“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means”:

Inherent Misunderstanding in Language and How it Illuminates Wayne Davis’s Criticisms of Gricean Theory within Pragmatics

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Archie A. Potter II
May 2014

© 2014 Archie A. Potter II. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis titled
“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means”:
Inherent Misunderstanding in Language and How it Illuminates Wayne Davis’s
Criticisms of Gricean Theory within Pragmatics

by
ARCHIE A. POTTER II

has been approved for
the Department of Philosophy
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Scott Carson
Associate Professor of Philosophy

Robert Frank
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
ABSTRACT

POTTER II, ARCHIE A., M.A., May 2014, Philosophy

“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means”: Inherent Misunderstanding in Language and How it Illuminates Wayne Davis’s Criticism of Gricean Theory within Pragmatics

Director of Thesis: Scott Carson

H. P. Grice was the first to provide a systematic account of pragmatics and implicature. He did this through various maxims and principles he saw as helping to identify, discern, and generate the implicatures we find in language. In 1998 Wayne Davis published Implicature, Intention, Conversation, and Principle in the Failure of Gricean Theory (1998) in which he presented many criticisms for Gricean theory. The three main objections Davis gives are the problem of determinacy, calculability, and differentiation. These problems show Grice’s theory is unable to discern when an implicature is present and when it is not. I contend when one views misunderstanding as an inherent part of language, resulting from the opacity of other minds and that language is used to communicate mental states, that one sees that the problems Davis presents can be classified as types of misunderstandings of communication. Thus, given these problems and considerations any theory of communication or natural language must account for these types of misunderstanding.
DEDICATION

To my parents:

Paula and Archie Potter

Without them, none of this would have been possible.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Scott Carson for the useful comments, remarks and engagement through the learning process of this master thesis. I would also like to thank my other readers Professor Jeremy Morris and Professor Robert Briscoe for their help and comments all of which were invaluable in the writing and researching process. I would also like to thank the philosophy department and all of its faculty and staff for help over the two years I attended Ohio University their conversations, comments, and classes have made me a better writer and philosopher. I would like to thank all the understanding and supporting friends and family who have helped me whenever they can. Lastly, I would like to thank my partner Camille for all of the time spent helping me edit and refine this thesis to where it is today and all of the mutual encouragement as we both completed our theses.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction to Concepts, Gricean Theory and Davis’s Objections</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1 Basic History and Concept</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2 Some Basic Questions Laid Out by Grice and Others</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Grice’s Theory of Implicatures</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1 Introductory Remarks</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2 Basic Layout of Grice’s Theory</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.3 The Calculability Assumption</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.4 The Working out Schema</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Problems for the Gricean theory</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1 The Problem of Differentiation</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2 The Problem of Determinacy</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Conclusion</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: The Inherence of misunderstanding and the problems it presents for pragmatics</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Misunderstanding</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Semantic Misunderstanding</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Putting Words in Your Mouth</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3 Missing the Point</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.4 A Cultural Misunderstanding</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Conclusion</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 1: Terms and definitions

61
LIST OF TABLES

Table One: Example of ascending scalar values..................................................28
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION TO CONCEPTS, GRICEAN THEORY AND DAVIS’S
OBECTIONS

1.1 Introduction

This thesis will explore the problems with Gricean theories of implicatures, which also apply to Wilson and Sperber’s relevance theory, and how misunderstanding, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology can inform us as to what, in the end, may be causing these problems through looking at the ways different varieties of misunderstanding in language use occur. After Wayne Davis published his book *Implicature, Intention, Conversation, and Principle in the Failure of Gricean Theory* (1998) showing the determinacy/calculability¹, and differentiation² problems for Grice’s theory, one could ask these three questions: 1) are these problems endemic to Gricean theories, 2) could other theoretical frameworks provide a way for us to overcome these problems, and 3) do these problems result from recondite structure of language? I contend that these problems for Grice may not be overcome, as can be seen by the various other objections in Davis and other places in the literature. As to the first question, the same problems of determinacy, differentiation, and calculability seem to appear in Wilson and Sperber’s relevance theory³. As Davis (1998) notes, “The problem

---

¹ The ability of Grice’s theory to *work-out* implicatures and tell you which one is being indicated among many. More exactly determinacy is *the supposition that S believes p is required to make S’s utterance consistent with the Cooperative Principle* (Davis 1998 pg.62).

² This problem presents as false positives. It indicates that there are implicatures present that are not actually intended in the utterance.

³ e.g. see Davis chapter three §3.12.
[with Gricean theory] is that any principle general enough to hold in all cases of implicatures will be too general to yield specific predictions…Sperber and Wilson’s [relevance] theory has the same difficulty” (Davis 1998 pg. 98-99). In answer to the second and third, a review of some linguistic evidence will lead one to conclude that these problems may be a product of language itself in that these problems result from the natural way language works. The opacity of other minds, the fact that language is used to communicate mental states, and the implicative meaning of an utterance is radically underdetermined by the terms used. In fact, Grice’s theory cannot distinguish between implicatures that are present, those that linguistic intuitions would say a utterance implicates, and those that are not present. Failure to distinguish may be a common occurrence of natural language and its use, and not necessarily one of a theory alone. One could call this a misunderstanding of an utterance. In the second chapter, I will explore and lay out varieties of linguistic misunderstanding that will show this very point. An example of the determinacy problem in everyday language use is one in which a listener encounters cases where the implicature(s) of a given utterance cannot be discerned, or what I will call missing the point in Chapter Two. One could surmise that this everyday occurrence of language is pervasive and could be a product of any theory of implicatures that one might try to use. However, one cannot discredit all the objections that Davis levies against Gricean theories. Some are still crippling, and even if the determinacy and differentiation problems are artifacts of natural language to some extent and not eliminable from our theories, I argue that Grice’s theory is still unsatisfactory.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Such as, given Davis’s objections some of Grice’s central claims about the relation of
In Chapter One, I will discuss the basic concept of implicatures and Gricean theory, and then examine Davis’s objections. This will provide a sturdy base to build the work in the latter chapter. In the second chapter, I will provide evidence and argumentation that one could see some of Davis’s objections to Gricean theory as part of natural language as a whole and not simply a matter of theoretical construction. In other words, these problems are an artifact of language itself; they are part of communicating in a natural language and not just a product of the Grice’s theory. These types of misunderstanding/miscommunication are inherent to language. These problems like the over-generation of implicatures for a given utterance happen in language frequently, what some might label over-thinking a given linguistic encounter. Other examples of problems include the inability to determine what implicature is being implied by a given utterance, for example, not understanding a joke or irony. I will provide examples and explanation of these varieties of misunderstanding in the second chapter.

1.1.1 Basic History and Concept

The heart of the problem of implicatures lies in the distinction between what is said and what is meant by a speaker’s utterance. As is commonly agreed, what an utterer intends to communicate by a speech act is far richer than what is directly conveyed by the words or sentences used. As Laurence Horn said, “linguistic meaning radically underdetermines the message conveyed and understood” by a hearer (Horn 2006 pg. 3).
Tracing this distinction back, the fourth century rhetoricians Servius and Denatus use this in their characterization of a pragmatic understanding of ‘litotes’ as “a figure in which we say less but mean more” (Horn 2006 pg. 3).

Moving forward to the true start of implicatures as their own topic of philosophical investigation, H. P. Grice coins the term and is the first person to give a systematic treatment and study of implicatures, cases in which a speaker’s meaning differs from what is said in the sentence used by the speaker. The turning point for the systematic development of a pragmatic framework was Grice’s 1967 William James lectures. As L. Horn and Gregory Ward (2006) say, it was a “masterful (if incomplete) program that showed how a regimented account of language use facilitates a simpler more elegant description of language structure” (pg. xi). From this lecture comes Grice’s uses of the terms ‘implicate’ and ‘implicature’ to pick out cases where what a speaker has said is different or distinct from what that speaker meant by making that utterance. An intuitive way to see what is being referred to by implicature is the case of temporal and causal uses of ‘and’ e.g. the difference between ‘Rand got married and had a baby’ vs. ‘Rand had a baby and got married.’ In the first case, the speaker could mean that Rand got married first and then, at some later time, he had a child, whereas the second could mean Rand had a child and then, at some later time, he got married. Additionally, the difference between using ‘and’, ‘but’, and ‘yet’ e.g. ‘Rand is smart and brave’ vs. ‘Rand is smart but brave.’ Grice labels these types of cases as conventional implicatures because of the conventions he sees behind the use of these word types and their interpretation. An

5 The Latin being minus dicimus et plus significamus.
example of a different kind of implicature that does not depend on the conventions for using words like ‘yet’, ‘even’, and ‘but’ is:

(1) Rand: ‘Min, are you going to the ball?’

Min: ‘I have to work.’

One can see at first glance this means Min will not go to the ball. In other words, she has given Rand a negative answer; she has said ‘No.’ Yet, how do we come to this conclusion? Her answer; “I have to work” is a statement whose semantic content, the meaning of the words, gives no answer to Rand’s question. The sentence “I have to work” is not strictly incompatible with Min attending the ball. However, it does imply, in the Gricean sense, that she will not be at the ball on account of her working. This is clearly an implicature because it goes beyond what is strictly said, the meaning of the words or sentence used. We have to work out what she meant by the utterance.

Defining what Grice means by what is said is important in seeing his distinction between what is said and what is meant or implied, which is one of the main distinguishing features of semantics and pragmatics for Grice and conversational implicatures vs. sentential semantic content. Neale formulates this in his 1991 paper as,

(V) By uttering X, U said⁶ that p iff

(1) by uttering X, part of what U meant was that p

(2) X consists of a sequence of elements (such as words) ordered in a way licensed by a system of rules (syntactical rules), and

⁶ This can be interpreted in some cases as conventionally meant.
(3) X means that ‘p’ in virtues of particular meanings of the elements in X, their order and their syntactical structure (pg. 554-555).

Like Neale, some claim that what is said lies in the overlap between utterance meaning and sentence meaning (1991 pg.554). It is important to note that Grice does not intend for implicatures derived from uses of words like ‘but’, ‘yet’, and ‘still’ to count as part of what is said. Thus, separating conventional implicature from conversational implicature via the what is said and what is meant distinction by looking at the use of such words and how they relate to the meaning of the sentence. Sometimes it is stated as what is said and what is uttered. Lastly, by saying Grice meant not the mere locutionary act of uttering certain words, he concentrated on the illocutionary act of saying that something is the case (Davis 1998 pg.5).

To fill this gap between what is strictly said and what is broadly meant, a Gricean model is built through implicatures and their derivations. In other words, a Gricean model attempts to resolve the difference between “the literal content of the uttered sentence,” that being its structure with references fixed for indexical, to what is communicated by that utterance e.g. that Min will not be at the ball (Horn 2006 pg. 3).

The question of how these implicatures are attained, derived, and determined depends on what type of theoretical framework one is using. Those frameworks being Grice’s as exhibited in the William James lectures and later work, Neo-Gricean stances like Searle, Horn, and Levinson, and Relevance Theory as formulated by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson.
1.1.2 Some Basic Questions Laid Out by Grice and Others

The work and efforts of H. P. Grice have a powerful influence on the way people: in this case philosophers, linguists, and cognitive scientists, think about how meaning and communication works (Neale 1992 pg. 509). As Neale states,

With respect to a particular sentence $\phi$ and an “utterer” $U$, Grice stressed the philosophical importance of separating (i) what $\phi$ means, (ii) what $U$ said on a given occasion by uttering $\phi$, and (iii) what $U$ meant by uttering $\phi$ on that occasion (1992. Pg 509).

