

EL4222 Stylistics and Drama: Week 5

Part 1 (Lecture with discussion: longish)

1. We are concerned with the work of H P Grice, who worked with J L Austin in Oxford in the 1940s and 50s. His work on the Co-operative Principle (CP) – see below – and its maxims also comes from the same philosophical tradition.

2. The initial problem is between the ‘sentence meaning’ and the ‘utterance meaning’ (cf. last week on apology) – how do we reconcile the two?

A. *Kent Coastguard reports that a girl, drifting out to sea on an inflatable set of false teeth, was rescued by a man on a giant inflatable lobster.*
(*The Guardian*, 20 July 1994)

B. *‘We must remember your telephone bill’, she said, hinting that Louise had talked long enough. ‘Goodbye’, said Louisa, ringing off. It takes the rich to remind one of bills, she thought.*
(Mary Wesley, *Harnessing peacocks*, p. 57)

C. *Christmas Eve, 1993: an ambulance is sent to pick up a man who has collapsed in Newcastle city centre. The man is drunk and vomits all over the ambulanceman who goes to help him. The ambulanceman says: ‘Great, that’s really great! That’s made my Christmas!’*

In A: sentence meaning = utterance meaning (more or less)

In B: ‘We must remember your telephone bill’ = ‘Stop talking now.’

In C: ‘Great, that’s really great!’ = ‘That’s bloody awful’

To puzzle over

... how is it that a potential reader of Gerald Durrell’s book *My Family and Other Animals* knows that the author is making fun of his family when the title does not say this?

... the advertisement for instant tea ... promotes its product with the legend **It’s the taste**. By itself this statement means very little, because we are not told what the taste is or does. And yet you and I understand it to mean that the taste is good. How can this be? And more puzzling still, when my daughter comes home from school and starts her destructive journey through the biscuit barrel, and I ask her why she did not eat her school dinner, and she replies **It’s the taste** I understand her to mean the opposite: that the taste is not good. How can the same sentence be understood to convey two meanings that are exactly the opposite of one another?

Peter Grundy (1995), *Doing Pragmatics*, p. 36

Grice’s theory attempts to provide a **systematic** link between sentence meaning and utterance meaning.

3. Grice calls the utterance meaning (that differs from the sentence meaning) the **implicature**. He has several categories of implicature, but the one that interests us most is his (**particularised**) **conversational implicature** — implicatures are particular to individual contexts.

4. **Implicature** is to do with the speaker’s intention; **inference** is to do with the hearer’s assessment. In C, an implicature is that the ambulanceman is very annoyed at being vomited on. In C, an inference from a bystander could be that the ambulanceman has had a long and hard day.

5. **Implicatures** are different from **entailment**.

Entailment is to do with logic: ‘We are tired’ → ‘I am tired’ → ‘I am alive’

Entailments can be derived by just looking at the sentence meaning.

6. Grice claims that we make **common assumptions** when we converse. The CP runs as follows:

Make your 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.

We can use the analogue of the assumptions that we make during driving (eg that drivers will stop at the red light; that if I have right of way, other drivers will give way; etc.). Without any assumptions, there will be chaos.

Is the CP at work here?

Nurse goes out and back to her place. Dysart sits, opening a file.

So: did you have a good journey? I hope they gave you lunch at least. Not that there’s much to choose between a British Rail meal and one here.

Alan stands staring at him.

1 DYSART Won’t you sit down?

Pause. He does not. Dysart consults his file.

Is this your full name? Alan Strang?

Silence.

