I. Pre-listening:

**For homework read the text and then answer the following questions. Finally complete the vocabulary exercise. You will do 3A together with your classmates in the next class.**

An Introduction to Gricean Maxims

You will hear a lecture about some maxims, or rules, of conversation that an English philosopher of language named Herbert Paul Grice devised. These rules have become known as Grice’s Conversational Maxims, or Gricean Maxims. It can be said that Grice’s work formed the basis of the modern study of pragmatics, a branch of linguistics concerned with the ways in which people produce and comprehend meanings through language in social contexts.

Grice noted that although much of our speech is nonliteral, we have a remarkable ability to accurately grasp what our conversational partners mean, even when the meaning the speaker is trying to convey and linguistic meaning are quite different. For example, when a boy says to a girl with whom he has fallen in love, “I can’t get you out of my head,” the girl does not imagine that she has been transported magically into the head of the boy. She knows that he means he cannot stop thinking about her.

Some jokes are based on taking nonliteral speech as if were meant literally. The girl in the situation described above might joke, in a teasing way, “I must be very crowded in such a small space.” The boy would, of course, recognize that the girl intentionally chose the literal meaning of the phrase “I can't get you out of my head,” in order to make a joke, at his expense. Grice thought that the appropriate understanding of nonliteral speech was the outcome of what he called a “cooperative principle” and maxims (rules) of discourse. You will hear about the four Gricean maxims in the videotaped lecture.

1. Mark “L” for “literal” or “N” for “nonliteral” next to the following sentences.

\_L\_ I would like to go inside that cave. [Said at the entrance of a cave.]

\_N\_ That song is out of this world.

\_N\_ Cherry blossoms are tender little bits of heaven.

\_L\_ Mars is the fourth planet from the sun in our solar system.

\_N\_ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man

to enter the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19:25, New American Standard Bible)

Write your literal interpretations of the three sentences that have nonliteral intent.

\_\_That’s a fantastic song. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_Cherry blossoms are delicate and remarkable.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_It’s tough for wealthy people to gain entrance to heaven.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. List three “rules” that *you think* should be followed when having a conversation:

[From your own common sense, not according to Grice.]

Example \* Be interesting. / Tell me something I don't know.

Further examples: \* Don't be rude. / If you need to interrupt, do so without being pushy.

\* Reciprocate. / Give others the chance to express themselves; don't hog the conversation.

\* Stay on topic./ Don't jump to an unrelated topic until enough has been said about the topic at hand.

3. Have any of your friends or family members ever violated these rules? Try to think of two cases when they were violated. Describe them and how the violation made you feel.

i)

ii)

3A) At the beginning of the next class you will read the two situations to classmates sitting near you and they will try to guess which of your rules of conversation were violated. Then, listen to the cases that your classmates thought of and try to identify the rule violations. [Do not show each other your papers! Listen to each other.]

**Classmate 1:**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Rule violated: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Classmate 2:**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Rule violated: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

4. Write a definition for each of these words. Use them in a sentence.

presumably　 trivial committed to [something]

a dozen　　　 corroborate assert

ambiguous arising with technically

inference implication plausible

weird intuitively

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5. Before you watch the video, try to match the maxims of conversation with their descriptions. Each of them will be described in the video and you’ll have a chance to revise your answers afterward, if necessary.

**Maxim Description**

1) Quantity \_3\_ Don’t say things that aren’t true. [E.g., Tell someone that

it is raining when it is actually a fine day.]

2) Relevance \_4\_ Don’t be confusing. [E.g., Saying “It’s not NOT sunny,” when you are trying to tell someone that it's sunny.]

3) Quality \_1\_ Say the strongest thing that is true? [E.g., If you ate all the doughnuts, don't say you ate some of them.]

4) Manner \_2\_ Don't say anything that the interlocutor doesn't need to know. [E.g., If you’re traveling in Europe and someone asks “Where are you from?” it would be better to say “the United States,” rather than “1642 West 34th Street.”]