This leads Grice to try to provide several more things to account for this distinction. Through Grice’s early papers (1957, 1969), he gave an account of how one can see what someone has said diverging in meaning from what they meant, the said/meant distinction above.

By characterizing a philosophically important distinction between the ‘genuinely semantic’ and ‘merely pragmatic’ implications of a statement, Grice clarified the relationship between classical logic and the semantics of natural language (Neale 1992 pg. 509).

In other words, a result of Grice’s project was to clarify the kinship among classical formal logics and the semantic structures of languages.7

Some of the main and important questions for Grice are:

1. Exactly what counts as an implicature? Alternatively, how do we distinguish between what a person has said and what a person means?

---

7 This is exhibited in his papers logic and conversation, and further notes on logic and conversation (as found in Studies 1989).
2. How are these implicatures being formed, derived, implied, or determined?

3. What criteria should take priority when formulating implicatures?

Grice and relevance theorist will answer these questions in slightly different ways, and it is from their answers that we can start to see their different approaches to the topic. In answering question one, Grice might give the list of necessary conditions for something being an implicature as Neale (1992) does (pg. 527-8), or as Grice himself states in the *Studies*,

Conversational implicature: U is said to conversationally implicate q, when (1) we think she is observing the *conversational maxims*, or at minimum the *Cooperative Principle*, “(2) the supposition that [she] is aware that, or thinks that, q is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say that p (or doing so in those terms) consistent with this presupposition, and (3) the speaker [she] thinks that the audience can work out that the supposition mentioned in (2) is needed, and she would expect the hearers to think that she thinks that it is within their ability to work out or grasp” (pg.30-32).

In answer to the second question, Grice would say that we use the conversation maxims and Cooperative Principle to determine what someone may be implying by a given speech act. Additionally, the person performing the speech act is assumed to be following the conversational maxims; such as the Maxim of Quantity (be informative as required) or the Cooperative Principle (contribute what is required by the accepted purpose of the conversation), because if she is not, it would be difficult to use the same maxims to determine what she means by a given utterance. For Grice, the third question can be
difficult to answer due to his thoughts that the flaunting of certain maxims is how we get things like irony, but he would say one must follow the Cooperative Principle at minimum, as he stated above. Thus, Grice’s and neo-Gricean theories are based on the Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims, and it is those things that help us to see what someone has meant by a given utterance. It should be noted that many of the neo-Griceans reformulate or substitute different conversational maxims in an attempt to fix various problems.

1.2 Grice’s Theory of Implicatures

1.2.1 Introductory Remarks

To create a firm base upon which we can view the problems for the Gricean theory a clear understanding of Grice’s theory and its principles must be established. Below, I will lay out Grice’s maxims and principles; how they work, and how they relate to each other. I will also give intuitive examples of how Grice’s theory works, and then in closing, look at the problems proposed for Grice’s system by Wayne Davis in his book *Implicature Intention, Convention and the Principle in the Failure of Grice’s Theory*. An example of the problems from Davis include that Gricean theory generates false predictions as readily as it produces correct ones, the conversational principles do not derive specific implicatures because they are not powerful enough, and conversational implicatures exist even when many of Grice’s presumptions fail (Davis 1998 pg.2). As Davis states, “The root problem is that any principle-based theory like Grice’s

---

8 Those being the maxims of: Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner.
understates both the intentionality of speaker implicature and the conventionality of sentence implicature” (Davis 1998 pg. 2).

Additionally, the theoretical importance of the study of implicatures lies in the fact that to understand a speaker fully one must know what they implicate. To understand fully, one cannot simply know the truth conditions, or in some instances the meaning, of the statement uttered, or as Grice would say what is said (Davis 1998 pg. 9). To understand a speaker, one must be able to work out what implicatures and extra-sentential, or semantic, meanings are contained in the utterance. As Davis states, “We do not have to accept any theory of implicatures in order to recognize the theoretical importance of the concept” (Davis 1998 pg. 11), because without some way to account for extra-sentential meaning of utterances, one could not make sense of many speech acts. For example, in (1) above, without what is implied by Min’s statement, we could not view it as an answer to Rand’s question. The meaning of the words and sentence do not contain an affirmative or negative response; the response is only found in the extra-sentential implications.

1.2.2 Basic Layout of Grice’s Theory

Grice’s system is based on the Cooperative Principle and the four conversational maxims that help to specify how to follow the Cooperative Principle. Further, Grice claims that it is a matter of common knowledge that people, for the most part, follow the rules and maxims set out for efficient communication. These rules and maxims can be stated as:
**Cooperative Principle:** Contribute what is required by the (accepted) purpose of the conversation.

**Maxim of Quality:** Make your contribution to the conversation true; thus, do not impart what you believe to be false or unjustified.

**Maxim of Quantity:** Be as informative as required\(^9\).

**Maxim of Relation:** Be relevant.

**Maxim of Manner:** Be perspicuous; avoid obscurity and ambiguity, and strive for brevity and order. Be clear and concise.

Grice maintains that generalizations of these rules “govern rational cooperative behavior in general” (Davis 1998 pg. 12). In other words, Grice thinks that his principle and maxims not only apply to language but also to human actions as a whole. For example, if I am helping someone build a wall, I will give him nails and a hammer rather than a book on physics (relevance), just give him two nails (quantity) or a toy hammer (quality), and I will not take overlong to help him with what he need (manner). Wayne Davis sees this as showing that “the maxims do not, therefore, have the characteristic arbitrariness of linguist convention” (Davis 1998 pg. 12). Grice claims the principles and maxims are not arbitrary and that they work in all cases of human purposive action. They are not like linguistic conventions for the use of commas, which are arbitrary in the sense that they could work differently by historical accident. This may not be the case with Grice’s maxims and Cooperative Principle, or so it is claimed.

\(^9\) We will see that this gets formed into two sub-maxims Q-based and R-based that help to create a lower and upper constraint on this maxim, more specifically in scalar cases.
Focusing on conversational implicatures, which I view as more important and integral to a pragmatic account of implicatures, because there have been questions as to the validity of conventional implicatures (see Kent Bach 1994, and 1999b). A simple way to view the different kinds of implicatures are conventional vs. non-conventional, conversational vs. non-conversational, and particular vs. generalized. At the most basic level, what Grice means by implicature is what a speaker implies, indicates, suggests, or communicates in their utterance beyond what is said.\textsuperscript{10} Conventional implicatures are those derived with context from the conventional meaning of certain words e.g. the difference between ‘and’ and ‘but’ in a sentence like ‘Jim is brave \textit{and} smart’ vs. ‘Jim is brave \textit{but} smart.’ As Neale states it,

The principle difference between a conventional and conversational implicature is that the existence of a conventional implicature depends upon the presence of some particular conventional device (such as ‘but’, ‘yet’, ‘still’…) whereas the existence of a conversational implicature does not (Neale 1991 pg. 524).

Conversational implicatures are those guided and affected by conversational principles and maxims, among other things.

When formulating Grice’s theory one can divide it into different principles such as the \textit{calculability assumption}, the \textit{generative assumption}, \textit{Grice’s Razor}\textsuperscript{11}, and Grice’s

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Say’ or ‘said’ can be seen as a way of saying what the sentence means by itself or what the combination of words mean without the filling-in of implicated information.

\textsuperscript{11} Davis’s reasoning for this statement is that it is more frugal to suppose something is a conversational implicature rather than a sense for conversational implicatures are derived from independently motivated principles (psychosocial principles of conversation) whereas the derivation of a sense requires specific linguistic conventions (Davis 1998}
working out schema, all of which he uses to explain how his theory works. These are related to his maxims and Cooperative Principle in various ways e.g. the generative assumption\textsuperscript{12} is a claim that the Cooperative Principle and maxims are what generate the implicature we find in a given utterance, and the calculability assumptions says that given the maxims, Cooperative Principle, and background information one should be able to discern what implicatures are present. In the next sections, we will look at these principles individually and how they relate to one another.

1.2.3 The Calculability Assumption

Speaker implicatures can be defined in terms of several different aspects such as saying, meaning, and implying. As Davis says, “\textit{S implicates that p iff S means or implies that p by saying something other than p}” (Davis 1998 pg.13). What a speaker means is determined given the intentions of the speaker, but as Davis says, “the exact intentions required are a matter of controversy” (Davis 1998 pg.6). Further, speaker implicatures can be distinguished by their reliance on conversational context as we have seen in cases pg.1, 19, 20). Additionally, see Grice’s Razor in terms and definitions appendix for more information.

\textsuperscript{12} \textbf{Generative Assumption:} Conversational implicatures exist because of the Cooperative Principle, determinacy, and the mutual knowledge constraints holding. One of Grice’s standard assumptions is that conversational implicatures have a relation of dependence on the maxims and Cooperative Principle, and thus, the implicatures are “present or absent because of them” (Davis 1998 pg.17). The principles of Grice “make it possible, give rise to, and generate implicatures” because of their dependency on the Cooperative Principle and other Gricean factors (Davis 1998 pg.17). The reason one needs both a Calculability and Generative Assumption is that the evidence or way one detects an implicature need not give us any explanation of why that thing is present. Conversely, the reason for why a thing exists do not need to give one any way to recognize when that thing is present. Thus, the Calculability and Generative Assumptions can be seen as independent and self-sufficient conditions for Gricean theories. For more information see terms and definitions appendix.
like (1). From this, Grice offers a theoretical conceptualization of conversational implicatures that is defined in terms of the Cooperative Principle (Davis 1998 pg.13). Thus, Grice’s theoretical definition, what Davis calls **Theoretical Definition I**\(^{13}\),

**Theoretical Definition:** S conversationally implicates p iff

(i) S implicates p;

(ii) S is presumed to be observing the Cooperative Principle (*cooperative presumption*);

(iii) The supposition that S believes p is required to make S’s utterance consistent with the Cooperative Principle (determinacy);

(iv) S believes, or knows, and expects H to believe that S believes, that H is able to determine that (iii) is true (mutual knowledge)

In other words, a particular sentence implicates what the speaker uttering that sentence at a certain time with its regular meaning would commonly use it to implicate (Davis 1998 pg.6), with the caveat that the hearer is able to work out what S is implying by uttering the sentence. However, according to Grice the Theoretical Definition does not capture all the thoughts essential to conversational implicatures. It excludes that conversational implicatures must be identifiable using the conversational principles and maxims. This identifiable nature of conversational implicatures is captured by the **Calculability Assumption**,

**Calculability Assumption:** Conversational implicates must be capable of being worked out\(^{14}\).

\(^{13}\) Davis, in his book, gives several reformulations to try and solve various problems that is why it appears as ‘I’ in his text.
In other words, if something is a conversational implicature, then given the Cooperative Principle, the conversational maxims, and things such as background knowledge will lead the hearer to the implied meaning. Alternately, if no hearer can come to the implicature given the correct background knowledge, the principles, and maxims, then it should not be counted as a conversational implicature. The hearer should be able, given these things, to provide an argument for the implied meaning they feel the speaker has implicated. They have worked out a rational route from the context, the utterance, the meaning of the words etc… to the implied meaning of the utterance. This is not to say that what S has said may not indicate and imply things that he/she did not intend, or suggest. Further, because of the maxims and mutual knowledge constraints, “S implicates a proposition which the sentence he utters implicates only if S intends to provide an indication that he believes that proposition” (Davis 1998 pg.7).

