



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
Terms used in Linguistics
presents

Maxim of Relation/Relevance



Definition

When engaged in conversation, the Maxim
of Relation requires you to

Be relevant

H.P. Grice (1975)



H.P. Grice

Slide 2 



Basic Idea

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

Slide 3 



Example 1

How do you like your steak cooked?

Medium rare, please.

One finds this normal. Why?

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

Because the Maxim is observed

Slide 4 

Example 2

He is a polite man and works on time.

Daniel, is Morgan good as a finance manager?

We find Daniel's behavior weird. Why?

Daniel's contribution is **irrelevant** for the purpose of the conversation.

Because the Maxim is violated.

Slide 5

Example 2

He is a polite man and works on time.

Daniel, is Morgan good as a finance manager?

In this case, one might infer Morgan is not a good finance manager.

WHY?

Deliberate and apparent violation of maxims is called **flouting**.

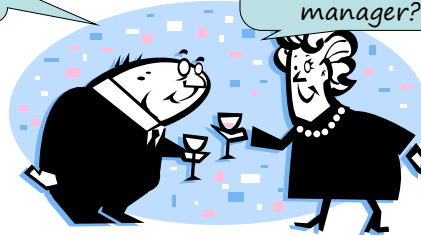
Because we do not expect the Maxim to be violated, the apparent violation must be motivated.

Slide 6

Example 2

He is a polite man
and works on time.

Daniel, is
Morgan good as
a finance
manager?




Inferences obtained
from flouting of maxims
are called **implicatures**.

Daniel may be implicating that

- *Morgan is no good as financial manager.*

Note: Implicatures do not have to be necessarily true, since the inferences are guessed at rather than derived by formal logic.

Slide 7 

The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)
An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.
Hong Kong Baptist University.

