Maxim of Relation/Relevance

**Definition**

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

**Be relevant**

H.P. Grice (1975)
**Basic Idea**

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

**Example 1**

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

*Medium rare, please.*

One finds this normal. Why?

Because the Maxim is observed
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?

Because the Maxim is violated.

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

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.

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

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

WHY?
Example 2

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

Daniel may be implicating that

- **Morgan is no good as a financial manager.**

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

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.