1.2.4 The Working out Schema

For Grice one of the necessary conditions for something to be an implicature is that the audience can work it out, along with being an integral part of the Calculability Assumption. This leads to the question, how do we work out implicatures? Grice states it as,

The presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out; for even if it can in fact be intuitively grasped, unless the intuition is replaceable by an argument, the implicature (if present at all) will not count as a

---

14 What Grice means by ‘workout’ is covered more fully in a section below, and in the terms and definitions appendix.

15 Such as, word meaning, context, knowledge of the utterer, fixing indexical. etc…
conversational implicature; it will be a conventional implicature. To work out that a particular conversational implicature is present, the hearer will rely on the following data: (1) the conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any references that may be involved; (2) the Cooperative Principle and its maxims; (3) the context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance; (4) other items of background knowledge; and (5) the fact (or supposed fact) that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case. A general pattern for the working-out of a conversational implicature might be given as follows: he has said that q; there is no reason to suppose that he is not observing the maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle; he could not be doing this unless he thought that p; he knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that supposition that he thinks p is required; he has done nothing to stop me thinking p; he intends me to think, or at least willing to allow me to think, that p; and so he has implicated that p (Grice 1975 pg. 31).

In other words, for one to work out an implicature one has to infer in a special way from the Cooperative Principle along with certain facts such as the sentence uttered and the context in which it is uttered. Davis (1998) has condensed this into his interpretation of the working out schema for speaker implicature:

P1 S uttered a sentence with a particular meaning, in a given context, etc.

P2 S is observing the Cooperative Principle
P3 Given P1, S could no be observing the Cooperative Principle unless he believed p.

…

C.: S implicated p (Davis 1991 pg. 15).

Davis lays out the inferences that one might have to take in working out an implicature from an utterance in a given context. Thus, for Grice, for something to be counted as a conversational implicature one must be able to provide an argument justifying the naming it as an implied meaning in the uttering of a sentence. Further, one must use the sentential meaning, context, the Gricean principle and maxims, other items of background knowledge, and importantly “the fact…that all relevant items fully under the previous headings are available” to both parties (Grice 1975 pg.31).

1.3 Problems for the Gricean theory

1.3.1 The Problem of Differentiation

Several philosophers\(^\text{16}\), including Wayne Davis, note that for almost every implicature correctly indicated by Gricean theory, many others are done so falsely (Davis 1998 pg.33). These failures of differentiation are attributed to the rules of inference used to work out the observed implicatures. These can normally be used to discern non-existent implicatures as easily as existent ones. As Davis states “by a simple application of Mill’s methods\(^\text{17}\), failures of differentiation mean that the observed implicatures do not


\(^{17}\) Mill’s Methods: these are five rules for investigation causes,
exist because of the Gricean factors or maxims and the Gricean theory does not provide a satisfactory account of implicatures” (Davis 1998 pg.33). In other words, with Mill’s Methods for determining causal relations and failures of differentiation between implicatures that do and do not exist, one can see that implicatures cannot be taken as existing as a result of the Gricean maxims and principles. If these maxims and principles fail to clarify what implicatures are present for a certain utterance, then none of Mill’s Methods will lead one to believe that the Gricean factors and maxims are the cause. For example, take the case of the method of agreement. If in every case where an implicature occurs, there is the single prior cause of φ (Grice’s principles and maxims), then φ is the cause of the implicatures. In other words, if there is an implicature, then it is a result of the Gricean maxims and principles. Therefore, to falsify this conditional one needs a case in which an implicature is present and the Gricean maxims and principles do not indicate it. This exact case is presented by Davis with his determinacy/calculability problem, which states Grice’s theory will give a listener false negatives and tell them an implicature is not there when indeed it is. Showing that an implicature is present but the

1) Method of Agreement: If in all cases where an effect occurs, there is a single prior factor φ that is common to all these cases, then φ is the cause of the effect.

2) Method of Difference: Where you have one situation that leads to an effect, and another which does not and the only difference is the presence of a single factor in the first situation we can infer this factor as the cause of the effect.

3) Joint Method: In this you apply both the Method of Agreement and the Method of Difference together.

4) Method of Concomitant Variation: If across a range of situation that lead to a certain varying with variation in a common factor to those situations, then we can infer that factor as the cause.

5) Method of Residue: If we have a range of factors believed to be the cause of a range of effects, we have reasons to believe all the factors, except one, then we should infer that φ is the cause of the remaining effects.
Gricean maxims and principles did not indicate it. Thus, Calling into question Grice’s claim that his principles and maxims are the reason the implicatures exist, as seen in Grice’s generative assumption, it would also call into question Grice’s central claim that his principles and maxims are instances of more general rules governing rational cooperative behavior. Davis, too, shows that Gricean theory fails in that it does not derive implicatures one would say are present from conversational principles. One manifestation of this problem is Quantity Implicatures\(^{18}\) and Gricean principles indicating which larger scalar value is to be negated by the utterance of the lower scalar value.

To look at this problem further, the use of examples of quantity implicatures is helpful, such as,

\[(4) \text{“Some swimmers run” implies } \sim\text{(all swimmers run)}^{19}\]

If the speaker was in a position to make a stronger claim or utterance, she would have as one can see from the Maxim of Quantity, and since she did not make that claim she must believe that the stronger is not true “all swimmers run”. The problem rests with discriminating between all of the scalar values that are higher than what was uttered.

Given Levinson’s sketch of scalar implicates (Levinson 1983 pg. 133-35\(^{20}\)), there is no basis or method for discriminating among all the stronger statements that a speaker might have made, which would have been as brief and as relevant as what was originally stated. Take (4) above as an example given a proliferation of scalar values (see below), we could

\(^{18}\) See terms and definitions appendix for further information about Quantity Implicatures.
\(^{19}\) \(\sim\) shall be used to indicate negation, “it is not the case that.”
\(^{20}\) Stated in appendix one, Terms and Definitions.
not distinguish which higher value was to be negated and implied by the utterance “some swimmers run” and which are not given just the Gricean methods.

Table 1: Examples of ascending scalar implicatures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ascending values</th>
<th>“Some swimmers run”</th>
<th>“Some swimmers run”</th>
<th>“Some swimmers run”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Several swimmers run</td>
<td>At least 1% of swimmers run from time to time</td>
<td>Some swimmers run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many swimmers run</td>
<td>At least 10% of swimmers run often</td>
<td>Some swimmers run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most swimmers run</td>
<td>At least 50% of swimmers run regularly</td>
<td>Some swimmers run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearly all swimmers run</td>
<td>At least 50% of swimmers run every day</td>
<td>Some swimmers run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All swimmers run</td>
<td>100% of swimmers run multiple times a day</td>
<td>Some swimmer run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Davis’s central claim for this case is that one cannot deny the existence of Quantity Implicatures, but what one should deny is that they are derived from or even explained by the Grice’s Maxim of Quantity (Davis pg. 35). Davis makes the further point that, “Cases in which weaker statements are not used to implicate the denial of the stronger statement are at least as common as cases in which they are” (Davis pg.35). For example,

(5) “Some died” does not implicate ~(only some [a few a minority])

“Some died” does not implicate ~(some were killed [murdered assassinated, executed, etc])

After listing his examples, Davis states that one could add to this list endlessly, and from this, it can be seen that “quantity implicatures are the exception rather than the rule” (Davis pg.36). Hence, the case can be made that quantity implicatures are not a result of the general psychological principles that Grice presents (Davis pg.36), because they are not accurate in helping to see what scalar implicature is present. One can see the Gricean claim that Quantity Implicates result from the Maxim of Quantity as some post hoc reasoning. Let us look at a contrast noted by Grice (1975 pg. 38), Horn (1972 chr. 1 & 2 1984 pg. 15), and Davis (pg. 37-38). This contrast can be illustrated by some classic examples:

(6)  

a. “John entered a house” implies ~(John entered his house).

---

21 For more examples see W. Davis 1998 pg. 35-36.
22 (a)-(e) are from Davis (1998 pg.37), and (f) and (g) are given by Horn (1972 chr. 1 &2, 1984 pg. 15).
b. “John entered a house” does not imply ~(John entered S’s house).


d. “John drove a car” does not imply (John drove his car).

e. “John drove a car” does not imply ~(John drove his car).

f. “John could have solved the problem” implies ~(John did solve it)

g. “John was able to solve the problem” implies (John did solve it)

Linguistic instincts would indicate that (6)(a) is a case of quantity implicature because the weaker value does imply the negation of the stronger. However, Davis claims, it would be post hoc reasoning to assume (6)(a) holds because of the Maxim of Quantity. One can see that statements that differ in no relevant way can be seen as implying other quantity implicatures different from one another, see (6)(a) and (6)(b). How do we come to think “John entered a house” implies he did not enter his own, and not imply he did not enter S’s house? Given the Maxim of Quantity or even Horn’s Q-based and R-based sub-maxims how are we to distinguish between (6)(a) implying he did not enter his own house and (6)(b) implying he did not enter S’s? There is not part of the Maxim of Quantity that will help one distinguish between the correct stronger scalar value and an incorrect stronger scalar value. Think of the list above involving swimmers and running. How given only the Gricean principles could one distinguish between what we intuitively see as the quantity implicature of “some swimmers run”? Davis claims we cannot and holds this as an example of the problem of differentiation. A maxim that states ‘be as informative as is required’ has no way of distinguishing which of the seemingly infinite larger scalar values is the one we need to deny or if the utterance even has a quantity
implicature. Keenan (1975) provides some cross-cultural evidence that our intuitions about what is an implicature of an utterance may be more a result of our cultural heritage and linguistic cultural conventions than Gricean maxims. Keenan states,

When someone in a Malagasy village says ‘I see a person’ those listening do not infer that the speaker is not closely associated with the referent. Such a format is simply a conventionalized mode of personal reference (1975 pg. 291-262).

This is in contrast to our own English/European linguistic intuitions that if someone utters “I see a person” it would imply that they did not know that individual.

(7) Malagasy: “I see a person” does not imply ~(I know the person)

English/European: “I see a person” does imply ~(I know the person).

Further, (6)(f) and (6)(g), which come from Horn, raise the question: “how in general could a body of psychosocial principles generate diametrically opposed implicatures from nearly identical utterances?” (Davis 1998 pg.38). If as Horn claims the first is due to the Maxim of Quantity being ‘in force’ and the Maxim of Relation being ‘in force’ in the latter, then how do we reconcile these opposed generations with the lack of context, etc. How can we attribute the difference to the maxims, as Horn wants, when we have no context to use? According to Davis, we cannot. He states that it would be post hoc reasoning to do so, further illustrating his point. Another instance is Levinson’s working-out schema and how it could generate contradictory implicature (See Horn 1976).

