

THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

WHAT IS COOPERATION?

- Cooperation can be understood as an essential factor when speakers and listeners are interacting, in other words, it is the **expectation** that the listener has towards the speaker. The speaker is supposed to convey true statements and say nothing more than what is required.

The cooperative principle describes how effective communication in conversation is achieved in common social situations, that is, how listeners and speakers must act cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way. When people talk with each other, they try to converse smoothly and successfully. Cooperation is the basis of successful conversations.

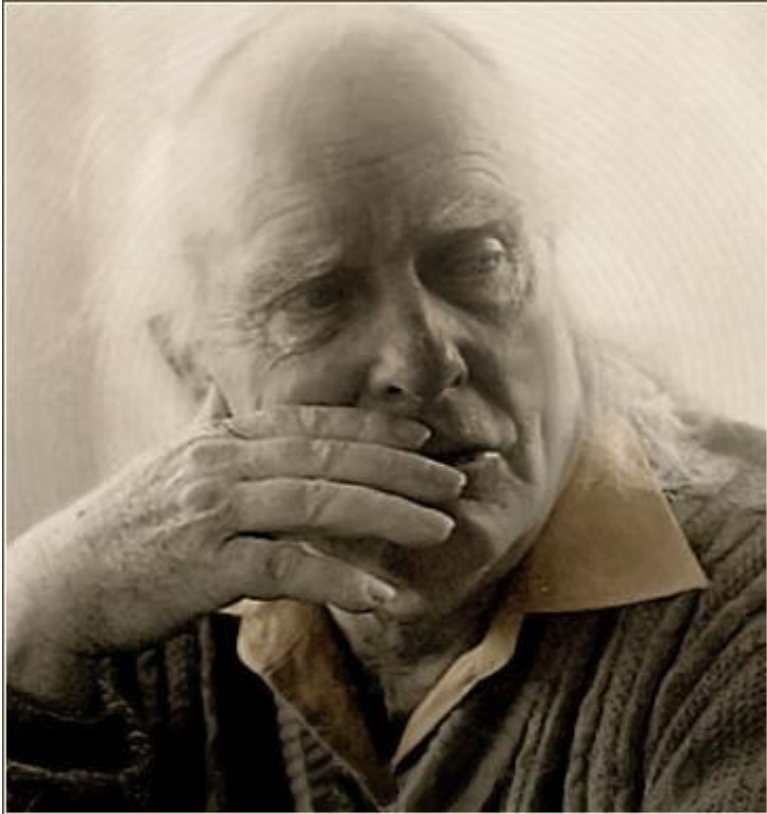
THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE



The concept of the cooperative principle was introduced by philosopher H. Paul Grice in his article "Logic and Conversation" (*Syntax and Semantics*, 1975). In that article, Grice argued that "talk exchanges" aren't merely a "succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did.

They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction."

