The teaching of implicature to ESL learners

Joel Christopher Harris

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THE TEACHING OF IMPLICATURE TO ESL LEARNERS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

By
Joel Christopher Harris
March 1995
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ABSTRACT

According to Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature, there are four maxims that speakers observe to cooperate with each other: Maxim of Quantity (be informative), Maxim of Quality (be truthful), Maxim of Relation (be relevant), and Maxim of Manner (be clear). When speakers violate one of the maxims, an implicature is created, and the hearer must interpret the implicature. For example, if I say "Out" as a response to the question "Where are you going?", I violate the Maxim of Quantity, thereby introducing an implicature: I do not want to inform the hearer of where I am going.

Implicature is a fact of all languages, a strategy frequently used in communication (Green 1989). The ability to understand implicature is a significant aspect of communicative competence and thus an important thing for ESL learners to master (Bouton 1990). However, previous research has found that ESL learners have considerable difficulty understanding implicature (Bouton 1988, 1990, Chen 1990, Chen and Harris 1993).

Although these findings point to a need to improve students' ability to understand implicature, the teaching of implicature has been almost completely ignored by most ESL teachers. For the past two years, I have been researching ESL learners' ability to understand implicature and experimenting with teaching implicature in the ESL
classroom. The findings are that, while ESL programs without explicit instruction do not improve such ability, explicit instruction resulted in significant improvement (Chen and Harris 1993, 1994). Based on this line of research, I propose to explore ways in which implicature can be taught. Specifically, I will develop materials and design classroom tasks.

In Chapter 1, I will introduce Grice's theory, discussing the seemingly paradoxical view that implicature is both universal and culture-specific. In Chapter 2, I will review research on the teaching of implicature to ESL learners, particularly Bouton's and Chen and Harris' (cited above) studies, which have shown that implicature can and should be taught in the ESL classroom. In Chapter 3, I will present materials and classroom tasks for the teaching of implicature. The materials include video and printed dialogues; the tasks include cross-cultural comparison of implicature and creating an implicature in a given context. These materials and tasks will emphasize raising the awareness of learners. Due to the presumed universality of implicature, the awareness raising will help the learners to transfer their ability to understand implicature in their native language to English. The instruction will also focus on the culture-specific nature of implicature, particularly the fact that different cultures may derive different implicatures from the same or similar utterances, so that
the learners will better understand native speakers' implied meanings. In Chapter 4, I will point out directions for further research.
CHAPTER FOUR

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Philosopher H. P. Grice proposes a general theory of communication called the Cooperative Principle, which he expresses as follows:

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. (45)

He outlined the following four maxims:

QUANTITY

1) Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

QUALITY

1) Do not say what you believe to be false.
2) Do not say that for which you lack evidence.

RELATION - Be relevant.

MANNER - Be perspicuous.

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

(45-46)

It is important to note that Grice’s four maxims are not meant to be a set of prescriptive rules speakers must follow, rather they describe what speakers do in order to successfully communicate. Levinson writes this about Grice’s point:

It is not the case, he (Grice) will readily admit, that people follow these guidelines to the letter. Rather, in most ordinary kinds of talk these principles are oriented to, such that when talk does not proceed according to their specifications, hearers assume that, contrary to appearances, the principles are nevertheless being adhered to at some deeper level (102).

So, the maxims are general criteria by which one can know if an implicature has been created. When a speaker does not seem to adhere to one of the maxims, she is still adhering to the Cooperative Principle. Our recognizing that a maxim seems to have been violated along with our assumption that the speaker is cooperating provides the mechanism by which we understand that the speaker intended her utterance to convey an implicature. In this way, the maxims enable us to make inferences about a speaker’s utterance in a given
context. In other words, "inferences arise to preserve the assumption of co-operation; it is only by making the assumption contrary to superficial indications that the inferences arise in the first place" (Levinson 102). The Cooperative Principle then can explain how speakers mean more than what they say. By assuming that a speaker is cooperating, hearers can infer extralinguistic meanings from utterances. Once again, Levinson presents Grice's theory lucidly:

So Grice's point is not that we always adhere to these maxims on a superficial level but rather that, wherever possible, people will interpret what we say as conforming to the maxims on at least some level (103).

I may say something that seems irrelevant (it seems to violate the Maxim of Relation), but I intend my utterance to convey some relevant information. So, when my utterance appears to be inconsistent with the maxims, the hearer assumes that I am observing the Cooperative Principle. The hearer must assume that the speaker is observing the Cooperative Principle because, as Green explains, "to do otherwise would be to assume that the speaker is irrational and unpredictable, and cannot be expected to participate in rational discourse" (90-91). The point is that the hearer creates an interpretation of an utterance. The hearer must first assume that an utterance is coherent. As rational
beings, we interpret utterances in order to make sense of what we hear. It seems that we cannot deal with incoherent input; so, in a sense, we create coherence.

When speakers violate one of the maxims, an implicature is created, and the hearer must interpret the implicature. For example, if I say "Out" as a response to the question "Where are you going?", I introduce an implicature that I do not want to inform the hearer of where I am going, by violating the Maxim of Quantity. I have not provided enough information as required by the question. The person who asked the question must infer the reason why I did not give enough information.

V. Green says this about the explanatory power of Grice's theory of conversational implicature:

The value of the maxims as an explanatory tool lies in what they induce a rational hearer to infer when she assumes that a speaker is abiding by them, even when what is said appears not to conform. Grice's contribution was thus not the claim that discourse should conform to the maxims, or that a particular sort of discourse does conform to them, but the observation that assuming that conversation is governed by the maxims explains usages which, taken at face value, appear illogical, yet typically convey much more than is said. This assumption, put as the Cooperative
Principle, is in essence the eminently reasonable claim that man is a social animal (96-97).