The stressing of words in an utterance presents another problem for Grice, for a difference in stress in (6)(g) from ‘able’ to ‘was’ will change what implicature it is correct to imply (Davis 1998 pg.38). The problem for Griceans is there is nothing stated
in the Maxims or the Cooperative Principle to account for stress and how it should have a role in generating implicatures (Davis 1998 pg.38). Davis also notes other examples, such as the letter of recommendation case (parsing by faint damns vs. damning by faint praise), that many implicate implicatures much like quantity implicates but do not imply the denial of a stronger statement, what he calls close-but implicatures\(^{23}\) (pg.39-41), tautology implicature (pg. 41-46), conjunctions implicatures (pg. 46-59), Davis presents other maxims and principles, which fall victim to the same types of post hoc reasoning.\(^ {24}\)

1.3.2 The Problem of Determinacy

In chapter three of his book Davis (1998) maintains that the Determinacy Requirement, that S believes p is required to make S’s utterance consistent with the cooperative principle, for Grice’s theory is untenable and therefore the Calculability Assumption and Grice’s razor fail due to their close interconnection (Davis 1998 pg.62). One can see this relation as

**Determinacy:** The supposition that S believes p is required to make S’s utterance consistent with the cooperative principle, which is an integral part of the working-out schema.

**Calculability Assumption:** Every conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out.

\(^{23}\) As Davis (1998) notes, “All quantity implicatures are close-but implicatures, but not all close-but implicatures are quantity implicatures” (pg.40), and it is this fact that is the source of the problem for the Griceans.

\(^{24}\) Such as the principle of information, as seen in Levinson (1983 pg.140-147), or Leech’s principle of politeness (1983), and, further, I think that cross-cultural linguistics provides evidence to show these principles and maxims are not general psychosocial principles at all, as seen above with Keenan.
Thus, the Determinacy Requirement is a central piece of the working-out schema, and if the Calculability Assumption depends on the working out schema to be satisfied, then because the Determinacy Requirement is central to the working out schema the Calculability Assumption depends on determinacy holding.

The first way to think of the problem is that the differentiation problem focuses on the puzzle of false positives for Grice whereas the determinacy problem focuses on false negatives (Davis 1998 pg.62). One place the problem arises is in background constraints in Grice’s theory. As Davis states, “Taken at face value, the determinacy condition is impossible to satisfy. There are too few constraints on the cooperative principle to require any particular beliefs,” which would need to be the case if determinacy were true (Davis 1998 pg.38). From this failure, as said above, calculability also fails. The background constraints that Grice gives must make this important element of the working-out schema true.25 Davis argues that there are no background assumptions that will satisfy determinacy (Davis 1998 pg.63). As Grice’s theory states, one must include more than just the conventional meaning, or reference, of a word that a speaker utters as a background constraint (Davis 1998 pg.63). One must also include what a speaker means by that word on the occasion of the speaker’s utterance. For example,

(8) Joe: “Where is there a grocery store?”

Tom: “There is a store around the corner.”

For one to be sure that Tom is in conformity with the Maxims of Quantity and Relation, that he means there is a grocery store and not an auto parts store and that Tom believes

25 Determinacy: S could not be observing the Cooperative Principle unless he believed p.
Joe can get groceries at that store, one needs to know what Tom meant by ‘store’ at the time of that utterance (Davis 1998 pg.63-64). As Grice puts it, this applied meaning is a result of both conventional and speaker meaning (Grice 1969 §7.2). However, Davis contends, if we carry this line of thought, then it will become clear to us that “the conventional meaning of the words the speaker utters are not operative constraints on determinacy at all” (Davis 1998 pg.64). Davis presents several examples where the conventional meaning of words is ignored and the utterance can still satisfy Quality and Relation. As Davis states,

More radically, Bob might have been using “There’s a station around the corner” in a secret code known only to Bob and Ann, in which the sentence meant that Bob has a can of gasoline in his trunk. In that case, consistency with the Maxim of Quality would require Bob to believe he has a can of gasoline in his trunk, and consistency with the Maxim of Relation would require him to believe Ann can use that gasoline (Davis 1998 pg.64).

What is important as an operative background constraint is not conventional word meaning but what the speaker meant by the sentence she uttered. One can see that what a sentence means, its conventional meaning in a language, or even at that occasion, is important to what that speaker believes “only insofar as it is an indicator of what the speaker means by it” (Davis 1998 pg.65). In other words, the Determinacy Requirement is fulfilled by word meaning only as that word meaning serves to show what the speaker

---

26 The case Davis is using comes from pg. 5, which is
Ann: ‘Where can I get gasoline?’
Bob: ‘There’s a station around the corner.’
meant by that utterance, and “the same can be said…for word and speaker reference” (Davis 1998 pg.65). Davis presents several responses to this objection from the Gricean camp. All involve reformulations of the theoretical definition stated above. However, Davis shows that all of these reformulations fail.

Once again even in the case most studied by Griceans, quantity implicatures, the theory fails, in this case, the Determinacy Requirement and with it the Calculability Assumptions. The focus is on determinacy. If one utters a scalar value \( A(e_2) \), according to Davis, it does not give us reason to infer that the speaker knows that \( \neg A(e_1) \). This goes against the normal Gricean assessment of scalar implicatures, but another case exist in which \( S \) does not know that \( \neg A(e_1) \) (Davis 1998 pg.78). Davis’s reasons for contending this is that the Maxim of Quantity gives no reason to infer that \( S \) know \( \neg A(e_1) \) rather than \( S \) not knowing \( A(e_1) \) (Davis 1998 pg.78). As Davis states, “Only in a very special case will your inferring I do not know whether all \( S \) are \( P \) allow you to infer Not all \( S \) are \( P \). Quantity implicatures are not restricted to that case” (Davis 1998 pg.79). Levinson states his vexation with the fact that negative knowledge is indicated in some cases of quantity implicates, and ignorance in others; “why this should be so remains one of the many mysteries in this area” (Levinson 1983 pg.136). The problem with the Determinacy Requirement, Calculability, and the Theoretical Definition is that they are to weak to weed out the implicatures one does not want so one is left with too many.

---

27 Davis (1998) pages 67, 69, and 79 show these reformulations.
28 See Davis’s example of Peter and Mary talking and given the definition on page 79 Peter would need to implicate in every instance that he is not communicating with little green men on Alpha Centauri. This result is unintuitive and runs against basic linguistic intuitions. As Davis says, “Assuming the common knowledge and cooperative
To reemphasize “We want to know whether determinacy is true, whether S’s belief in \( p \) is necessary for S to implicate \( p \)” (Davis 1998 pg.81). Thus, in the case of a general implying that not all died after a battle by saying “some died,” one needs to discern whether the general’s believing that not all died is “required by the cooperative principle given that he said “some died”” (Davis 1998 pg.81). One can easily see that if the general is dispensing information on a ‘need to know basis,’ and he thought that his addressees did not need to know whether all died or not, Davis claims, “suffices to show that such a belief is not required” (1998 pg.81). In other words, determinacy and the Calculability Assumption fails since there is no fact given by the Gricean theory, besides appealing to the implicature itself, which one cannot access, that will rule out that the general is following the Maxim of Quantity by giving information on a need to know basis. One cannot appeal to the implicature because then one would be in danger of circular reasoning. For, if one asks does S need to believe \( p \) to implicate \( p \), then it would be circular to point to the fact that S indeed did implicate \( p \) as proof of S’s belief that \( p \), because this is the very link one is trying to clarify.

Lastly, once again Davis uses the Malagasy case presented by Keenan to great effect in illustrating the failure of determinacy (Davis 1998 p.82). Gricean theory would say the Malagasy speaker is purporting implicatures that they did not intend, and in this presumption conditions are also satisfied, the Generative Assumption implies that no matter what Peter is saying, he is implicating that he is not talking to little green men on Alpha Centauri, and definition IV [a reformulation of the Theoretical Definition trying to fix problems already encountered, found on Davis 1998 p. 72] implies that the implicature is conversional,” which is a ridiculous outcome given our intuitions about what implicatures should intuitively occur in everyday language use (Davis 1998 pg80). Namely, if we are talking about the baseball game last night one would not think that one has to implicate \( I \) am not talking to little green men on Alpha Centauri.
case that the Malagasy or someone not of their culture would miss some implicatures that are present in a given utterance that happens between them. Davis also talks about how stress in utterances will show a failure in determinacy, and hence the Calculability Assumption\textsuperscript{29}.

1.4 Conclusion

Davis has provided two main objections to Grice’s theory. The first he presents is the differentiation problem in which Gricean theory will give false positives for implicatures that are not present in a given utterance. Davis uses quantity implicatures as his main case in demonstrating this problem, but he finds this problem in any type of implicature that Griceans discuss. Second, the determinacy/calculability problem deals with the false negatives Grice’s theory outputs that conclude that there is not an implicature present that indeed is. Once again, Davis uses the quantity implicatures as his main case example, but again this problem is found in any type of implicature the Griceans try to explain. Further, Davis presents other objections to Gricean theory e.g. Grice’s claim, that his maxims and principles are what generate implicatures, fails when the differentiation or determinacy problems occur, and Grice’s lack of sensitivity to things like stress in utterances or the culture of the speaker and recipients as is exhibited

\textsuperscript{29} Take this case as an example involving bottles of beer, (a) Some bottles are cool. (b) Some bottles are cool. “the stress determines whether the scale <all, some> is relevant rather than <cold, cool>. My point is that because stress does not influence the information that is explicitly conveyed by a sentence, Grice’s Maxim of quantity cannot possibly predict or generate the implicature of either...[(a) or (b)]” (Davis 1998 p.87).
in the Malagasy case. This lack of sensitivity is a separate reason from the main problems presented to establish that Grice’s theory has failed.
CHAPTER 2:

THE INHERENCE OF MISUNDERSTANDING AND THE PROBLEMS IT PRESENTS FOR PRAGMATICS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will first argue that misunderstanding is an inherent product of language use and communication, through the opacity of other minds and what language users try to communicate, such as thoughts and intentions. The second purpose will be to show there are types of misunderstanding that are analogues to cases of both Davis’s differentiation problem and the determinacy/calculability problem. Finally, I will demonstrate that, from these similarities, any theory attempting to give a pragmatic account of natural language must account for these problems of misunderstanding. Alternately, these problems or ones similar to them will be present in any theories, so an account of these problems will become necessary. One goal, at minimum, of any philosophical theory is to present clear problem cases within the topic area of the theory. Here I am presenting problems that any theory of natural language and communication will have to account for. As Bertrand Russell said, “A logical theory may be tested by its capacity for dealing with puzzles, and it is a wholesome plan, in thinking about logic, to stock the mind with as many puzzles as possible, since they serve much the same purpose as is served by experiments in physical science” (Russell 1905 pp. 484-485). Thus, any theory of language will have to account for the puzzles encountered in language.

30 See Chapter One §3.1 above or Davis chapter 2.
31 See Chapter One §3.2 above or Davis chapter 3.
content that misunderstanding is an inherent puzzle of language. Thus, any theory of
language will have to deal with this puzzle of misunderstanding.

A component of the evidence for the thought that misunderstanding is an inherent
part of linguistic communication is all of the literature published about how others
misunderstand an individual or an idea the article describes. For example, many
philosophical articles have *misunderstanding* in the title. All the seemingly
incommensurable interpretations about what Kant, Wittgenstein, Descartes, or many
other philosophers are thought to be saying are perfect examples. For example, Kant had
certain intentions when writing the *Critique*, and in all the various interpretations by
scholars of what Kant intended to say in his writing, there are tensions and
incompatibilities between them. If Kant did not intend those tensions and
incompatibilities to be part of his theory, then it seems likely that these scholars are
misinterpreting or misunderstanding what Kant is trying to say. In his writing, Kant had
certain extra-sentential meanings in mind, and he intended for the reader to come to
understand that he believes $p$. However, given all the different interpretations over the
last 200 years of Kant scholarship, some of the beliefs attributed to Kant are
misunderstandings of his writing or miscommunications of some sort between writer and
reader. Further, one may examine the literature of conflict theory,\(^{32}\) which takes as a base
assumption that misunderstanding is a part of human communication. Moreover,
linguistic and linguistic anthropological literature discusses misunderstanding in speech,
ethnography, and communication in general.