(HERBERT) PAUL GRICE

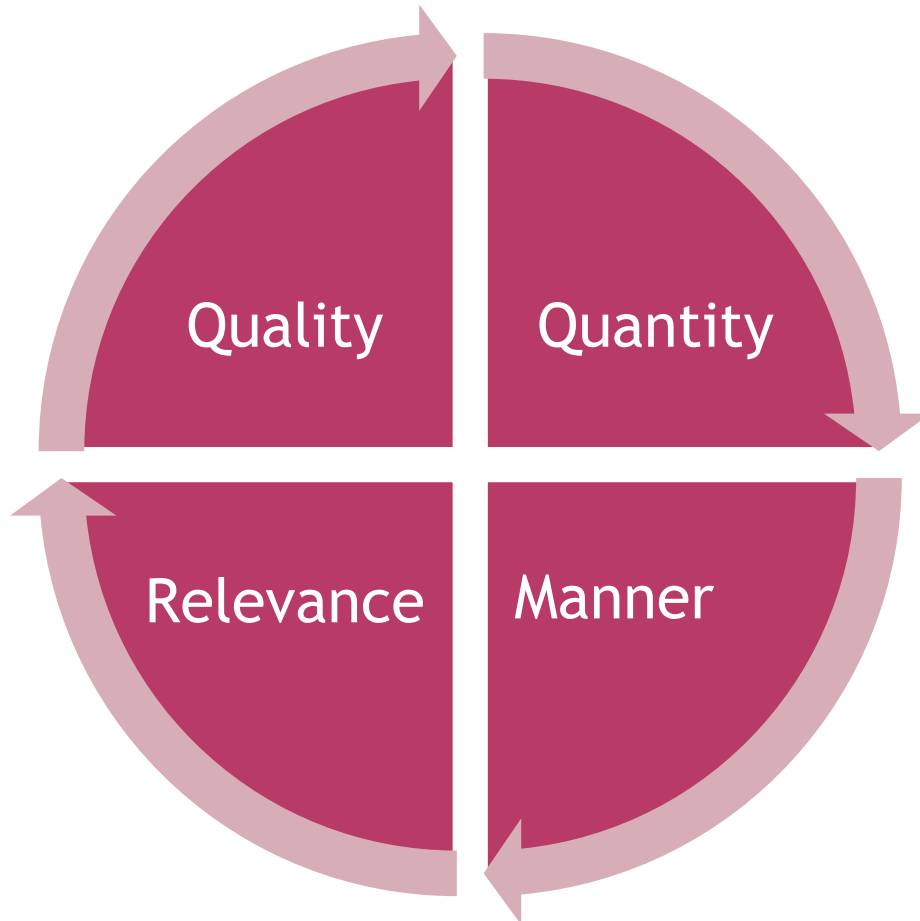


- ◉ 1913-1988
- ◉ Educated at Oxford, taught there for several years, spent the last two decades of his life at the University of California at Berkeley
- ◉ Many of his most influential writings are reprinted in the book *Studies in the Way of Words*

COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE AND ITS FOUR MAXIMS

- A principle proposed by the philosopher **Paul Grice** whereby those involved in Paul communication assume that both parties will normally seek to cooperate with each other to establish agreed meaning. It is composed of four maxims: quality, quantity, relation, and manner.

CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS



MAXIM OF QUALITY

◎ Supermaxim:

1. Try to make your contribution one that is true.

◎ Submaxims:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.

2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

BASIC IDEA

- The Maxim of Quality requires information provided in conversations to be genuine and justified . It is one of the four conversational maxims of the Cooperative Principle . Grice proposes this maxim as an explanation for a certain kind of regularity in conversational behavior with respect to the authenticity of information provided at each turn of a conversation.

EXAMPLE:



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Boy: How old are you?

Girl: I'm 200 years old.

We can clearly see that the receiver has violated the maxim of quality by lying.

MAXIM OF QUANTITY

1. Say no less than the conversation requires.
2. Say no more than the conversation requires.

BASIC IDEA

- The Maxim of Quantity relates to the amount of information provided in conversations . It is one of the four conversational maxims that make up the Cooperative Principle . Grice proposes this maxim as an explanation for a certain kind of regularity in conversational behavior with respect to the amount of information provided in each turn of a conversation.

EXAMPLE:



Boy: Do you have the time?

Man: Yes, it's 9:30 .

Given the purpose of the conversation, the man contributes **only as much information as is required**.

- not excessive like “it’s 9:30 at night, Greenwich Mean Time, 20 May 2009, ...”
- Not inadequate like, “it’s night time”.

MAXIM OF RELATION/RELEVANCE

1. Be relevant.

BASIC IDEA

- The Maxim of Relation is one of the four conversational maxims of the Cooperative Principle . Grice proposes this maxim as an explanation for a certain kind of regularity in conversational behavior with respect to the relevance of information provided at each turn of a conversation.

EXAMPLE:



Waitress: How do you like your steak cooked?
Man: Medium rare, please.