Levinson points out the significance of Grice’s theory of conversational implicature:
First, implicature stands as a paradigmatic example of the nature and power of pragmatic explanations of linguistic phenomena. The sources of this species of pragmatic inference can be shown to lie outside the organization of language, in some general principles for co-operative interaction, and yet these principles have a pervasive effect upon the structure of language. The concept of implicature, therefore, seems to offer some significant functional explanations of linguistic facts. A second important contribution made by the notion of implicature is that it provides some explicit account of how it is possible to mean (in some general sense) more than what is actually ‘said’ (i.e. more than what is literally expressed by the conventional sense of the linguistic expressions uttered) (97).

We are faced with a problem. How is it possible for a speaker to mean more than what she literally says? Levinson uses another theory from Grice to explain how:

If, as we indicated, Grice’s theory of meaning-nn is construed as a theory of communication, it has the
interesting consequence that it gives an account of how communication might be achieved in the absence of any conventional means for expressing the intended message. A corollary is that it provides an account of how more can be communicated, in his rather strict sense of non-naturally meant, than what is actually said. Obviously we can given an utterance, often derive a number of inferences from it; but not all those inferences may have been communicative in Grice's sense, i.e. intended to be recognized as having been intended. The kind of inferences that are called implicatures are always of this special intended kind, and the theory of implicature sketches one way in which such inferences, of a non-conventional sort, can be conveyed while meeting the criterion of communicated messages in Grice's theory of meaning (101).

Grice's theory of meaning refers to what is intentionally communicated. A speaker intends to communicate X by an utterance U, and she assumes that the hearer will figure out X by recognizing the speaker's intention (Levinson).

There is one final important point about the Cooperative Principle which comes from Levinson: Grice's suggestion is that there is a set of over-arching assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation. These arise, it seems, from basic
rational considerations and may be formulated as guidelines to further co-operative ends (101).

Perhaps it is still not clear just what the maxims are and how they are learned. Levinson writes:

But what is the source of these maxims of conversational behavior? Are they conventional rules that we learn as we learn, say, table manners? Grice suggests that the maxims are in fact not arbitrary conventions, but rather describe rational means for conducting co-operative exchanges (103).

To summarize, implicature is a basic strategy for communicating more than what one says. The meaning of an utterance is carried not only in the linguistic structures and vocabulary items, but outside or above them. Where semantics is the study of the meanings associated with structures and lexical items, pragmatics is the study of how people use language. The fact that an utterance can convey more than the literal meaning is the basic assumption of linguistic pragmatics. In Jacob Mey's words, implicature is "something which is implied in conversation, that is, something which is left implicit in actual language use" (99).

Grice describes implicature as possessing the following features: cancellability, non-detachability, calculability,
and non-conventionality (Levinson 119). Cancellability refers to the fact that implicature can be canceled by "adding some additional premises to the original ones" (Levinson 114). Non-detachability refers to the fact that implicature is "attached to the semantic content of what is said, not to linguistic form, and therefore implicatures cannot be detached from an utterance simply by changing the words of the utterance for synonyms" (Levinson 116). Calculability means that implicatures can be (in fact, must be) worked out by the hearer. In Levinson's words, "from the literal meaning or the sense on the one hand, and the cooperative principle on the other, it follows that an addressee would make the inference in question to preserve the assumption of co-operation" (Levinson 117). Finally, non-conventionality means that implicatures are "not part of the conventional meaning of linguistic expressions" (Levinson 117).

Let me turn to an important issue. Implicature is assumed to be universal (Leech 1983, Levinson 1983, Green 1989). How is it that implicature can be both universal (found in all cultures) and culture-specific (different from culture to culture)? Leech writes:

No claim has been made that the CP applies in an identical manner in all societies. Indeed, one of the main purposes of socio-pragmatics, as I envisage it, is
to find out how different societies operate maxims in
different ways" (80).

While Grice never claimed that the Cooperative
Principle is universal, other writers have done so (Green
view that the Cooperative Principle and maxims represent
"values universally assumed in human society" (1990, 24-25).
Green claims that the Cooperative Principle and maxims are
"potentially a consequence of some property of human nature
or human society" (25).

Green discusses Keenan’s claim (1976) that the maxims,
in fact, do not explain human talk exchanges in all
cultures. Though Keenan’s evidence from Malagasy culture is
often cited to argue that Grice’s Cooperative Principle and
maxims are not universal, Green turns Keenan’s argument on
its head, claiming that the maxims are present in all
cultures but are observed in different degrees (1990).

On the other hand, however, implicature is culture-
specific. Consider the following implicature from Japanese,
which will be discussed in Chapter 3: Some friends are
going to the beach for a swim. They invite B to join them,
saying "Do you want to go to swimming with us?" B answers
"I gained weight." Does B want to go? Do the hearers
interpret B’s utterance as an acceptance or refusal of the
invitation?
Some Japanese students reported that the implicature in B’s utterance is ambiguous. It could convey at least two meanings. It could mean "No, I won’t go because I don’t want to be seen in a bathing suit." Also, it could mean "Yes, I will go because swimming is good exercise and it will do me good." The Americans I asked about the implicature, on the other hand, did not find it ambiguous. They interpreted B’s utterance as a refusal of the invitation, stating that B obviously does not want to be seen in a bathing suit because of gaining weight. Thus, in the same context, the same utterance can be interpreted differently by different hearers. In fact, in this case, the utterance is interpreted to have the opposite intended meaning. Both Americans and Japanese interpreted B’s utterance to be relevant. They differed in their specific interpretation of the meaning implied by the utterance. In both cases the Cooperative Principle and maxims applied and an implicature was observed. The difference is the culture-specific interpretation of the implicature.

The discussion in this chapter yields the following points. First, implicature is pervasive in language use. ESL students therefore should be able to interpret implicature so as to communicate effectively in the target language. Second, implicature is a result of violation of the maxims, which may point out an approach to the teaching of implicature. In other words, one may find it helpful to
teach implicature by partly talking about the maxims.
Third, implicature is both universal and culture-specific.
The universality of it indicates that the ESL students already know, unconsciously of course, that implicature exists in their own language. As a result, the ESL teacher could draw upon such knowledge and raise the students' awareness of implicature. The culture-specific nature of implicature suggests that when dealing with implicature, one should be aware that she is in part teaching the culture of the target language. These points will be seen in different parts of this thesis.
CHAPTER 2 - RESEARCH ON HOW NONNATIVE SPEAKERS INTERPRET IMPLICATURE AND THE TEACHING OF IMPLICATURE TO NONNATIVE SPEAKERS

In this section I will review studies of how nonnative speakers understand implicature and whether implicature can be effectively taught in the ESL classroom. As this is a rather new area, there are a limited number of studies that I am aware of. The most significant contribution is Bouton’s series of studies (1988, 1990, 1994).