\(^{32}\) e.g. Heidi Burgess’s work for the Conflict Information Consortium at the University of
Colorado Boulder.
Following these examples, there are types of misunderstanding that represent some of the problems Davis presents for Griceans, namely determinacy/calculability and differentiation. Indeed, some of the types of misunderstanding elaborated below are analogues to the differentiation and determinacy/calculability problems laid out by Davis. In the following sections, I will demonstrate that the *putting words in your mouth* varieties of misunderstanding aligns with the false positives of the differentiation problem, and the *missing the point* variety is comparable with the false negatives of the determinacy problem. Some cases of cultural misunderstandings could be akin to either the determinacy or differentiation problems. Davis uses cultural cases as examples to present the problems to the Griceans in his 1998 book.

Lastly, The present study is not intended as either a refutation of Grice or Davis, nor is it intended to serve as a defense of Grice against specific criticisms from Davis. Rather, this study takes as its starting point certain difficulties posed for Grice’s view by Davis and seeks to show the following: first, that it may be possible in an ideal case to have a theory of implicatures that is able to provide a framework within which there are neither false positives nor false negatives, but second, this ideal case has not been realized because of the inherent ambiguity of all natural languages. Moreover, I claim that this ideal type of case can never be realized in any sort of practical way, because in natural language misunderstanding, which we will see represents such false positive and false negative cases, is inherent to communication. Such an ideal case is hard to imagine, so this inherent ambiguity has an important consequence for theories of implicatures: any complete theory of communication or implicatures will have to account for these problem
cases. Many philosophers of language might take it as understood that no theory of implicatures will be entirely complete in the sense that I have just described, and perhaps will be content to focus only on describing successful communication. With this in mind, they might say it will be enough simply to provide a framework within which the criteria for successful implicatures can be at least described, if not fully explained. This attitude poses no great threat to the overall project I have set out, in which I argue that any theory of implicature will have to account for these problems if they are to provide a truly useful theory, one that goes beyond mere description and provides an explanation for the phenomena involved in misunderstandings. Philosophy of language in general, and theories of implicature in particular, ought to aim not merely to describe mere success but also to explain these phenomena, otherwise the alleged theory of implicatures is nothing more than a just-so story. Multiple descriptions of the same data are always available, and as long as the data underdetermine the proposed theories, it seems overly optimistic to claim to have provided a “successful” theory of implicatures.

2.2 Misunderstanding

As noted, the focus of this chapter will be misunderstanding, but the meaning of ‘misunderstanding’ must be addressed. The term misunderstanding can mean vastly different things, even within the more limited scope of communicative misunderstanding. In the next sections, I will distinguish four different types of misunderstanding relating to language and expand upon each of these narrower meanings of the term. From the narrower meanings, I will explain that indeed misunderstanding is a product of the use of language itself and not necessarily a result of any pragmatic theory, for instance, their
appearance in Grice’s work. Further, some of the varieties of misunderstanding align with Davis’s objections. However, Davis’s objections targeted Grice’s theory, one could reasonably expect any pragmatic theory dealing with implicatures to be vulnerable to the same or very similar objections. Because of this, any given theory should have some account of his objections.

The different categories are as follows: 1) a semantic misunderstanding or an inability to ascribe accurately the correct meanings to the term(s) used in an utterance, 2) a false generation of additional implicatures for a given utterance, in other words, erroneously crediting to a speaker an extra-sentential meaning that she did not intend, 3) an inability to ascertain an implicature that is present in a given utterance or missing the point of an utterance so that the hearer cannot discern what it suggests, and 4) those misunderstandings of speech associated with difference in cultural norms (of language use, etiquette etc…), e.g. those illustrated by the Malagasies case in Chapter One and others presented by linguistic anthropology.33

Before I begin my argument on the above mentioned misunderstandings, it is important to establish the inherent nature of misunderstanding in language. Grice, along with many others, view implicatures as being a result of what a speaker intends to mean by a given utterance. Further, I contend that human linguistic communication is an attempt to show/indicate/make known/communicate certain internal mental states like beliefs, intentions, opinions, thoughts, sensations, ideas, etc. Additionally, the opacity of other minds necessitates this external communication: since we cannot directly access

33 Many of these four types of misunderstanding easily carry over to the case of written language.
other minds and the thoughts they contain as a way to verify the intended meaning of a given utterance, we have to rely on experience, conventions of language, culture, etc. to determine what a person means by a given utterance. However, these tools do not guarantee perfect accuracy in discerning what a given utterance means. Thus, this wall of opacity keeps language users from attaining a complete understanding about what the intended meaning of a given utterance, as there is no way to access the mental states directly. Hence, I contend misunderstandings are inherent to language for three reasons: (1) the opacity of other minds, (2) in much of linguistic communication, one intends to show a certain mental state that one may have via language, and (3) that (1) and (2) together will lead language users to make mistakes about what a given speaker intends in any given utterance. In other words, the conjunction of (1) and (2) leads to misunderstandings because if a listener does not have access to exactly what someone intends by the terms used in an utterance and the intentions and thoughts they are trying to convey (a.k.a (1)), and the task of language is to communicate certain mental states and meanings of terms (2), then room is left for them to misidentify the intent or meaning one is implying in a given utterance. Further it is the case that (1) and (2), thus there will always be room for misunderstanding as long as other minds are opaque and language is needed to convey intentions and other mental states, which are referentially opaque. It is the opaque nature of the intentions etc. of implicatures that leaves room for error between the speaker and listener and thus misunderstanding occurs. Examples of these sorts of mistakes are: attributing additional implicative meanings to an utterer, not discerning an implicature in an utterance, and having a lack of knowledge or understanding about the
specific cultural norms being assumed by the utterer. However, this can be mitigated by past communication with the individual, experience as a language user, and knowledge of the conventions that you assume the person is following.

Further, one might object that there could be a language composed of precise and stipulative necessary and sufficient conditions for the terms used in a language. Firstly, it is not clear that such a natural human language, where every term has a precise definition and explicit necessary and sufficient conditions, could occur. Second, implicatures are not necessarily just a result of the words used in the utterance or semantic content of words used, but a result of the intent of the speaker in their utterance, and there exists a sort of referential opacity in which we do not have access to other minds because of their opaque nature. That is why they are characterized as extending beyond what is said in a given utterance, and if this is the case how would one give necessary and sufficient conditions for extra-sentential meanings that are referentially opaque? Additionally, pragmatics is a study of how language is and how it works. Therefore, the possible world scenario in which the case of a well formed language with stipulated definitions, and with necessary and sufficient conditions, does not have much sway over pragmatics, as pragmatics is the study of how language is and how language works, and (1) and (2) are how language is, so if that changes then so will pragmatics.

2.2.1 Semantic Misunderstanding

A semantic misunderstanding is when one hears an utterance and misattributes to a word a meaning it does not and would not have given the context of the utterance. In other words, when a person is the addressee of an utterance and misidentifies what a
given word means, he will, in most cases, not be able to understand properly what the addresser meant by that utterance. For example, the misidentification of homonyms such as ‘bank’ (financial institution) vs. ‘bank’ (the edge of a river), ‘bow’ (a long wooden stick used to play a string instrument like the violin) vs. ‘bow’ (the instrument used to shoot projection weapons), or the various meanings of ‘fluke’. Take this conversation:

Ted: Bill, meet me by the bank before band practice tonight so we can pick up the princesses.

Bill: I most certainly will.

Ted: Excellent!

Ted meant Bill should meet him outside the financial institution so they could withdraw money to buy decent instruments, and Bill understood ‘bank’ to mean the side of the river in San Demas so they would have a romantic location to meet the princesses. The misunderstanding occurs when Bill is not able to ascribe the right meaning to the word that Ted intended when he uttered the statement. At some later time when Bill and Ted meet again, they will likely have a discussion to clarify the misunderstanding of ‘bank’ in their previous conversation. I contend that this example illustrates a common type of misunderstanding in the use of language in that the execution of language is fraught with cases of semantic misunderstanding, which is not always clarified at the time the misunderstanding occurs. Philosophers are well acquainted with the question, “Will you clarify what you meant by that word (or statement)?” during a presentation or discussion so as to circumvent a misunderstanding of what exactly a person means by a term. I

34 A fish, a flatworm, the end part of an anchor, the fin on a whale’s tail, or a stroke of luck.
contend that semantic misunderstandings grow out of the use of language itself as a result of things like homonyms, the different intentions and extensions words have for various individuals\textsuperscript{35}, and encountering words with which one may not be well acquainted with. This semantic variety of misunderstanding does not represent any of the pragmatic problems Davis presents. However, ignoring this category of misunderstanding and not discussing it would be remiss because it represents many cases of misunderstanding and provides a representative sample of the types of communication-based misunderstandings. Also, it represents a problem case any theory of language will have to account for.

2.2.2 Putting Words in Your Mouth

When a listener interprets a speaker’s utterance to generate extra implicatures besides those that were intended, this is a case of what I will call the putting words in your mouth variety of misunderstanding. In other words, a listener is able to work out the various meanings of the utterance but also surmises additional meaning(s) (implicature(s)) to that utterance that were not intended by the utterer. A clear example can be seen in this dialogue from When Harry Met Sally (1989 screenplay by Nora Ephron), the starred lines being those in which the misunderstanding occurs:

\begin{quote}
Jess: \textit{If she’s so great why aren’t YOU taking her out?}

Harry: How many times do I have to tell you, we’re just friends.

Jess: \textit{But you also said she has a good personality.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} As Wilhelm von Humboldt states, “Nobody means by a word precisely and exactly what his neighbor does, and the difference, be it ever so small, vibrates, like a ripple in water, throughout the entire language. Thus all understanding is always at the same time a not-understanding” (1988 p.63).
Harry: She HAS a good personality.

Jess: [stops walking, turns around, throws up hands, as if to say “Aha”!]

Harry: What?

*Jess: When someone’s not that attractive they’re ALWAYS described as having a good personality.

→Harry: Look, if you were to ask me what does she look like and I said she has a good personality, that means she’s not attractive. But just because I happen to mention that she has a good personality, she could be either. She could be attractive with a good personality or not attractive with a good personality.

Jess: So, which one is she?

Harry: Attractive.

*Jess: But not beautiful, right?

Jess is putting words in Harry’s mouth in that Harry did not intend to imply that the woman is not attractive by saying that she has a good personality. One can see Harry’s attempt to ameliorate the misunderstanding on the arrowed line. However, again Jess falls prey to the same misunderstanding, thinking that Harry’s assent that she is attractive means she is not beautiful when Harry meant no such thing. The opacity of Harry’s mind is allowing for Jess to misinterpret the utterance to mean she is not pretty because Jess cannot access Harry’s intentions directly to make sure he is not mis-ascribing implicatures to him. Even after an attempt to make clear his intentions, Jess still does not see it and attributes the implicature to Harry. Another analogous example can be taken from The Shop Around the Corner (1940 Ernst Lubitsch screenplay):
Kralik: She is the most wonderful girl in the world.

