

Universality of Grice's Maxims in Najdi Arabic Dialect

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Abstract

This study was conducted to test the universality of the Cooperative principle and the conversational maxims within the non-standard Arabic, Najdi dialect. In order to determine the applicability of the maxims, we used Prince's (1982) description of what a language has to look like if it lacked one maxim. For this study, I applied the examples of Prince to the Najdi Arabic, and asked 10 speakers of the Najdi dialect, what the utterance inferred. Later, I provided examples from the speech exchange between the participants. In this paper, I only discussed the Quality and the Quantity maxims. The results of the study showed that the speakers of the Najdi dialect do not observe the maxims when they want to generate an implicature. Finally, the results of the study argue in favor of Conversational maxim and the Cooperative principle.

Keywords: Conversational implicature theory, Universality of Grice's maxims, Maxim of quantity, Maxim of quality, Najdi dialect.

1. Introduction

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Language is used as a means of communication in social interaction. It allows the speakers to express their feelings and thoughts, and it helps in establishing relationships with others and helps in maintaining these relationships (Alzuberiry, 2020). Communication through language is successful when all the participants are cooperative in the conversation (Grice, 1975). Grice (1975), claimed that in order for the interaction to be successful the interlocutors have to follow four maxims or as Pratt calls them "Grice's rules"(as cited in Green, 1990, p.514).

The four maxims are part of what Grice has introduced as the Cooperative Principle (CP) to the field of Pragmatics. In the CP, Grice states that ". . . make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1975, P.45). The four maxims are Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. The First maxim which is the maxim of quantity states that speakers'

contribution in a conversation should be as informative as is required, but not more than is required. Second, the maxim of quality in which speakers have to make their contribution a true one. Grice list two sub-maxims under this one:

“1. Do not say what you believe to be false.

2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.” (Grice, 1975, p 46).

The third maxim is relation, in which the contribution should be one that is relevant. The last maxim is the maxim of manner. This maxim states that speakers should avoid expression obscurity and ambiguity, and have to be brief, and orderly. According to Grice, the non-observance of one of the four conversational maxims will generate an implied meaning. That means not obeying the CP and the maxims will lead to conversational implicature.

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the reasons for why people sometimes do not observe one of the maxims. Some speakers use implicatures to show politeness and to maintain their relationships with others (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Consider the example from Haugh (2007):

The following conversation took place in the Edo-Tokyo museum, where a woman was about to eat something at the museum, and one of the attendants came up to her and implied that eating at the museum is not allowed by giving rise to politeness.

(1) “Attendant: Mooshiwake-gozai-mas-en...mooshiwake-gozai-mas-en
excuse(Pol)-have-Pol-Neg excuse(Pol)-have-Pol-Neg
(I am very sorry...I am very sorry)

Visitor: A', ike-nai?

oh acceptable-Neg

(Oh, is this not allowed?)

Attendant: Mooshiwake-gozai-mas-en...

excuse(Pol)-have-Pol-Neg

(I am very sorry) (Edo-Tokyo museum, Tokyo)” (p. 86)

We can notice from the above example that the museum attendant did not say (eating at the museum is prohibited) to tell the woman to stop eating but used (I am very sorry) which in no relevance to what she actually wanted to say. Also, instead of answering the visitor's question, she apologized again to infer (yes, it is allowed). By apologizing the attendant expresses to the visitor that she does not think bad of her (the visitor) which reduces the illocutionary force of the attendant request.

Others use it as a means of humor (Al kayed, 2019; Hu, 2012). A famous joke in Jordan is "They do a population census in Jordan and they found: 2 million Syrians, 500 thousand Yamani, 500 Libyans, and 1 million Iraqi. However, they are still looking for Jordanians!" (Al kayed, 2019, p. 16). In this joke, there is an obvious violation of the quality maxim since it is impossible to not find any Jordanians in Jordan. The joke gives reference to the demographic shift that happened in Jordan.

The major objective of this study is to investigate the universality of the conversational maxims in non-standard Arabic (SA), Najdi dialect (ND). This study provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of the universality of the CP. The central question in this paper addresses whether the CP and its maxim are universal or not. In the current paper, I focused on two of the maxims which are the maxim of quantity, and the maxim of quality.

2.The universality of Grice's Principle and maxims

Grice did not claim the universality of the CP (Fintel & Matthewson, 2008; Prince, 1982), but since he considered the CP as governing all rational behaviors, and if it does, then we should consider it as universally applicable to all languages (Green, 1990).