Studies have shown that nonnative speakers interpret implicature differently from native speakers (Bouton 1988, Chen 1990). At first glance, these findings seem to pose a problem for the theory of conversational implicature. Recall from the end of Chapter 1 the discussion of the universal as well as culture-specific nature of implicature. Implicature is universal, but people from different cultures interpret implicature differently. Although the Cooperative Principle and maxims are found in all cultures, different cultures value the maxims differently. Therefore, studies that show that native speakers of English and nonnative speakers interpret implicatures differently do not undermine the theory of conversational implicature but, in fact, support it.

By means of a questionnaire, Bouton (1988) found that native speakers and nonnative speakers interpret implicatures differently 27% of the time. Based on a
comparison of the scores of subjects' from different countries, he argues that cultural background is a factor underlying a person's ability to interpret implicature.

Chen (1990) also looked at how nonnative speakers interpret implicature. Specifically, he investigated the relationship between immersion and the ability to interpret implicature. He found that Chinese students living in the United States for less than a year did not significantly improve their ability to interpret implicature. This finding is significant because it sheds light on the correlation between length of stay in the target culture and the ability to interpret implicatures. How do nonnative speakers develop such ability? Do they learn implicatures slowly as they are exposed to various aspects of American culture?

Central to the present work is the following question: can we accelerate the learning of implicature? If the ability to interpret implicature comes chiefly from exposure to the target culture, what can ESL teachers do to improve such ability besides what they normally do in the classroom to teach language and culture?

To find out if implicature is taught in the classroom, Bouton (1990) performed a survey of ESL textbooks which showed that almost no attention at all is paid to raising students' awareness of implicature. Bouton argues that the effective use of implicature should and can be taught in the
ESL classroom. He concludes that since textbooks generally do not include implicature, it is the responsibility of the teacher to develop appropriate materials. Taking a first step in that direction, he offers suggestions for teaching implicature.

The studies seeking to test the extent to which implicature can be taught are primarily Bouton (1994) and Chen and Harris (1993, 1994). I will discuss these three studies in some detail.

2.1 BOUTON’S (1994) LONGITUDINAL STUDIES OF LEARNERS’ INTERPRETATION OF IMPLICATURE

Bouton reports two longitudinal studies on nonnative speakers’ ability to interpret implicature. The first study was conducted from 1986 to 1991. Using an implicature questionnaire, Bouton tested international students upon their arrival at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He then used the same implicature questionnaire to test some of the same students four and a half years later. In addition, he tested a number of native speakers. He compared the results of the implicature questionnaires to see the extent to which the nonnative speakers differed from the native speakers in their responses before and after the four and a half year period of living in the United States.

Bouton found that nonnative speakers chose the same interpretation as native speakers 79.5% of the time upon
arrival in 1986 and 91.5% of the time in 1991. After four and a half years in the target culture, the nonnative speakers almost matched the native speakers’ ability to interpret implicature. Bouton concludes that nonnative speakers can almost reach a native speaker’s proficiency in interpreting implicature if they live in the United States for a long enough time.

The second study was conducted from 1990 to 1993. Using the same methodology, a pre-test and post-test, Bouton tested a large group of international students upon their arrival at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 1990. From that group, he chose two smaller groups, one of which he tested again 17 months later, the other 33 months later. Like the first study, he used the same implicature questionnaire for both groups before and after the specified periods of time.

The results showed that the two groups did interpret implicature better after living in the United States for 17 and 33 months. Though the 33 month group scored slightly higher (18.80 compared to 18.06), there was no significant difference between the two groups. Bouton concludes that the students seemed to reach their level of proficiency by 17 months. After 17 months, their progress slowed down considerably.

Finally, Bouton describes a six-week pilot study in which he intended to find out if instruction in implicature
would improve students' ability to interpret implicature. Again, he tested groups of students with the same type of pre-test and post-test measurement. Then, one group received approximately six hours of instruction on implicature on different occasions during a six-week period. The results revealed that formal instruction in conversational implicature helped students better understand formulaic implicatures but not relevance-based implicatures.

2.2 CHEN AND HARRIS' (1993) STUDY OF THE INTERPRETATION OF IMPLICATURE BY JAPANESE STUDENTS

Chen and Harris tested a group of Japanese students with an implicature questionnaire and the Michigan Test at the beginning and end of an intensive ESL program to see if the students would improve their ability to interpret implicature. They found that there was no correlation in either pre or post-test between students' ability to interpret implicature and their linguistic competence as measured by the Michigan Test. Also, they found that during a five-month intensive ESL program which contained no explicit instruction in implicature, the learners did not improve their ability to interpret implicature except for implicature resulting from the violation of the Maxim of Manner. The authors argue that the improvement might be due to the fact that the Maxim of Manner is most closely related to the linguistic structures of English; since the ESL
program did lead to improved linguistic competence, it also led to improved understanding of implicature arising from violating the Maxim of Manner. They state that what was missing from the ESL program was attention to developing students' pragmatic competence.

2.3 CHEN AND HARRIS' (1994) STUDY OF THE TEACHABILITY OF IMPLICATURE

Having discovered that the ESL program without explicit instruction on implicature does not improve students' ability to interpret implicature (except for Manner Implicature), Chen and Harris sought to determine whether and to what extent implicature is teachable. They used the same methodology as in their 1993 study, but included explicit instruction on implicature in the five-month intensive ESL program.

The results show that explicit instruction helped improve students' ability to understand implicature. However, not all students improved equally. Those students who had more difficulty at the beginning of the program improved the most. Also, Quality and Manner Implicatures seem easier to teach than Quantity and Relation Implicatures.