Pirovitch: *Is she pretty?*

Kralik: She has such ideas, and such a viewpoint of things that she’s so far above all the other girls that you meet nowadays that there’s no comparison.

Pirovitch: *So she’s not very pretty.*

This form of misunderstanding is prevalent in language use, and is often seen in comedic tropes of pop culture and media. This misunderstanding is also seen in the texts and interpretations of Kant. Given all the different and seemingly incompatible interpretations of Kant’s philosophy over the long history of Kant scholarship, at least one scholar must be attributing additional implicative meanings to his work. Alternatively, perhaps Kant wrote in such a way to mis-communicate what he intended to convey in his texts. For example, take all of the beliefs and ideas attributed to Kant by Kristine Korsgaard’s constructivist approach to Kant contrasted with those like Guyer, Bennett, and Chignell, etc. Alternatively, look at the scholarship and interpretation of Wittgenstein and the debates about what he did or did not say. Thus, I argue that this type of misunderstanding is a result of language and human communication because of the opacity of other minds and the nature of what language is trying to communicate.

Further, the differentiation problem discussed above is very similar to the false positive found in this type of misunderstanding. It must be noted that the pervasiveness of the differentiation problem for Griceans is much worse than what we find in everyday language use, because, as Davis notes,\(^{36}\) it is crippling for Grice’s theory. It runs against

\(^{36}\) as exhibited on page 33 of Davis (1998).
our linguistic intuitions about some clear cases of when a implicature is present. I contend that the interplay between Gricean theory and Davis’s criticism allows us to see that this type of problem can be found in common language use. This is despite the fact that the reason one sees the differentiation problem appear in Grice’s theory is because of his theoretical framework and its lack of sensitivity to various aspects of language, like stress. However, even if we created an ideal theory to model the way language works, these types of misunderstandings seem to be inherent to language and its use, and we would therefore expect any theory to have occurrences of the differentiation type problem or what I am calling putting words in your mouth type of misunderstanding. In other words, I claim that if these types of misunderstandings are inherent to language use, then any theory that tries to explain natural language will have to account for these problems or similar ones, I have shown above that these types of misunderstanding do occur in natural language use and are inherent, and thus, one should expect any theory trying to explain language and its uses to have these problems present or give an account of them. This shows that this type of over-generation of implicatures will not only be a problem for Gricean theory, because it is part of communication and language itself and therefore should be present in any theory that takes account of language and its operation. Those theories should try to take misunderstanding into account as to how it will affect and be present in its concepts and structure.38

37 The theory would have to be pragmatic in nature because this type of misunderstanding is pragmatic in nature when dealing with implicatures.
38 Not to mention those like Fabian who think that a rigorous treatment of misunderstanding can be used as a tool to refine our theories and methods in work like ethnography (1995).
2.2.3 Missing the Point

The missing the point variety of misunderstanding is characterized by the addressee being unable to figure out an implicature that is intended by the addressee in their utterance. In other words, a person $S$ utters a statement $p$ with an intended implicative meaning $i$, and a listener $L$, who $S$ thinks should be able to discern $i$, cannot come to see that $p$ suggests $i$. This formulation shows how this type of misunderstanding could represent a failure of determinacy/calculability for Gricean theory. When the determinacy problem occurs for Grice, a listener will not be able to use Grice’s working out schema\(^ {39} \) to determine what is implied by a given utterance. Namely, one cannot calculate what implicature is present; as Davis says, it will give the listener a false negative, indicating there are no other implicatures. Indeed, he/she is missing the point of that utterance by not being able to uncover that extra-sentential meaning. An example of this is: John and Liz are at a party. Further, suppose they came together and that they have been friends for many years, which means they know each other well. John wants to leave so he asks Liz, “Don’t you have to work tomorrow morning?” trying to indicate that they should leave the party. However, this only prompts Liz to talk about how her boss would not give her the morning off work. Thus, Liz did not ascertain what John meant and thus missed the main point in him making the utterance. Another example is

---

\(^ {39} \) So as to remember here is a formulation of both conditions for Grice or see sections 2.3, 2.4, and 3.2 of chapter one, 

**Determinacy:** the supposition that S believes $p$ is required to make S’s utterance consistent with the cooperative principle, which is an integral part of the working-out schema.

**Calculability Assumption:** every conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out.
someone saying, “I’ve got to see a man about a dog” in response to the question, “Where are you going?” which is meant to indicate to the inquirer that it is none of their business. If the questioner does not figure out that the speaker was indicating that it is none of their business, the questioner might come wrongly to think that the person is going to talk to someone about a dog. In both cases, the speaker has a particular intention in mind when uttering their statement, such as ‘I would like to leave the party now.’ However, because neither recipient can access the speakers’ intentions directly and can only rely on the utterance, context, etc. to provide evidence as to what is being intended by the utterance, a misunderstanding occurs. Once again, this type of misunderstanding is both present and inherent in language use and represents cases of the determinacy/calculability problem of Davis. Thus, as I stated above in 2.2, if this type of misunderstanding is inherent to language use, then any theory which tries to explain natural language will have to account for these problems. It should be plain that this type of misunderstanding is inherent to language, and thus, one should expect any theory trying to explain language and its uses to have these problems present or give an account of them. Further, the determinacy/calculability problem for Grice’s theory is pervasive and crippling as indicated by Davis (1998) in his second chapter. This problem for Grice will generate so many false negatives that it clashes with our linguistic intuitions about what implicatures are and are not present in a given utterance. However, this sort of misunderstanding in language does not occur on a level where communication becomes infeasible, which is the case with Grice’s theory.
2.2.4 A Cultural Misunderstanding

Examples of cultural misunderstanding abound in life and in the literature. Simple gestures like pointing being rude in many countries or the slurping sounds that indicate enjoyment of food in Japan are common misunderstandings if done outside their cultural context. For example, take an American traveling to Japan for the first time, and they are attending a dinner at someone’s house. During the dinner, when they are enjoying soup and tea the American does not make slurping sounds because they were taught that it is rude. However, the Japanese hosts could take the absence of slurping sounds as an insult and an indication that the visitor is not enjoying the food because they do not have access to the visitor’s mind to see that his set of cultural norms is different from theirs in this respect, thus, creating a misunderstanding between them. Further, this misunderstanding represents the generation of a false positive telling the hosts that the visitor is not enjoying their food when indeed he is. This could be taken as a case of differentiations because it is generating a false positive. With regard to linguistic anthropologists and linguists like Gunter Senft (2008), Johannes Fabian (1995), and Helen Spencer-Oatey and Wenying Jiang (2003) concern themselves with misunderstanding in different culture’s uses of language and the surrounding traditions. Johannes Fabian is especially concerned with the propensity for misunderstanding in ethnographic work due to the difference in cultures between the researcher and those being researched and how the difference in cultural conditions and context can lead to misunderstandings in verbal encounters. Fabian cites Auer and Di Luzio (1992) and Duranti and Goodwin (1992) as examples of the debate in sociolinguistics about communication, miscommunication, context, and
contextualization in conversations and ethnography (Fabian 1995 p.49). Further, I claim that one can examine many of these cultural misunderstandings as examples of the determinacy/calculability problem and the differentiation problem Davis presents. Reasons for this argument include Davis’s examples of cultural misunderstanding in the presentation of both the problem of determinacy (Davis 1998 p.82) and the differentiation problem (Davis 1998 p.37).

2.3 Conclusion

In his paper ‘Misunderstanding,’ Benjamin Bailey claims, “Misunderstanding along more pragmatic dimensions of communication, in contrast, are often more persistent, confounding, and linked to debilitated social relationships” (Bailey 2004 p.396). This demonstrates that the kind of pragmatic misunderstanding that is characterized by cultural misunderstandings, putting words in our mouth, and missing the point is persistent and hard to resolve in language use. This is because things like implicates are based on intentions of the speaker which the hearer cannot access. Most importantly, Bailey indicates that misunderstanding is found in language itself and that pragmatic misunderstandings akin to the determinacy and the differentiation problems levied by Davis are present in language use.

In this chapter, I have outlined four different types of misunderstanding in language use, those being cultural misunderstanding, semantic misunderstanding, missing the point, and putting words in your mouth. I posit that indeed these four varieties of misunderstanding are inherent in language use, because of the opacity of other minds and the fact that language is used to communicate internal states such as thoughts, ideas
beliefs, etc. Then, by comparing them to the problems proposed by Davis for Grice, I demonstrate that three of these varieties of misunderstanding, *missing the point, putting words in your mouth*, and cultural misunderstanding, represent the sort of cases Davis discusses in his differentiation and determinacy/calculability problems.\(^{40}\) From these, I contend that if we find these types of misunderstandings in language, then they will be present in any theory of language. Because I have shown these problems to be part of language use, an explanation of them should be expected in any theory made to account for language used in these ways. In other words, a) one would expect to find these types of misunderstandings, as cases of the problems Davis presents, in any theory of pragmatics dealing with implicatures\(^{41}\), and b) that any theory attempting to give an account of this sort of language phenomena should give an account of misunderstanding. These misunderstandings are an integral part of how this type of pragmatic phenomena works in language. Thus, when one views the criticism of Davis for Grice with the thought that misunderstandings are inherent to language one can see that any pragmatic theory will encounter these or similar problems. Further, seeing that misunderstanding in communication is an inherent problem because of the opacity of other minds and what language communicates one can see that it is a puzzle/problem that any theory of communication will have to deal with. Again, as Russell said our theories should explain

\(^{40}\) Remember, I am not presenting a defense of Grice from Davis nor am I trying to refute Davis’s claims and objections about Grice. I am simply contending that there are certain types of misunderstanding that are inherent to language that are similar to the cases that Davis presents this does not mean that Grice is set free from the problems Davis presents for him.

\(^{41}\) Indeed Davis does note that his problems will arise in relevance theory, which at that time was the only major theoretical alternative to Gricean theory (e.g. see Davis chapter 3 §3.12).
the puzzles that philosophers uncover (Russell 1905 pp. 484-485), and indeed misunderstanding is a puzzle that theories of communication have to account for.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX 1:

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Key:

R.T= Relevance Theory

Code Model of Communication (Classical Model):

A model of communication where a communicator encodes her intended message into a signal, such as an utterance, which is decoded by the audience member(s) using the same code the sender used originally.

Also see inferential model.

Cognitive Principle of Relevance:

“Every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance”

(Wilson and Sperber 2006 pg. 612).

Also, see Presumption of Optimal Relevance.

Complete Utterance-Type Meaning:

This concept for Grice has as one of its species sentence meaning. The appropriate thing to analyze and define is ‘X means that “p”’, where X is an utterance type and p is a particular specification or X’s meaning. As Neale (1991) states it,
For population group G, complete utterance-type X means “p” iff (a) at least some (many) members of G have in their behavioral repertories the procedure of uttering a token of X if they mean that p, and (b) the retention of this procedure is for them conditional on the assumption that at least some (other) members of G have, or have had, this procedure in their repertoires (pg.553).

