Maxim of Manner

Saying something

Suppose some person made the utterance U in some discourse.

Two aspects of U:

i. the propositional content of U
   • True/false?
   • (In)sufficient information?
   • Relevant?

ii. the delivery of U
   • clear/vague/ambiguous?
   • happy/sad/excited

Smells rotten.

Did the man like the smell?
**Definition**

When engaged in conversation, the Maxim of Manner requires you to be **perspicuous**.

Includes (but not restricted to)

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

H.P. Grice (1975)

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**Basic Idea**

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

Let's begin by considering two propositions:

P1: Laura ran to the pier.

P2: Laura jumped.

Logically,

P1 & P2 = P2 & P1
One finds this bewildering. Why?

Because the Maxim is violated.

Example

What did Laura do when she heard that Lauri’s boat had arrived?

Laura ran to the pier and jumped.

Example

What did Laura do when she heard that Lauri’s boat had arrived?

Laura jumped and ran to the pier.

One finds this conversation normal. Why?

Because the Maxim is observed.
Example

Logically,

\[ P1 \& P2 = P2 \& P1 \]

But *being orderly* in the presentation of information is important in conversations. This is an effect of the *Maxim of Manner*.

Violation

What did Laura do when she heard that Lauri’s boat had arrived?

Laura ran to the pier and jumped.

Deliberate and apparent violation of maxims is called “flouting”.

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

The woman in red may be implicating that *Lauri is Laura’s nemesis*.

We do not expect the Maxim to be violated. Flouting must be motivated.
Scope of Manner

Violations of the Maxim of Manner can take many forms:

- Order of presentation of information
- Vagueness and ambiguity
- Volume and pace
- Choice of words
- Attitude
- Even facial/gestural expressions

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.