Chen and Harris' finding that explicit instruction improved students' ability to understand implicature confirms Bouton's finding in his pilot study (1994). The
fact that two independent lines of research produced similar results speaks to the need for explicit instruction in programs to improve learners' pragmatic competence. Since such instruction has been largely ignored in ESL textbooks and in the classroom, the present study attempts to provide insight into teaching implicature in the ESL classroom. I will devote part of Chapter 3 to a detailed presentation of the way Chen and Harris taught implicature in their 1994 study.

Besides, Rose (1994) argues that pragmatic issues are central to language use and language learning; therefore, they must be addressed in the language classroom. He proposes one way to teach pragmatics in an EFL context, what he calls "pragmatic consciousness-raising," which aims to develop "learners' pragmatic awareness through classroom application of available descriptive frameworks and research results" (56-57). Rose claims that the goal of pragmatic consciousness-raising is to "sensitize learners to context-based variation in language use and the role of variables that help determine that variation" (57).

My experience teaching implicature confirms Rose's claims about consciousness-raising techniques. In the beginning, I believed I was teaching students about implicature, when, in fact, I was only drawing their attention to something they do in their native language. This should not be surprising since implicature is
universal. By first making them aware of implicature in English, I provided them with a foundation of general knowledge to which they could add specific knowledge of particular examples of implicature. A major difficulty for my students in learning implicature was that the interpretation of English implicature differs drastically from the interpretation of Japanese implicature because of the culture-specific nature of implicature.
CHAPTER 3 - WAYS TO TEACH IMPLICATURE

3.0 INTRODUCTION

In this section, I will present ways to teach conversational implicature to university-level ESL students. One way is to begin by giving students a general introduction to pragmatics and the fact that context influences how hearers interpret utterances. Next, one could explain Grice’s Cooperative Principle and the four maxims. Then, one could give examples of implicature. This might take one class period. After an introduction of this kind, one could teach four separate lessons, devoting one class period for each maxim.

3.1 PRESENTATION OF QUANTITY IMPLICATURES

Recall from Chapter 1 that the Maxim of Quantity refers to the amount of information expressed in an utterance. That is, the speaker is either saying too little or too much.

A teacher could present students with the following example:

(1) Two friends are looking at some watches in a store.
   Jan: Look at this beautiful watch! Isn’t it great?
   Kim: Yeah, it’s okay.
   Jan: Why don’t you like it?
   Kim: I do. I said it was okay.
The teacher could draw the students' attention to the amount of information expressed in the utterance. Then, the teacher could ask students, "Do you think Kim likes the watch?" In my experience, students are quick to point out that they understand that Kim does not really like the watch. Many students, especially Japanese students, have told me that this exchange is easy to understand because they speak this way in their native language. As a result, my Japanese students believe that Americans and Japanese share similar ideas about the Maxim of Quantity.

For more discussion of (1), the teacher could ask the following question: Why did Jan ask Kim why she does not like the watch? The purpose of this question is to demonstrate that Jan makes an inference about Kim's response, interpreting it to mean that Kim does not like the watch. By not saying enough in response to Jan's question, Kim was expressing her dislike of, or at least indifference to, the watch. This example nicely illustrates the cancellability of implicature. In my experience, the students realized that Kim was trying to take back her implicature by denying her intended meaning in order not to upset Jan.

The concept of "interlanguage" from second language acquisition theory (see Ellis, 1985) helps to explain what many students seem to experience regarding their knowledge of implicature. My Japanese students' conclusion that
Japanese and English are similar with respect to the amount of information indicates their "pragmatic interlanguage." It is possible that they will refine their definition of implicature resulting from the violation of the Maxim of Quantity as they experience more examples of this type of implicature. Their initial reaction strikes me as an overgeneralization. Over time, they will add to and take away from their understanding of this type of implicature.

Example (2) is similar to (1), in that the implicature comes from saying too little. However, while the implicature in (1) seems to be motivated by politeness considerations, the implicature in (2) has an entirely different meaning and motivation.

(2) It's 8:00 p.m. A mother is talking to her teenage daughter who is about to leave the house.

Mother: Where are you going?

Daughter: Out.

Mother: With whom?

Daughter: Friends.

After presenting (2) to students, the teacher could ask them why the daughter answers the mother's question with so little information. The point is for the students to see that the daughter is hiding something from her mother. By not supplying enough information, the daughter implies that
she does not want to say exactly where she is going. Once again, my Japanese students said this type of exchange was common in Japanese culture. They gave many similar examples, some of which are discussed below in section 3.5.

After presenting examples (1) and (2), the teacher could assign students the task of writing down some examples of implicature in their native language. At this point, the students would only write down implicatures involving the violation of the Maxim of Quantity, saying too little. The purpose of this task is for students to compare their native language to English implicature to see if their native language contains this type of implicature. If they are unable to find any similar utterances, that would possibly reveal something about this type of Quantity Implicature in their native language. If they do find some similar utterances, then they could see how they might transfer knowledge of implicature in their native language to English, thus helping them to understand situations when English speakers create implicatures because they seem to be saying too little.

Next, the teacher could give students examples of implicature resulting from the violation of the Maxim of Quantity when a speaker says too much.

(3) A father asks his son about a broken lamp.

Father: Did you break the lamp?
Son: Well, Alan was chasing me, so I was running and I tripped over your golf bag and kind of fell down near the table and the lamp got broken.

The teacher could show students that the son says too much in response to his father’s question probably because he does not want to admit his guilt directly. In my experience, compared to implicatures which involve saying too little, this type of Quantity Implicature proved to be more difficult for the class as a whole to understand. My students did not seem to know how much information is considered too much.

One possible reason for their uncertainty could be the fact that they have to process more information in order to infer the meaning. This is an obvious difference between violations of saying too little and violations of saying too much. The former are perhaps easier for ESL learners to understand initially, while the latter were not particularly difficult but required more time and careful thought.