**II. Listening Exercises**

***First Section -- Introduction***

**Dictation**

**Listen to the first section several times and write down the missing sentences.**

OK, so… today what we are going to do is this: I am going to tell you about two sort of different kinds of content, OK, assertive content and what you might call implicated content or implicature. I will tell you what these things are in a minute. Now, what we are going to see is that there is a notion in which communication should be cooperative. Um… and it’s this sort of cooperative kind of communication that gives rise to these implicatures, as we’ll see. So… the whole story will then sort of tie in to helping us see what kind of content is in play in language use, and sort of how we can go about formulating these contents in terms of…at least we will have a partial description of this…in terms of what are called the Gricean maxims.

***Second Section -- Story No. 1: “It’s not raining.”***

**Reconstructing stories**

In order to make his points, the speaker tells four stories. The first story is about a lie that someone told to his friend. You will have to retell the story to a classmate. To help you prepare for that, fill in the blanks or answer the questions about it.

1. What is the setting of the story?

\_\_In the basement of a building at the end of a working day\_\_\_\_

1. What is the story’s context? [In other words, what is presupposed?]

\_\_Since you’ve been working in the basement all day you don’t know what the weather is like\_\_

1. You ask your friend, “what’s the weather like out there?”
2. Your friend answers, “It’s not raining.”
3. So, you decide \_not to take your umbrella and to go out in your normal clothing\_.
4. As it turns out, \_it’s pouring rain\_\_\_\_\_.
5. The speaker believes that your friend has a responsibility to \_\_apologize to you\_\_.

After you are satisfied that you understand the story well, try retelling it to a partner.

***Third Section -- Story No. 2: “I ate SOME of the doughnuts.”***

**Reconstructing stories (continued)**

The second story involves doughnuts. Try to reconstruct the story by filling in the blanks.

1) The speaker asks you to imagine that you and he are \_roommates\_\_\_ .

2) He said that yesterday he went out and bought \_a dozen doughnuts\_.

3) You and he ate some for dessert last night and he had a couple for breakfast.

4) While on his way home, he wonders if he needs to stop somewhere to buy food for breakfast.

5) He calls you up and asks, “Did you eat the doughnuts?”

6) You reply, “Yeah, I ate some of them.”

7) From what you said, he concludes that there must be some doughnuts left.

8) Due to the conclusion he reached, he decided not to buy any breakfast food.

9) When he got home, he opened the doughnut box and found that it was empty.

10) He confronts you by saying, “Hey, you told me you didn’t eat all of the doughnuts.

11) But, you defend yourself when you reply, “I didn’t tell you I didn’t eat all of the doughnuts, I only told you I ate some of the doughnuts; in fact, I ate them all.”

A student asked the teacher a question so that he could better understand the point of the story. What was that question?: “What do you mean by commitment?”

What questions would you have liked to have asked the teacher to better understand the point he was making?

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Let’s see if your questions will be answered later in the lecture.

***Third Section -- Story No. 3: “I have three kids.”***

**Understanding the point of stories used as illustrations**

The third story is a very simple one. It involves a conversation between you and a hypothetical friend of yours, John. Fill in the following sentence and fill in the dialog of the conversation.

Before the conversation, you know that John is \_\_married\_, but you’re wondering if he has children.

Dialog 1

You: Hey, John, do you have children?

John: Yes, I have three.

Now, imagine the dialog you might have with John after you have found out that although what he told you was not technically false, it was highly misleading.

Dialog 2

You: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

John: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

You: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

John: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Share the conversation you created with a few people sitting near you.

How was the statement in the first story, “It’s not raining.”, different from the statement John makes in this story, “I have three children.”

“It’s not raining” was not true; it violated the Maxim of Quality.

“I have three children” was not technically false in that it is true that John has three children—he just left out the other four. But, we may feel just as dissatisfied as when we were told a lie, since it violates another one of the Gricean Maxims—Quantity.

The story is used as an illustration for the distinction between “implied content” and something called “implicated content” or “implicature.”

According to the speaker, when John said that he had three children, it was implied that:

He had TWO children and ONE child.

However, the implicature (or the inference by the hearer based on common sense understanding), was that: He had no more than three children or he would have given a higher number.

