

I Gricean reasoning (pragmatics)

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[a] B's utterance implicates that B's cat is a breed other than Siamese. We can show that this is an implicature by using the cancellation test:

(B") I have a cat, and it is a Siamese.

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Since this sentence makes sense, "B's cat is not a Siamese" is cancelable and therefore an implicature. In order to derive this implicature, we must assume that the Gricean maxims of quantity, relation, and manner were observed. We first must assume that B's utterance is relevant to the question posed by A. With this assumption, we know that speaker B is suggesting either "yes" or "no". We must also assume that speaker B was observing the maxim of quantity. Simply saying "yes" would simultaneously mean that B has a cat and that it is a Siamese. However, saying "no" could mean either "I do not have a cat" or "I have a cat, but it is not a Siamese." If the existence of B's cat is important to the conversation, then simply saying "no" would not be as informative as is required, which would violate the maxim, requiring B to say something like "I have a cat, but it is not a Siamese." If we assume that B was also observing the maxim of manner and wanted to be brief, then they could have shortened "I have a cat, but it is not a Siamese" to just "I have a cat".

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There are several possible reasons why speaker B might decide to use utterance B instead of B'. One possibility is related to the Gricean maxim of quantity mentioned above. If the speaker knew that speaker A was unaware of the existence of his cat, and this information was relevant to the conversation, "I have a cat" is a logical reply.

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Another possibility is that there is a different implicature, and B is uncertain of whether or not their cat is a Siamese. Assuming that speaker B was observing the maxim of quality, and did not want to say anything for which they lacked adequate evidence, they may have meant, "I have a cat, but I'm not sure what its breed is". This then could have been shortened to simply "I have a cat."

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or rather we
assume
relevance,
and that
quantity is
being flouted
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