3.2 PRESENTATION OF QUALITY IMPLICATURES

The Maxim of Quality has to do with the truthfulness of an utterance. These implicatures involve saying something that is not true. Grice expressed it as "don’t say what you
believe to be false" and "don't say that for which you lack adequate evidence" (44).

For this type of implicature, the teacher could present examples (4) and (5), which involve ironic utterances.

(4) A: I heard that Bob failed all his classes.
    B: I know, he's a real genius.

(5) Peter invites Tammy to go to the beach.

    Peter: Do you want to go to the beach with us?
    Tammy: Sure, I love to get sunburned.
    Peter: Oh, I understand.

From my experience teaching Japanese students, I have learned that these examples were not difficult for students because Japanese people often use irony, producing utterances similar to those in (4) and (5). Once students are told about irony, they are able to find ironic utterances in many different contexts. From this point on, they reported examples of irony found in their reading for an American Literature class.

Next, let me turn to a different type of implicature resulting from the violation of the Maxim of Quality. A teacher could ask students to read the example:
Pat and Susan are talking about their plans for the evening. Susan says that she doesn’t have any. Bob hears this and approaches Susan.

Bob: Hi, Susan. Do you want to go out tonight?
Susan: I’m sorry, Bob, but I have to meet a friend for dinner.
Bob: Okay. Maybe some other time.

Next, the teacher could ask the students what the meaning of Susan’s utterance is. The teacher could point out that Susan tells a "white lie" in order to politely excuse herself from going on a date with Bob. Students could be asked if their culture shares the American belief that sometimes it is better to lie than to speak directly. In other words, lying is sometimes necessary in order to preserve harmony between participants in a conversation.

At this point, teachers could give a task involving the speech acts of inviting and refusing invitations in a polite way. One way for the teacher to do this is to model some invitations and polite refusals. Then, the teacher invites each student in turn, and the students must refuse the invitation. At the end, the teacher could lead a discussion of the different ways the students refused the invitations, noting which ways are more polite than others. Finally, the
teacher could put students in pairs for them to practice more.

Another activity for reinforcing comprehension of Quantity Implicatures is for the teacher to ask students to write examples of Quality Implicature in their native language. For an out-of-class activity, the teacher could suggest that students bait their interlocutors by forcing a situation which would most likely produce an implicature. That is, the teacher could give phrases that might force hearers to respond by violating a maxim, thus creating an implicature. For example, students who felt comfortable doing so could go around asking people for evaluative comments: "How do you like my outfit?" or "What do you think of my pronunciation?" The point of doing this is that students might become conscious of how context and social factors, such as relationship and politeness, determine the appropriateness of an utterance. It should be obvious that many students would not feel comfortable trying this activity, and they should not be forced to try it. But, they should be made aware of it, so they can see how it is possible to take risks in order to learn something about English.

Before continuing to the next lesson, I want to relate something from my experience teaching Quality Implicature to Japanese students. After a class discussion of white lies based on example (6) above, they listed the following common
white lies in Japanese which are acceptable for refusing the invitation "Do you want to go out with me tonight?"

1) I have a lot of homework.
2) I have to work.
3) My parents will visit me (said by someone who lives alone).
4) A friend of mine is going to call me.
5) There is a TV program I don’t want to miss.
6) I feel a little sick.

It is interesting to note that these are also acceptable in American English with the possible exception of 5 which could be considered rude depending on the relationship between the speakers. The fact that Japanese and English share these ways of refusing an invitation makes the job of teaching implicature easier. However, when the linguistic form and pragmatic function of utterances does not match between the two languages, it makes for a rough transition for learners in their acquisition process.

3.3 PRESENTATION OF RELATION IMPLICATURES

In my own teaching, implicature resulting from the violation of the Maxim of Relation tend to be extremely difficult for students to comprehend. This suggests that Relation Implicature is the most culture-specific.

One way for a teacher to begin is to present ludicrous examples of relevance violations, violations in which
meanings cannot be worked out and thus are not implicatures. Here is an example I have used:

A: Would you care to dance?
B: I don’t have a dog or a spoon.

I asked my students to tell me the meaning of B’s utterance. Judging by their laughter, they realized the utterance has no meaning. Teachers could create similarly ridiculous utterances and encourage students to do the same. They might be surprised to find that an utterance that they had intended as meaningless sometimes can be interpreted in a meaningful way if they are creative enough.

Here are some examples a teacher could use to show how an utterance which at first appears irrelevant may in fact be relevant and communicate a meaning.

(7) Mike: Would you like a piece of chocolate?
Phil: I’m on a diet.

(8) Lars: Where’s Rudy, Tom? Have you seen him lately?
Tom: There’s a yellow Honda parked over by Sarah’s house.

(9) A: Is Frank home?
B: His bike is on the lawn.
Examples (7), (8) and (9) contain utterances which seem to violate the Maxim of Relation. They are alike structurally; each contains a question and a response. In each example, the response does not seem relevant to the question, but a meaning can be worked out with some effort. If we assume that the speaker is cooperating, then we must discover a meaning that will enable us to feel secure in our assumption. We first assume that utterance is relevant, and then we infer an intended meaning and attribute it to the speaker.

All three examples provide a way to demonstrate how implicature can be canceled. Recall from Chapter 1 that cancellability is a defining characteristic of implicature. Simply put, it means that the speaker can cancel, or deny, an implicature after having expressed it. In my experience, discussing the feature of cancellability proved useful when analyzing these implicatures.

The response "I'm on a diet" in (7) seems to be an indirect way of refusing an offer, but it could be canceled if Phil, in fact, chooses to accept the offer. He might say, "I'm on a diet, but one piece wouldn't hurt" or something to that effect.

Examples (8) and (9) are similar in content. The response seems uninformative or irrelevant. It appears that the speaker intended a meaning of the sort "I don't have enough information to tell you precisely where the person
is, but I am willing to have you infer that I believe that he is there."