Previous studies have reported in favor of Grice's maxims (Alduais, 2012; Fintel & Matthewson, 2008; Green 1990). So far, to my knowledge, there has been one research that argued against Grice. Keenan (1976) argues that native speakers of Malagasy do not follow the maxim of quantity, and goes on to explain that the native speakers of Malagasy deliberately give less information than is required, though they have the necessary information. Kennan (1976) stats:

If A asks B 'Where is your mother?' and B responds 'She is either in the house or at the market', B's utterance is not usually taken to imply that B is unable to provide more specific information needed by the hearer. The implicature is not made,

because the expectation that speakers will satisfy informational needs is not a basic norm. (p. 70)

According to Keenan, there are two reasons for why the speakers provide less information than is required. The first one is that the information which is not available to the public is highly desired. The speaker who has a new information is unwilling to share it, since those who have new information are considered superior to others. The second reason is because they do not want to be held responsible for the information they provide.

Prince (1982) used Keenan's data to claim that Malagasy does have quantity maxim. In regard to Keenan's example above, Prince explains:

[I]t seems that A leaves believing that B could have made a stronger statement and chose not to in an obvious way. That is, A believes that B is either flouting or 'opting out of' the Maxim of Quantity. The implicature made, or the inference drawn, is that B is, temporarily at least, superior in some way to A. If A had no Maxim of Quantity and were therefore unable to recognize the flouting of it, it is hard to see how B could accrue prestige in his eyes from such an exchange. Thus it seems that, in this case too, Malagasy speakers indeed have a Maxim of Quantity and use it to derive understandings that cannot be logically deduced. (p. 5)

In addition to that, in his paper, Prince provided examples and explained for each maxim, what a language has to be like if it did not have a certain maxim.

Recently, linguists have examined the universality of Grice's theory to languages other than English. Alduais (2012) investigated the applicability of the Conversational Implicature to the Yemeni dialect. In his study, Alduais analyzed a thirty minute recorded conversation that he had with his friend. The results of his study showed that the flouting of any of the conversational maxims in the Yemeni dialect leads to implicature.

In this paper, I made reference to Grice's conversational maxims and their applicability in the Najdi dialect (NA). I attempted to answer the question proposed by Fintel and Matthewson (2008) of whether Grice's CP and maxims hold for all languages.

3. Methodology

In this study, I only tested the applicability of two maxims which are quantity and quality. I tried to apply Prince's description of what a language looks like if it lacks a certain maxim.

I constructed some sentences based on Prince's examples and asked 10 native speakers of the Najdi dialect about what the sentences infer. The participants were recruited from two regions in Saudi Arabia (6 from Qassim and 4 from 4 Riyadh). Lastly, I provided some examples we got from the speech exchange between the participants.

4. Data and Results

4.1. Quantity Maxim

According to Prince (1982), the speakers of a language that lacks the maxim of quantity will not draw an inference based on the maxim, as shown in (1):

- (2) “a. Some people left early.
 b. At least two people left early.
 c. Not everyone left early.” (Prince, 1982, p.6)

Prince clarified that speakers of a language that does not have the Quantity maxim will draw the inference (1-b) when they hear utterance (1-a) but they will not infer (1-c).

I attempted to apply the same thing with Najdi Arabic and asked the participants about the inference of the following utterance:

- (3) *raħ bad^s ald^suf bdri*
raħ bad^s al-d^suf bdri
 left some ART,DEF- Guests early
 “some guests left early”

All the participants agreed that the utterance means that *not all the guests left* and none of the participants inferred that *at least two left early*. Also, I found out that the native speakers tend to use this type of utterance a lot when they want to infer *not all*. The following is a conversation between two of the participants:

- (4) Speaker A: *ysalt bad^salm alabis*
ysal- t bad^s al-malabs
 Wash-PST, 1SG some ART,DEF- clothes
 “I washed some of the clothes”

Speaker B: *ljf ma ysal-tj-hu m klhm?*

ljf ma ysal-tj-hu m klhm

Why NEG wash-2SG-PL all

“why did not you wash all of them?”

From B’s response, I can conclude that B interpreted A’s utterance as A did not *wash all the clothes*.