The woman contributes what is relevant for the purpose of the conversation.
- not irrelevant like “I like steak very much”
or “What nice weather!”

MAXIM OF MANNER

◎ Supermaxim:

1. Be perspicuous.

◎ Submaxims:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

BASIC IDEA

- The Maxim of Manner is related to how something is being said in the conversation. It is one of the four conversational maxims that are part of the Cooperative Principle . Grice proposes this maxim as an explanation for a certain kind of regularity in conversational behavior with respect to the way information is provided at each turn of a conversation.

EXAMPLE:



A brother asking his sister
Ahmad: Do you know where
my phone is?

Maha: Your phone! Do you
know that using phones a lot
can damage your brain. They
are more dangerous than you
think, how about trying to
stop using your phone for a
week!?

So, as shown above Ahmed asked a question and he was expecting a specific and clear answer, but, we can clearly see that the talkative Maha was not clear. Instead she gave him a speech, so, she is obviously violating the maxim of manner.

CRITICISM

- Grice's theory is often disputed by arguing that cooperative conversation, as with most social behaviour, is culturally determined, and therefore the Gricean maxims and the cooperative principle cannot be universally applied due to intercultural differences. Keenan claims that the Malagasy, for example, follow a completely opposite cooperative principle in order to achieve conversational cooperation. In their culture, speakers are reluctant to share information and flout the maxim of quantity by evading direct questions and replying on incomplete answers because of the risk of losing face by committing oneself to the truth of the information, as well as the fact that having information is a form of prestige. However, Harnish points out that Grice only claims his maxims hold in conversations where his cooperative principle is in effect. The Malagasy speakers choose not to be cooperative, valuing the prestige of information ownership more highly. (It could also be said in this case that this is a less cooperative communication system, since less information is shared)
- Another criticism is that the Gricean maxims can easily be misinterpreted to be a guideline for etiquette, instructing speakers on how to be moral, polite conversationalists. However, the Gricean maxims, despite their wording, are only meant to describe the commonly accepted traits of successful cooperative communication. Geoffrey Leech created the politeness maxims: **tact**, **generosity**, **approbation**, **modesty**, **agreement**, and **sympathy**.



FLOUTING THE MAXIMS

- ◉ Without cooperation, human interaction would be far more difficult and counterproductive. Therefore, the cooperative principle and the Gricean maxims are not specific to conversation but to verbal interactions in general. For example, it would not make sense to reply to a question about the weather with an answer about groceries because it would violate the maxim of relevance. Likewise, responding to a simple yes/no question with a long monologue would violate the maxim of quantity.
- ◉ However, it is possible to flout a maxim intentionally or unconsciously and thereby convey a different meaning than what is literally spoken. Many times in conversation, this flouting is manipulated by a speaker to produce a negative pragmatic effect, as with sarcasm or irony. One can flout the maxim of quality to tell a clumsy friend who has just taken a bad fall that her gracefulness is impressive and obviously intend to mean the complete opposite. Likewise, flouting the maxim of quantity may result in ironic understatement, the maxim of relevance in blame by irrelevant praise, and the maxim of manner in ironic ambiguity. The Gricean maxims are therefore often purposefully flouted by comedians and writers, who may hide the complete truth and manipulate their words for the effect of the story and the sake of the reader's experience.
- ◉ Speakers who deliberately flout the maxims usually intend for their listener to understand their underlying implication. In the case of the clumsy friend, she will most likely understand that the speaker is not truly offering a compliment. Therefore, cooperation is still taking place, but no longer on the literal level. Conversationalists can assume that when speakers intentionally flout a maxim, they still do so with the aim of expressing some thought. Thus, the Gricean maxims serve a purpose both when they are followed and when they are flouted.

CONCLUSION

- In conclusion, we always use the cooperative principle when we talk. At the same time, we always violate the maxims. But, still the message that we want to convey is being understood for the most cases. And indeed "Grice's cooperative principle could be seen as a great contribution in suggesting an effective principle."