When we are in a language with indexical, demonstratives, and anaphoric pronouns it becomes apparent that this definition needs reworking to become acceptable. For example, Schiffer’s note that (b) will have to have a mutual knowledge component without which it will not work (Schiffer 1972). Baring this reworking Grice will not be able to give the definition of saying he wants, or give an account of utterance-type meaning for languages like English. Lastly, it is important to note for Grice no appeal to truth-conditional content is needed to formulate utterer’s meaning or utterance-type meaning (Neale 1991 pg.556).

**Communicative Intention:**

A communicative intention is what characterizes an action as communicative.

Some, like Grice, see it as having four properties.

(1) It is perlocutionary; it is an intention that seeks a mental effect on the part of the addressee.
(2) The speaker wants the audience to recognize her communicative intention. In other words, it is overt.

(3) When an addressee recognizes a communicative intention, this satisfies that intention. A communicative intention’s satisfaction is determined by the recognition of the intention by the addressee.

(4) A communicative intention does not have to be linguistic in nature.

**Contextual Implication:**

It is a conclusion derived or deduced from inputs and context together but not as a result of either by itself. For example, upon seeing my plane pulling up to the flight gate, I check the time, and also remember what time it should arrive. From all three of these things, I can deduce whether my plane is late, on time, or early, depending on the specific context and the inputs given, but not from any one alone.

**Constantive vs. Performative**

J. L. Austin discusses the distinction between constantive and performative. A constantive is simply saying whether something is true or not. Constantives are true depending on their correspondence to the facts. A performative does something by making an utterance. For example, saying ‘I do’ when you are getting married will make you married. A performative is not true or false but
felicitous or infelicitous, depending on whether the individual performs the action in question.

**Explicature:**

An explicature is something called the *explicitly communicated content* of an utterance. Explicature means a proposition recovered by a combination of decoding a given utterance and inferences from its premise(s) that provides the audience with information for the derivation of contextual implicatures and other cognitive effects (Wilson and Sperber 2006 note 10). Scholars like Levinson (2000a pg. 195-6) reject the explicature-implicature distinction because no criteria that are satisfactory to him for distinguishing explicature from implicatures are provided.

**Far-side Pragmatics:** see Near-side vs. Far-side Pragmatics

**Generative Assumption:**

One of Grice’s standard assumptions is that conversational implicatures have a relation of dependence on the maxims and Cooperative Principle, and thus, the implicatures are “present or absent because of them” (Davis 1998 pg.17). The principles of Grice “make it possible, give rise to, and generate implicatures” because of their dependency on the Cooperative Principle and other Gricean factors (Davis 1998 pg.17). In other words, Grice’s attempts to demarcate what is
and is not a conversational implicature in terms of what he sees as causing them. Therefore, Grice holds the generative assumption:

**Generative Assumption:** Conversational implicatures exist because of the Cooperative Principle, determinacy, and the mutual knowledge constraints holding.

As Davis notes, “The generative assumption, according to which satisfaction of the first clause of [the Theoretical Definition] is due to satisfaction of the remaining three clauses when the implicature is conversational” (Davis 1998 pg.17). $\phi$ being an implicature (condition (i)) is explained by its determinacy, the Cooperative Principle, and mutual knowledge all obtaining. In asserting the generative assumption and explaining conversational implicatures by virtue of their underlying causes, we can see how the Theatrical Definition is related to conversational implicatures.

Further, the Generative Assumption is ontological because it is concerned with what constitutes an implicature unlike the epistemic Calculability Assumption, which is concerned with the working out and recognition of what is and is not an implicature. Another way to view the importance of the Generative Assumption is that it provides a way to interpret our theoretical definition that is not provided via the Calculability Assumption (for examples see Davis 1998 pg.18). For Grice, the factors that give rise to conversational implicatures are precisely those that enable hearers to recognize them. Lastly, the reason one needs both a Calculability and Generative Assumption is that the evidence or way one
detects an implicature need not give us any explanation of why that thing is present. Conversely, the reason for why a thing exists do not need to give one any way to recognize when that thing is present. Thus, the Calculability and Generative Assumptions can be seen as independent and self-sufficient conditions for Gricean theories. The final component to be discussed in the next section is the Gricean methodology that many call *Grice’s Razor*.

Also, see **Cooperative assumption**

**Grice’s Razor or Modified Occum’s Razor:**

It can be simply stated as *senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity* (Grice Studies pg. 47). Davis formulates it as,

Other things equal, it is preferable to postulate conversational implicatures rather than senses, conventional implicatures, or semantic presupposition because conversational implicatures can be derived from independently motivated psychosocial principles (Davis 1998 pg. 19).

Davis’s reasoning for this statement is that it is more frugal to suppose something is a conversational implicature rather than a sense for conversational implicatures are derived from independently motivated principles (psychosocial principles of conversation) whereas the derivation of a sense requires specific linguistic conventions (Davis 1998 pg. 1, 19, 20). Thus, the presumption that something is a sense rather than an implicature results in a more complex theory. This violates parsimony if we have a theory (Grice’s) in which we can do without that sense.
As William Lycan puts it, “it is not just that postulating extra senses complicates the semantics. It is that every single extra sense would have to be learned separately” (from a personal conversation with Lycan, Davis 1998 pg. 20).

**Implicature:**

For scholars of Grice’s school of thought there are further distinctions to make within implicature such as conventional vs. non-conventional, conversational vs. non-conversational, and particular vs. generalized. At the most basic level what Grice means by implicature is what a speaker implies, indicates, suggests, or communicates in their utterance beyond what is said. Conventional implicatures are those derived with context from the conventional meaning of certain words e.g. the difference between ‘and’ and ‘but’ in a sentence like ‘Jim is brave and smart’ vs. ‘Jim is brave but smart.’ As Neale states it,

> The principle difference between a conventional and conversational implicature is that the existence of a conventional implicature depends upon the presence of some particular conventional device (such as ‘but’, ‘yet’, ‘still’)… whereas the existence of a conversational implicature does not (Neale 1991 pg. 524).

Within non-conventional implicatures, Grice distinguishes conversational and non-conversational implicatures. Conversational implicatures are those guided and affected by conversational principles and maxims, among other things.

---

42 ‘Say’ or ‘said’ can be seen as a way of saying what the sentence means by itself or what the combination of words mean without the filling-in of implicated information.
Within conversational implicatures, Grice separates those that are particularized occurring in a particular context and those that are generalized conversational implicatures occurring for general cases or types of utterances. Further, Grice means that conversational implicatures have at least the three following quality:

(1) We are able to calculate, or infer, them from the communicative principles and maxims.

(2) We are able to cancel them (cancelable). In other words, we are able cancel out the meaning of the implicature either explicitly, through the use of a phrase like ‘I did not mean that,’ or contextually by changing the context in which they are uttered by inconsistency with the background information.

(3) An exception to (2) being those implicatures that are using or based on the maxim of manner. This means that there is no way of saying the same thing that would not carry the implicature.

As Grice states himself,

Conversational implicature: U is said to conversationally implicate q, when (1) we think she is observing the conversational maxims, or at minimum the cooperative principle, “(2) the supposition that [she] is aware that, or thinks that, q is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say that p (or doing so in those terms) consistent with this presupposition, and (3) the speaker [she] thinks that the audience can work
out that the supposition mentioned in (2) is needed, and she would expect the hearers to think that she thinks that it is within their ability to work or grasp” (Grice studies pg.30-32).

Further, Neale (1991 pg.527-538) gives us a list of what he sees as necessary conditions for something being an implicature:

i. U said that p

ii. We have no reason to thin that U is not following the cooperative principle

iii. U could not be doing this unless she thought that q

iv. U knows, and knows that I know she know, that I can see that U thinks the supposition that U thinks that q is required

v. There has been no cancellation by U of q (U has done nothing to stop me form thinking that q)

vi. U intended me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that q

vii. Thus, U has implicated that q

Theatrical definition I: S conversationally implicates p iff

i. S implicates p;

ii. S is presumed to be observing the cooperative principle

(cooperative presumption)

iii. The supposition that S believes p is required to make S’s utterance consistent with the cooperative principle (determinacy); and
iv. S believes (or knows), and expects H to believe that S believes, that H is able to determine that (iii) is true (\textit{Mutual knowledge}).

\textbf{Inferential Model:}

A communicator supplies evidence of what particular meaning she is trying to convey to the audience. The audience uses the evidence supplied to infer the intended meaning. Some examples of this are Grice’s intention-based theory, and the R.T. of Wilson and Sperber.

\textbf{Near-side vs. Far-side Pragmatics:}

Near-side pragmatics concerns the nature of certain facts that are relevant to determine what is said, and the resolution of ambiguities, vagueness, indexicals, demonstratives, some issues involving presumption, and things like proper names. In all of these cases, some fact beyond what is contained within the utterance, the meaning of the terms used, is needed. In contrast, far-side pragmatics concerns that which goes beyond what is said in the sentence alone. Namely, what speech acts are done by the saying the utterance, or what sorts of implicatures are created by saying what is said. This is also in the territory of conventional implicatures, or what goes beyond what is literally said in the sentence used.

\textbf{Ostensive-Inferential Communication:}
An ostensive-inferential communication has an ostensive stimulus as a component. This stimulus is designed to attract the audience’s attention and indicate what the communicator’s meaning is. Given ostensive stimuli, we can see that ostensive-inferential communication involves (1) an intention on the part of the communicator to inform their audience of something, and (2) the intention to inform the audience of the communicator’s own informative intention (Wilson and Sperber 2006 pg.611).

Also see **Principle of Cognitive Relevance.**

**Performative:** see **Constantive vs. Performative**

**Positive Cognitive Effect:**

A worthwhile difference made to the individual’s representation of the world e.g. true predictions and true conclusions. There are several different kinds of cognitive effects: strengthening, revision, belief rejection, and contextual implication. The most important of these for relevance theorists will be contextual implication.

**Presumption of Optimal Relevance:**

Has two components: (1) the ostensive stimulus used is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s effort to process it. The audience can expect the ostensive stimulus chosen by the communicator to be at least relevant enough to warrant
The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator’s own ability and preferences. Thus, it is in the best interest of the communicator, if she wants to be understood, to pick one that will be (a) easy for the audience to understand and (b) provide sufficient evidence for the audience to understand or have the desired cognitive effect. This stimulus should also allow the communicator to accomplish her own goals as well, within her own limitations and preferences.

**Quantity implicature:**

Quantity implicatures, also called scalar implicatures, are one of the most thoroughly studied implicates. A Quantity Implicate being an implicature in which a weaker statement “is used to implicate the denial of a stronger statement”43 (Davis 1998 pg.33). Griceans use the Maxim of Quantity, which states you should be as informative as required, to explain these implicatures. The basic concept is that if a speaker were in the positional to make the stronger claim she should have done so, and because she did not she is taken to believe the stronger claim is not true. For example, “Some people died in the car crash” implicates “Not all the people died.” One way to articulate what a Quantity Implicate is exhibited by Levinson’s claims below:

---

To show that these regular scalar inferences are indeed implicatures we need now to produce a Gricean argument deriving the inference…. A short version of the argument might go as follows:

The speaker has said $A(e_2)$; if $S$ was in a position to state that a stronger item on the scale holds—i.e. to assert $A(e_1)$—then he would be in breach of the first maxim of Quantity if he asserted $A(e_2)$. Since I the addressee assume that $S$ is cooperating, and therefore will not violate the maxim of Quantity without warning, I take it that $S$ wishes to convey that he is not in a position to state that the stronger item $e_1$ on the scale holds, and indeed knows that it does not hold.\(^44\)

More generally, and somewhat more explicitly:

i. $S$ has said $p$

ii. There is an expression $q$, more informative than $p$ (and thus $q$ entails $p$), which might be desirable as a contribution to the current purposes of the exchange (and here there is perhaps an implicit reference to the maxim of Relevance)

iii. $q$ is of roughly equal brevity to $p$; so $S$ did not say $p$ rather than $q$ simply in order to be brief (i.e. to conform to the maxim of Manner)

\(^44\) In this case, $e_2$ could be taken as ‘some of the people died’ whereas $e_1$ could be interchanged with ‘all the people died.’ Thus, with uniform substitution one gets the example above.
iv. Since if $S$ knew that $q$ holds but nevertheless uttered $p$ he would be in breach of the injunction to make his contribution as informative as is required, $S$ must mean me, the addressee, to infer that $S$ knows that $q$ is not the case ($K\neg q$), or at least that he does not know that $q$ is the case ($\neg Kq$).