Another way to prove whether a language has the Quantity maxim or not is the use of conditional sentences (Prince, 1982). The language that lacks this maxim will not infer (4-c) from (4-a), but will infer (4-b):

(5) “.I’ll give you five dollars if you mow the lawn .a

.b. I won’t give you five dollars if you don’t mow the lawn

.the lawn c. I’ll give you five dollars if and only if you mow” (Prince, 1982, p.6)

We used the conditional sentence and asked the participants about what the utterance infer:

(6) *bʕtj kxmsjn ryal eða nðʕfj yrfætj*

b-ʕtj- k xmsj n ryal eða n ðʕf ty yrfætj

Will-1SG,give-2SG fifty riyal if clean-2SG,F room-1SG,POSS,F

“I will give you 50 Riyal if you cleaned my room”

When the participants were asked about this utterance, there were two responses. Four of the participants inferred that I won’t give you the fifty riyals unless you clean my room and six inferred that I’ll give you the fifty riyals if and only if you clean my room.

4.2. Quality Maxim

In reference to Prince’s description of what the languages that do not have the maxim of Quality look like, he states that the culture that lacks the Quality maxim will not have metaphor or sarcasm. Then he provided the following example:

(7) “*What beautiful weather!*” (Prince, 1982, p.6)

This utterance was spoken by **A** to **B** when they were looking at the rain. **B** considered the weather as not beautiful, and for that reason, **B** inferred **A**'s utterance as sarcasm. Also, **B** assumes that **A** does not find the weather beautiful as well.

For this maxim, I tried to analyze a conversation between two of the participants. The two speakers in the following conversation are college students, and they are talking about a course that they are sharing:

(8) Speaker A: *aldkt ur bjɿtʰj na muħadʰrh edʰafjah*

Al-dktu r b-j-ɿtʰj- na muħadʰrh edʰafjah

ART,DEF- Professor will-3SG,M-give-1PL lecture extra

“the professor will give us an extra lecture”

Speaker B: *ya ħðʰna!*

ya ħðʰ-na!

VOC luck-1PL

“Lucky us”

A inferred that **B**'s response is sarcasm because **A** was not feeling lucky, on the contrary, **A** was upset that she has taken an extra class, and assumes that **B** feels the same.

Another example of Quality maxim is the use of metaphor, as in:

(9) *alexbar kan mujh*

Al-extbar kan mujh

ART,DEF- exam was water

“the exam was a piece of cake”ⁱ

The above utterance was spoken by a student after finishing the exam. The student was comparing between the easiness of exam and water. The student meant to say that *the exam was very easy*.

5. Discussion

The objective of the current paper was to identify whether Grice's maxims are universal or not. And in order to answer the question, I consider Grice's theory and test it within the non-standard Arabic, Najdi dialect.

In reviewing the literature, only one study (The universality of conversational postulates) argued against the universality of Grice's theory (Kennan, 1976), and most of the studies are in support of Grice's principles and maxims (Fintel & Matthewson, 2008; Green, 1990; Alduis, 2012)

The present study revealed that the non-observing of the maxims (i.e., Quantity and Quality) caused the generating of a meaning that is different from what is said.

In this study, I attempted to apply Prince's description of what a language has to be like if it did not have a certain maxim. First, I investigated the quantity maxim and I found out that the interlocutors seem to infer not all from some as in (2) and (3). Also, most of the native speakers when they heard the conditional sentence inferred that the condition has to be fulfilled for the action to take place as in (5). These results suggest that Grice's principles and maxims do apply to the Najdi dialect similar to the Indonesian Language (*Herawati, 2013; Martini, 2018*) and The Yemeni dialect (Alduais, 2012).

Another maxim I tested is the maxim of Quality. For this maxim, we applied Prince's description as well. The results showed that the participants did not observe the maxim when they wanted to say the opposite of how they really feel, and when they wanted to be sarcastic as in (6), and that leads us to the conclusion that the Najdi dialect does follow the CP and the conversational maxims.

6. Conclusion

The main goal of this study is investigate the universality of conversational maxims. Grice (1957) argued that what is said is not always what is meant, and he referred to this as the conversational implicature theory. According to Grice, implicature arise when the interlocutors do not obey the CP and conversational maxims.

This study set out to determine the universality of the CP and the conversational maxims. In order to determine the universality, This study investigated the applicability of the maxims within the Najdi dialect by using Prince's (1982) description of what a language has to be like if it did not have one of the maxims. I considered only two out of the four maxims (i.e., Quality and Quantity maxims). The study has shown that the speakers of the Najdi dialect do not observe

the maxims when they want to generate an implicature. For example, they say *happy*. to express *sadness*. Taken together, these results are in support of Grice's theory.

Further research can be conducted to test the last two maxims or apply all the maxims on the standard Arabic

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¹ The literal translation here is that the “Exam was water” but for the seek of clarity, it was translated as the English idiom “piece of cake” because both idioms (i.e. Arabic and English) have the same meaning.