points of view. They all developed and enriched Grice's Cooperative Principle by arguing in favour of their own principles for the goal of a more powerful interpretation of communication with their different perspectives.

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