The teacher could point out to students how important context is in this type of implicature as well as other types. The problem is that, because Relation Implicatures are so closely tied to culture, hence less likely to be universal, the students may have no way of knowing whether an utterance is relevant or not in a given situation. After teaching Relation Implicatures to a class of Japanese students, I was encouraged to discover that while students may not understand when others violate the Maxim of Relation, they do know how to violate it themselves. Here is a student's reflection that reveals her understanding of Relevance Implicature:

At dinner my host mom often asks me, "Do you like it?" I like most of her food. But if I think it's not so good, I often change the topic from the taste of that dish to the information about the ingredients. For example, I said "This vegetable is not so popular in Japan, so I had never eaten it before." Then I started to talk about something else.

3.4 PRESENTATION OF MANNER IMPLICATURES

A teacher could present the following examples:
(10) A husband and wife are talking. Their children, ages 2 and 3, are present.

A: Let’s get the kids something.
B: Okay, but I veto I-C-E-C-R-E-A-M (B spells the word).

(11) A and B are talking about a colleague, C.
A: You still feel the same towards him?
B: I just don’t trust the guy.
A: Why not? He’s a great trouble shooter.
B: Trouble. Period.

Examples (10) and (11) are meant to demonstrate how Manner Implicature works. Many students, particularly Japanese and Chinese, will find example (10) interesting because it is impossible to spell words in their native languages. The teacher must remember that because Manner Implicature is most closely tied to linguistic structures, it will be difficult for beginning ESL students who may still have trouble understanding literal meanings.

Examples (12) and (13) below are similar in function to (10):

(12) A husband and wife are talking in the presence of their children:
A: About what we talked about earlier, I say we do it.
B: Okay.

(13) A husband and wife are talking in the presence of their children:
A: How about the you know what for you know who?
B: Right.

In my experience, examples (12) and (13) were easier for Japanese students to understand because they said that these implicatures are almost identical to what they do in Japan in similar situations.

3.5 STUDENT EXAMPLES OF IMPLICATURE

Before discussing one way to evaluate students’ ability to interpret implicature, I will discuss examples of implicature in Japanese which students came up with. The students gave me these implicatures in response to the assignment mentioned above to try to find similar implicatures in Japanese.

3.5.1 QUANTITY

(14) Mother: Where are you going?
        Daughter: Shopping.
        Mother: Well, with whom?
        Daughter: Friends.
Mother: What time will you come home?
Daughter: I don’t think it will be late.

The student who reported this claimed that the daughter violates the Maxim of Quantity by saying too little when answering her mother because she wants to hide something from her mother. The daughter is going to do something which the mother does not approve of. This example is almost identical to (2) above.

3.5.2 QUANTITY AND QUALITY

(15) Daughter: I’m going to spend the night at my friend’s house.
    Mother: Who?
    Daughter: A school friend.
    Mother: That’s a good thing.

The daughter says too little in response to her mother’s question, and the mother responds by speaking ironically. By using the expression that I have translated as "That’s a good thing," the mother means that the daughter is always going out and having fun while the mother is working hard. Many students reported this same ironic expression in almost identical situations (said by mother to daughter).
3.5.3 QUALITY

(16) A is wearing a new green dress.

A: How do you like my dress.

B: It’s great. You look like a grasshopper.

This example is a metaphor used as a joke.

(17) When parents know that their child has slept through the night with the light on, they often say:

"You studied all night, didn’t you?"

Apparently this expression is commonly used to tease someone. Many students reported hearing it at home on many occasions.

(18) A daughter is eating a lot of junk food.

Mother: "You’re always eating. That’s why you’re so thin."

The mother’s sarcasm reveals something about the relationship between the mother and daughter.

Finally, here is one more example of irony, a real incident reported by a student. She writes:

We are Japanese. Now we are staying in the U.S. We
always speak to each other in Japanese in front of our host mother. So, she says to us, "I think you will become good speakers of Japanese while you are here."

It is clear that the student understood the irony of her host mother’s utterance: the host mother means that they should speak English instead of Japanese while living in her home.

3.5.4 RELATION

(19) Some friends are going to the beach for a swim. They invite B to join them.

    A: Do you want to go to swimming with us?
    B: I gained weight.

Interestingly, students told me that B’s utterance could mean "No, I don’t want to be seen in a bathing suit" or "Yes, swimming is good exercise and it will do me good." This raised the question of how to interpret ambiguous utterances. They recognize that in Japanese they depend on context as well as other factors such as nonverbal behavior to understand a person’s intended meaning.
3.6 EVALUATION

How can teachers evaluate their students to find out if they are learning implicature? As mentioned above, in Chen and Harris' studies (1993, 1994) the students' ability to understand implicature was measured by means of an implicature questionnaire administered at the beginning and end of their five-month stay in the United States. Students were asked to read a short dialogue containing an implicature. Then, from among four possible interpretations, they had to choose the one which was closest in meaning to the utterance in the dialogue. Here is an example from the questionnaire:

(20) Bill and Peter have been good friends since they were children. They lived together in college and traveled through Europe together after graduation. New friends have told Bill that they saw Peter dancing with Bill's wife while Bill was out of town on business.

Bill: Peter knows how to be a really good friend.

Which of the following best says what Bill means?

a. Peter is not acting the way a good friend should.
b. Peter and Bill's wife are becoming really good friends while Bill is out of town.
c. Peter is a good friend, so Bill can trust him.
d. Nothing should be allowed to interfere with their friendship.

3.7 SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

Before presenting other ways to teach implicature, I feel it necessary to relate a few observations from my experience of teaching implicature to ESL students. During the process, I often wondered if I was doing more harm than good by seemingly causing students to overgeneralize about (and hence sometimes incorrectly interpret) certain implicatures. It seems that making students aware of implicature is a necessary first step to helping them correctly interpret it. In time, they will be able to piece together a more complete understanding of the particular implicatures they encounter.