***Fourth Section -- What makes a speaker “cooperative”?***

**Fill in the missing words.**

So the idea is something like this: Well, a cooperative speaker should do certain things. These particular things have been formulated by a philosopher called “Grice”—this is a G by the way—as something called the maxims of conversation. The particular maxim that we are dealing with here is what’s called quantity. So what the maxim of quantity says is this: Say the strongest thing you can, say the strongest thing that is true. What does it mean? In this case, well, first of all, you may wonder what do you mean by “strongest,” right?

You will notice that even without the phrases that belong in the blanks in the section above, the passage makes sense. Most of the phrases are used as rhetorical devices which help the speaker frame what he is saying, make the content a bit less information dense (therefore, more comprehensible when heard), and anticipate questions that the audience might have in their minds.

By “strongest,” I just mean logically strongest. In the same sense that we just heard as implication. So, “three” implies “two,” implies “one,” so, in that sense three is stronger than two and so on up the scale, so…1<2<3<4 whatever, some bigger numbers. Ok, in this same kind of thing we can find, NO<SOME<ALL, actually perhaps “NO” should be left off the scale, at least SOME and ALL from a scale of the same kind because all seems to imply some, or so we in general, assume. So quantity just says this: say the strongest thing that is true.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

One of the students noticed an underlying assumption, or simplification, that the speaker was making. What was that assumption? That a person knows that what he’s saying is true.

This led the speaker to go off on a tangent in which he told another story. Complete the following sentences to paraphrase the story:

Although he was convinced that had a cup of coffee this morning, it might be the case that people actually don’t exist. Perhaps we are really on the set of “The Matrix” and our brains are being stimulated as we float in vats of fluid. So, it’s possible that he didn’t have a cup of coffee this morning.

What is the point of this digression?

When we talk about Quantity, the speaker should say the strongest thing he BELIEVES to be true.

***Fifth Section -- Why “Quantity” can’t be the only maxim***

**This section provides a good example of a student (S) engaging with the teacher (T). Fill in the missing phrases.**

**T:** Okay, now, let me ask you guys a question. Suppose that this [Quantity] was the only rule, the only Maxim that we had. What would happen? I mean, how would our communication go?

**S:** Umm…you mean, like, there can be other kinds of maxims?

**T:** Yeah, in fact there must be, if you look at the result here.

**S:** What about, well, whether it is true or false. Like, umm, Quality?

**T:** Yeah, okay, okay, you already know something about this.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

The students seemed to recognize that the teacher’s questions required an answer. How do you think they knew that? 1. The teacher rephrased the question.

2. He paused for a long time after asking the questions.

At the end of this section, the student made a comment that the teacher did not agree with. Did the teacher say to the student, “You’re wrong!”? If not, how did the teacher show his disagreement?

The teacher gently reminds the student that the roommate did not technically lie about the doughnuts. He just said ‘some’ when he should have said ‘all.’ So it was really a Quantity issue.

***Sixth Section -- The Maxim of Relevance***

**Answer true (T) or (F) to the following questions.**

\_**F**\_ You know that Pascal is from Toulouse, but you don’t know where in Toulouse.

\_**T**\_ Pascal says that he is from France.

\_**F**\_ Pascal further specified that he is from the north of France.

\_**F**\_ Pascal is not very proud to be French.

\_**F**\_ Pascal must have lied about being from France.

\_**T**\_ In this section, the teacher tried to apply the Maxim of Quantity (i.e., say the strongest thing that is true) to a case in which it did not fit.

\_**T**\_ Pascal probably did not say that he is from the *north, south, east,* or *west* of France because it was not relevant.

\_**T**\_ The point of this section is to illustrate that there must be maxims other than the Maxim of Quantity

**III. Wrapping things up**

***Last Section -- Conclusion***

As you listen to the speaker’s brief explanation of the four Gricean Maxims, go back to the matching exercise, Question 5 of the Pre-listening section (page 4), and check your answers.

[Answers will vary.]

Then, go back to the list of “rules” that you thoughtshould be followed when having a conversation, Question 2 of the Pre-listening section (page 2). Do you have any Gricean Maxims among your rules? There are various sub-maxims to Grice’s Maxims. Do you think any of your rules might be sub-maxims? Exchange your views with classmates sitting near you.

[Answers will vary.]