(Levinson 1983 pg. 134–135)

Another helpful quote from Levinson,

A linguistic scale consists of a set of linguistic alternates, or contrastive expressions of the same grammatical category, which can be arranged in a linear order by degree of informativeness or semantic strength. Such a scale will have the general form of an ordered set (indicated by angled brackets) of linguistic expressions or scalar predicates $e_1, e_2, e_3, \ldots e_n$ as in

(117) $< e_1, e_2, e_3, \ldots e_n >$

Where if we substitute $e_1$ or $e_2$ etc., in a sentential from $A$ we obtain well-formed sentences $A(e_1), A(e_2)$, etc.; and where $A(e_1)$ entails $A(e_2)$, $A(e_2)$ entails $A(e_3)$, etc, but not vice versa. For example, take the English quantifiers all and some. These form an implicational scale $<all, some>$, because any sentence like (118) entails (119) (i.e., whenever (118) is true (119) is true also) but not vice versa:
(118) All of the boys went to the party

(119) Some of the boys went to the party.

Now, given any such scale, there is a general predictive rule for deriving a set of quantity implicates, namely if a speaker asserts that a lower or weaker point (i.e., a rightward item in the ordered set of alternatives) on a scale obtains, then he implicates that a higher point (leftward in the ordered set) does not obtain. Thus if one asserts (119) one conversationally implicates that not all the boys went to the party; this is so even though it is quite compatible with the truth of (119) that (118) is also true, as shown by the non-contradictoriness of (120)

(120) Some of the boys went to the party, in fact all.

We may formulate this generally as a rule for deriving scalar implicatures from scalar predicates:

(121) Scalar implicature: given any scale of the form \(< e_1, e_2, e_3, ... e_n >\), if a speaker asserts \(A(e_2)\), then he implicates \(\neg A(e_1)\), if he asserts \(A(e_3)\), then he implicates \(\neg A(e_2)\) and \(\neg A(e_1)\), and in general, if he asserts \(A(e_n)\), then he implicates \(\neg (A(e_{n-1}), \neg A(e_{n-2}))\) and so on, up to \(\neg (A(e_1))\) (Levinson 1983 pg. 133).
Yet a further way to view Quantity or, what Horn calls, scalar implicature is through the Maxim of Quantity’s sub-maxims, which articulate and show how when they are used they yield upper-bounding “generalized conversational implicatures associated with scalar value” (Horn 2006 pg.8). Horn goes on to state these sub-maxims as Q-based and R-based principles. The Q principle, as Horn says, is “a lower-bounding hearer-based guarantee of the sufficiency of the informative content (“saying as much as you can, Modulo Quality and R”)” (Horn 2006 pg. 13). On the other hand, the R-principle is “an upper-bounding correlate of the Law of Least Effort dictating minimization of form (“say no more than you must, Modulo Q”)” (Horn 2006 pg.13). Thus, the Q and R principles represent a way to view upper- and lower-bounding in different Quantity Implicatures.

Lastly, there is striving to articulate this interplay between perspicuity (clarity) and brevity of an utterance in classical philosophy and classical works of rhetoric.

If it is prolix, it will not be clear, nor if it is too brief. It is plain that the middle way is appropriate… saying just enough to make the facts plain (Aristotle, rhetoric, 3.12-3.16).

Brevis esse laboro; obscurus fio. ‘I strive to be brief; I become obscure’ (Horace, Ars Poetica 1. 25).
Personally, when I use the term brevity \([brevitas]\), I mean not saying less, but not saying more than the occasion demands. (Quintilion, *Institutio Oratio*, IV.ii 41-43).

**Relevance (For R.T):**

Relevance comes in varying degrees. Stated loosely, ceteris paribus, the more advantageous the conclusion an audience can achieve by processing an input, the more relevant it will be. Conversely, the more effort of perception, memory, and inference needed, the less relevant the input, and, thus, less deserving of our attention. In other words, the greater the processing effort needed, the less relevant the input. Hence, Wilson and Sperber express relevance in terms of cognitive effects and processing cost (2006 pg. 609).

**Relevance of an input to an individual:**

a) Ceteris paribus, the greater the positive cognitive effect achieved through processing a given input, the greater the relevance of the input to an individual at that time.

b) Ceteris paribus, the greater the expenditure in processing cost, the less relevant that input is for an individual at that time.

These two criteria balance one another, much like Grice’s Q-principle and R-principle, so that outlandish things do not becoming relevant for an individual at a given time. These criteria allow us to evaluate where on a spectrum of relevance a given input will lay.
Relevant input:

A relevant input’s processing cost yields a positive cognitive effect for an individual, as Wilson and Sperber put it.

Also, see *Positive Cognitive Effect*.

Relevance-Theoretic Comprehension Procedure:

This procedure is two fold:

a) Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects. Test interpretative hypotheses (disambiguate, reference resolution, implicature etc.) in order of accessibility.

b) Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied or abandoned.

(As found in Wilson and Sperber 2006 pg. 613)

Relevance Theory (R.T.):

R.T. approaches some of Grice’s central questions and claims in an alternative way. For example, an essential feature of most human communication is expression and recognition of intention. An utterance automatically creates expectations which guide the hearer towards the speaker’s meaning (Grice 1987). R.T. shares the notion that utterances raise expeditions that guide the hearer (for R.T. expectations of relevance), but question aspects of Grice’s account i.e. maxim of Quality, Quantity, Relation, Manner, and the Cooperative Principle
(Wilson and Sperber 2006). For Wilson and Sperber, the central claim of R.T. is that expectations of relevance raised by someone’s utterance are predictive enough to point or steer the audience towards the intended meaning of the speaker (2006). This leads the relevance theorist to try to explain what we can equate in realistic cognitive terms with these expectations of relevance, and then how these expectations could contribute to the construction of an empirically plausible account of linguistic comprehension. This raises questions of what relevance is and how something can be relevant to us in trying to infer what someone’s meaning is. R.T. also makes the claim that humans have an innate automatic compulsion to maximize relevance as a result of the way our cognitive systems evolved (Wilson and Sperber 2006). In other words, relevance theorists claim, “human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance” via our evolution (Wilson and Sperber 2006 pg. 610). Assuming this, R.T. claims it is possible for us to predict and manipulate the mental states of others, and because of this, we can unpack and deduce the contextual implicatures of other people.

Also, see relevance.

Scalar Implicatures:

See Quantity Implicature

Saying That or What is Said:

Defining what Grice means by what is said is important in seeing his distinction between what is said and what is implied, which is one of the main distinguishing
feature of semantics and pragmatics for Grice and conversational implicatures vs. sentential semantic content. Neale formulates this in his 1991 paper as,

(V) By uttering X, U said\textsuperscript{45} that p iff

(8) by uttering X, part of what U meant was that p

(9) \(X\) consists of a sequence of elements (such as words) ordered in a way licensed by a system of rules (syntactical rues), and

(10) \(X\) means that ‘p’ in virtues of particular meanings of the elements in \(X\), their order and their syntactical structure (pg. 554-555).

Some like Neale claim that what is said lies in the overlap between utterance meaning and sentence meaning (1991 pg.554). It is important to note that Grice does not want implicatures derived from used of words like ‘but’, ‘yet’, ‘still’ to count as part of what is said. Thus, separating conventional implicature from conversational implicature via the what is said and what is implied distinction (sometimes it is stated as what is said and what is uttered). Lastly, by saying Grice meant not the mere locutionary act of uttering certain words, but he concentrated on the illocutionary act of saying that something is the case (Davis 1998 pg.5). (add example)

Tricotomy of speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary):

\textsuperscript{45} This can be interpreted in some cases as conventionally meant.
J. L. Austin also described and introduced this distinction. *Locutionary*: an act, or the act, of saying something. Some describe it as the surface meaning of a speech act. Austin said it was composed of a phonic act, a phatic act, and a rhetic act.

*Illocutionary*: when we perform a locutionary action, we perform that act with a certain force, e.g. commanding, warning, promising etc. In other words, when someone makes an utterance they are doing something, such as warning you about the tiger by the river. For people like Bach and Harnish, this can mean what particular thing one intends to happen when one utters a sentence. *Perlocutionary*: through the illocutionary force of a speech act, we may produce certain effects in the audience’s thoughts, beliefs, or actions. When one says something, one gets an intended or unintended effect in the audience.

‘*Utter*, ‘*Utterance*, and ‘*Uttering*’ (For Grice):

Grice uses these terms in a way that is germane to “any case of doing X or producing X by the performance of which U meant that so and so” (Neale 1991 pg. 515). In a broader sense, Grice does not strictly see these in a linguistic, covenental, or orthodox way.

**Weak vs. Strong Implicature Distinction:**

If something is strongly implicated, then recovering it and its derivation is essential in order to arrive at an interpretation that satisfies the addressee’s expectation of relevance. Without this implication the audience would not be able
to make sense of the addressee’s utterance in light of their expectation of relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1986a 1. Pg 10-16, 4.6).

If something is weakly implicated, then its recovery or derivation is helpful with the formation of an interpretation that satisfies the audience’s expectations of relevance. However, this implicature is not necessary because the utterance suggests a range of similar possibilities any of which would work in the interpretation (Sperber and Wilson 1986a 1. Pg 10-16, 4.6).

‘Working out’ for Grice and implicatures:

For Grice one of the necessary conditions for something being an implicature is that the audience can work it out. So this leads to the question how do we work them out? Grice states that it as,

The presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out; for even if it can in fact be intuitively grasped, unless the intuition is replaceable by an argument, the implicature (if present at all) will not count as a conversational implicature; it will be a conventional implicature. To work out that a particular conversational implicature is present, the hearer will relies on the following data: (1) the conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any references that may be involved; (2) the Cooperative Principle and its maxims; (3) the context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance; (4) other items of
back ground knowledge; and (5) the fact (or supposed fact) that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case (Grice 1975 pg. 31).

In other words, for one to work out an implicature one has to infer in a special way from the cooperative principle along with certain facts such as the sentence utter and the context it is uttered in. Davis (1998) has condensed this into his working out schema for speaker implicature:

P1 S uttered a sentence with a particular meaning, in a given context, etc.

P2 S is observing the Cooperative Principle

P3 Given P1, S could no be observing the Cooperative Principle unless he believed p.

...

C∴ S implicated p (Davis 1998 pg. 15).

In this Davis is laying out the inferences that one might have to take in working out an implicature from an utterance in a given context.