Until students more fully develop their understanding of implicature, they very likely will misinterpret what Americans say by reading more into the utterance than was intended. Here is a real example which caused a serious problem between a student and her host family. A host mother asked a student "Have you seen the catsup?" The student, angry and defensive, answered "I didn't use it." She was sure that her host mother was accusing her of misplacing the catsup when, in fact, the host mother claimed that she had not intended her question as an accusation.
3.8 OTHER WAYS TO PRESENT IMPLICATURE

I outlined above how to teach implicature using printed dialogues which were given to students on handouts. By no means is this the only way to expose students to implicature. Another way to present implicature to students is through the use of video. Briefly, there are two ways to use video. One way is to film native speakers using implicature. These could be rehearsed dialogues, or possibly spontaneous conversations. Students would view the film noting the utterance and context in order to interpret implicature. Likewise, students could be filmed using implicature in role-plays that they create.

Another way to use video is to show scenes from movies or television. The students must try to find utterances containing implicature, and work out the possible intended meaning(s) of the implicature. Rose (1994) presents a thorough treatment of using video. Though he writes about teaching EFL students to become aware of speech acts, his technique is easily adapted to teaching implicature. Particularly helpful is his suggestion for using an analysis worksheet which provides students with a concrete way to analyze the video segments they watch.

There are numerous television programs which can be used to demonstrate particular types of implicatures. For example, programs that present a topic with participants arguing for and against it are useful. These programs range
from informal discussion where members of the audience take part, to formal discussion where experts are invited to debate an issue.

Still another way to present implicature to students is through storytelling. This is an excellent way to present utterances containing implicature because students tend to be interested in real events. For example, in my own classes I have told students about a time when I was buying seaweed at a supermarket near the campus. While ringing up the seaweed, the clerk asked me, "What is this?" When I replied "Seaweed," she asked "You're going to eat this stuff?" Students understand the clerk's intended message to be something to the effect that she cannot imagine why I would want to eat seaweed because it most likely does not taste good. After students have a basic understanding of implicature, they might benefit from this type of language input.

A teacher could model implicature for students in the way he or she interacts with them. That is, teachers could use irony, metaphor, exaggeration, and other figures of speech in realistic situations in the classroom. Many teachers already do this from time to time, and they should be aware that the teacher can systematically expose students in this way to a large variety of implicatures by imitating real situations in the classroom.
Literature is a good source of implicature. Students could read literary works or view films, paying attention to implicature. Let me briefly describe my experience teaching *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. A group of Japanese students read the play in their American Literature class, and then they watched the movie. I used the opportunity to discuss implicature in the play because they were familiar with it, and it seemed that analyzing certain utterances might help them better understand the whole play. In particular, I thought they might learn something about the characters in the play.

For example, in the following exchange Tom and Amanda are talking about making a wish on the moon. Tom claims that he can guess what Amanda wished for.

(32) Amanda: Is my head so transparent?
Tom: You're not a sphinx. (58)

Tom's implicature is that Amanda is not mysterious at all; she does not hide what she is thinking. I asked students to think about Tom's utterance. Why did he say that instead of something else? What else could he have said that would have conveyed the same intended meaning?

Students decided that his using figurative language reflected something about his personality. They realized that the alternative utterances they came up with were not
nearly as expressive as his utterance. They began to think about why the writer used this utterance. When I reflect on the benefit of such an activity, I think that they can learn a great deal from focusing on specific utterances. As a consequence, they remember certain important utterances, utterances that are important to the whole play. The students were in a good position when it came to citing evidence from the play to support their belief about a character. They were able to make connections between the characters and certain utterances those characters made which reveal aspects of their personality as well as insight into the meaning of the whole play. I strongly believe that the work we did on conversational implicature helped them engage with the text and better understand it.

Another play that I have used is The Zoo Story by Edward Albee. Again, the students were reading the play in their American Literature class. I used the following exchange which reveals something about the characters:

(33) Jerry: Because after I tell you about the dog, do you know what then? Then...then I’ll tell you about what happened at the zoo.

Peter: You’re...you’re full of stories, aren’t you?

Jerry: You don’t have to listen. Nobody is holding you here; remember that. Keep that in your mind.
Peter: I know that.
Jerry: You do? Good. (37)

When Peter says "You’re full of stories, aren’t you?" he implies that Jerry is talking so much that he is tired of listening to him. Jerry’s response demonstrates that he correctly interprets Peter’s implicature. This exchange is typical of the unusual way of speaking in the play. While the play itself was difficult, students recognized the unusual nature of some of the talk exchanges. However, they were unable to infer much about the characters based on their way of speaking.

I recommend using material the students are studying in other classes because it can help them to see the work in a different way by asking them to go beyond the level of content and look closely at the meaning of particular utterances. Many other literary works could be used. Until materials are available for teaching implicature in the context of literary works, it is the teacher’s responsibility to develop such materials.

3.9 ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICING THE USE OF IMPLICATURE

Having described how to present implicature to students, I will now say something about what to do with implicature after presenting it. What kind of classroom activities can be used to practice using implicature? I
will present four activities that will be effective and successful in the ESL classroom.

Activity one is to present a dialogue with a number of different utterances, each with different intended meanings. For example, if A says, "Her performance was magnificent, wasn't it?" B could say, "Was it?" By saying this, B implies that he does not agree with A that the performance was magnificent; rather, B implies that the performance was something less than magnificent, perhaps even terrible.

Let me take the same exchange and present it with other responses by B, other implicatures.

(21) A: Her performance was magnificent, wasn't it?
   B: Was it?

(22) A: Her performance was magnificent, wasn't it?
   B: Do you think so?

(23) A: Her performance was magnificent, wasn't it?
   B: Well, I guess so.

(24) A: Her performance was magnificent, wasn't it?
   B: It was okay.

Students are asked which one they could use in a certain situation, with a certain person. They must figure out the
intended implicature of each response. In addition, students could be asked to rank B’s responses, deciding which utterances are more direct and which are more indirect. This would give them valuable practice in distinguishing between nuances intended by their interlocutors, getting a sense for choices speakers make. Also, they could internalize certain utterances containing implicature that might prove useful to them. In general, they would be improving their communicative competence.

Consider examples 25-28:

(25) A: Where is my box of chocolate?
   B: The children were in your room this morning.

(26) A: Where is my box of chocolate?
   B: It’s not in your room?

(27) A: Where is my box of chocolate?
   B: How should I know?

(28) A: Where is my box of chocolate?
   B: I didn’t touch it.

Again students could be asked to interpret the implicatures of each response and then rank the responses in terms of directness and appropriateness. For each example
of implicature given above, a teacher could create some other possible utterances to demonstrate different implicatures, and ask students to interpret them.

This brings me to an important point. Teachers who want to teach implicature could develop their own examples to teach in context. They could note implicatures that they hear in conversations. In addition to getting implicatures from real conversations, teachers could listen for them in movies and plays, and read them in literary works, newspaper articles, and advertisements.

Activity two is to present students with a context and ask them to create an implicature. For example, if an implicature is taken from a movie, the teacher could show the scene but stop just before the utterance containing the implicature. Then, the students are asked to create an utterance containing an implicature that would work in that situation. If using printed dialogues, the teacher could present the dialogue with the utterance containing an implicature missing. Again, the students must fill in the blank with a suitable implicature. Depending on the level of the students, the teacher would have to provide more or less specific information about the context. The students could be encouraged to perform their dialogues in the form of a role-play.

Here are some examples in which the context is given and the students must create an implicature.
(29) You went to a movie with a friend. You didn’t like the movie at all, but your friend seemed to enjoy it. Later, your friend asks if you liked the movie. What would you say?

Here are some model responses, but the teacher and students could come up with many other possible responses.

A: So, what did you think of that movie?
B1: It wasn’t bad.
B2: It was okay, I guess.
B3: I liked the music.
B4: Great special effects.

This activity could be varied. For example, a teacher could emphasize ways in which you could find out the other person’s opinion before expressing your own.

(30) You went to a movie with a friend. While you hated the movie, you are not sure but you think your friend loved it. You want to know your friend’s opinion before saying yours. When your friend asks for your opinion, what would you say?

Here is another example, a situation which most likely calls for a "white lie."
A person you work with brought homemade cookies to the office. You taste one and it is not very good. The person asks, "What do you think?" What would you say?

Activity three is to prepare students for an interview where one student must try to get as much information as possible and the other tries not to give the information. Models for this type of situation could be courtroom talk exchanges, presidential debates, or other political discourse such as press conferences. This activity shows students how to push for information as well as how to avoid giving information. They will get experience violating the Maxim of Quantity by responding with too little information, the Maxim of Quality by perhaps saying something that is not true, and the Maxim of Relation by saying something that does not exactly answer the interviewer's question.

Activity four is to ask students to compare implicatures in English to implicatures in their native language. Students must translate a situation involving implicature. They specify all relevant contextual factors such as information about the participants and the physical setting. By doing this, students will become more aware of how context interacts with utterances to create implicatures. In addition, they will see how English speakers differ from people in their culture in their inferences about particular utterances. The goal of this
activity is to make students aware of implicature in their native language and English. They will become sensitive to universal aspects of implicature (utterances in the two languages that convey the same implicature in the same context) as well as culture-specific aspects of implicature (different implicatures between the two languages due to cultural differences).
CHAPTER 4 - SOME FINAL COMMENTS

The ability to understand implicature is an important aspect of ESL learners' communicative competence (Bouton 1990). As such, it should be dealt with in the ESL classroom. A few studies have explored how nonnative speakers understand implicature, and the results reveal that ESL learners have considerable difficulty understanding implicature (Bouton 1988, 1990, Chen 1990, Chen and Harris 1993). Though we may agree that ESL programs and textbooks need to pay attention to improving students' ability to understand implicature, programs and textbooks typically ignore such instruction.

My own involvement in researching ESL learners' ability to understand implicature has revealed that while ESL programs without explicit instruction do not significantly improve students' ability to understand implicature, explicit instruction resulted in significant improvement (Chen and Harris 1994). In the present study, I have presented some ways to teach implicature in the ESL classroom. In addition, I have suggested other ways to teach implicature, including specific activities, which have been used in the ESL classroom. Based on my combined experience of researching nonnative speakers' ability to interpret implicature and teaching implicature in the ESL classroom, I have attempted to outline what I have learned about developing nonnative speakers' ability to understand
implicature. In particular, I have discussed ways to raise students' awareness of implicature as a strategy they need in order to successfully communicate.

I have discussed Grice's Cooperative Principle and the maxims. While Grice's framework has received much attention in a number of disciplines, it has been misunderstood. I have attempted to clarify some of the misconceptions. One such misconception is that Grice meant the maxims to dictate how language users behave. That is, some writers interpret Grice to mean that speakers of a language must follow these maxims as if they were rules. This is simply not true. Grice's work describes the rationality of the linguistic behavior of speakers. His theory is meant to explain commonly observable phenomena.

Another misconception is that the Cooperative Principle and maxims are not universal. I have demonstrated that, in fact, implicature is universal. That is, we can predict that Grice's framework applies to all cultures because it describes human behavior in general. In addition, I have shown that the interpretation of implicature varies from culture to culture. Grice's framework applies universally across cultures and it is general enough to account for differences due to culture-specific constraints. While the Cooperative Principle is universal in normal talk exchanges in all cultures, individual cultures may vary in the value they place on each
maxim and in the interpretations they make of the implicatures that arise from violating those maxims.

I have presented materials and activities for the teaching of implicature in the ESL classroom. These materials and activities are intended to raise learners' awareness of implicature.

IMPLICATIONS FOR READING AND WRITING

In my treatment of Grice's Cooperative Principle and theory of conversational implicature, I have described an application to ESL courses with emphasis on speaking and listening skills. However, the Cooperative Principle and the maxims can also be applied to reading and writing skills. In fact, it is possible that Grice's framework will have an even greater impact on theories of reading and writing. Consider the following questions: How does the Cooperative Principle relate to reading and writing? Can Grice's Cooperative Principle adequately explain how coherence is achieved in written texts? Once ESL students have been made aware of implicature, particularly the Cooperative Principle and maxims, they could be shown how the theory affects reading and writing.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