- And you're seventeen. Is that right? Seventeen? ... Well?
- 2 ALAN (*singing low*) Double your pleasure
Double your fun
With Doublemint, Doublemint
Doublemint gum.
- 3 DYSART (*unperturbed*) Now, let's see. You work in an electrical shop during the week. You live with your parents, and your father's a printer. What sort of things does he print?
- 4 ALAN (*singing louder*) Double your pleasure
Double your fun
With Doublemint, Doublemint
Doublemint gum.
- 5 DYSART I mean does he do leaflets and calendars? Things like that?
The boy approaches him, hostile.
- 6 ALAN (*singing*) Try the taste of Martini
The most beautiful drink in the world.
It's the right one —
The bright one —
That's Martini!
- 7 DYSART I wish you'd sit down, if you're going to sing. Don't you think you'd be more comfortable?
Pause
- 8 ALAN (*singing*) There's only one T in Typhoo!
In packets and in teabags too.
Any way you make it, you'll find it's true:
There's only one T in Typhoo!
- 9 DYSART (*appreciatively*) Now that's a good song. I like it better than the other two. Can I hear that one again?
Alan starts away from him, and sits on the upstage bench.
- 10 ALAN (*singing*) Double your pleasure
Double your fun
With Doublemint, Doublemint
Doublemint gum.
- 11 DYSART (*smiling*) You know I was wrong. I really do think that one's better. It's got such a catchy tune. Please do that one again.
Silence. The boy glares at him.



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(*Equus*, Act 1, Scene 3: pp. 5–7)

The notion of the narrator

As mentioned last week, the distinction between **story** and **discourse**, between **fabula** and **sjuzet**, or **mimesis** (showing) and **diegesis** (telling) applies to plays.

The most common distinction is between the **first-person narrator** (Genette: *homodiegetic* narrator) and **third-person narrator** (Genette: *heterodiegetic* narrator). In the former the narrator is also a character – think of Tom Wingfield, Dysart, Emily, Malcolm and maybe even the chorus in *Romeo and Juliet*. In films, the technique of **voice-overs** is associated with first-person narration.

Key questions are

- Whether the narrator is the main character (protagonist) or secondary character?
- Who is the focaliser (who provides the perspective or point of view)? – how does Tom know about the Laura-Jim interaction if he's in the kitchen?
- How reliable or unreliable is narrator? Does *The Glass Menagerie* represent Tom's self-justification?
- What is the status of the narrator' speech acts in terms of tellability and other aspects?

It is not clear how the notion of a **third-person narrator** might be relevant to plays. The notion of whether the narrator is omniscient or limited is often also asked.

Is the CP at work here?

1 MRS HIGGINS. You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll.

2 HIGGINS. Playing! The hardest job I ever tackled: make no mistake about that, mother. But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul.

3 PICKERING [*drawing his chair closer to Mrs Higgins and bending over to her eagerly*] Yes: it's enormously interesting. I assure you, Mrs Higgins, we take Eliza very seriously. Every week – every day almost – there is some new change. [*Closer again*] We keep records of every stage – dozens of gramophone discs and photographs –

4 HIGGINS [*assailing her at the other ear*] Yes, by George: it's the most absorbing experiment I ever tackled. She regularly fills our lives up, doesn't she, Pick?

5 PICKERING. We're always talking Eliza.

6 HIGGINS. Teaching Eliza.

7 PICKERING. Dressing Eliza.

8 MRS HIGGINS. What!

9 HIGGINS. Inventing new Elizas.

10 HIGGINS.

You know, she has the most extraordinary quickness of ear just like a parrot. I've tried her with every possible sort of sound that a human being can make – continental dialects, African dialects, Hottentot clicks, things it took me years to get hold of; and she picks them up like a shot, right away, as if she had been at it all her life.

11 PICKERING.

I assure you, my dear Mrs Higgins, that girl is a genius. She can play the piano quite beautifully. We have taken her to classical concerts and to music halls; and it's all the same to her: she plays everything she hears right off when she comes home, whether it's Beethoven and Brahms or Lehar and Lionel Monckton; though six months ago, she'd never as much as touched a piano –

12 MRS HIGGINS [*putting her fingers in her ears, as they are by this time shouting one another down with an intolerable noise*] Sh-sh-sh!

[*Pygmalion*, Act 3, pp. 81–83]

Is the CP at work here?

The living-room of a house in a seaside town. A door leading to the hall down left. Back door and small window up left. Kitchen hatch, centre back. Kitchen door up right. Table and chairs, centre.

PETEY *enters from the door on the left with a paper and sits at the table. He begins to read. MEG's voice comes through the kitchen hatch.*

1 MEG. Is that you, Petey?

Pause

Petey, is that you?

Pause

Petey?

2 PETEY. What?

3 MEG. Is that you?

4 PETEY. Yes, it's me.

5 MEG. What? (*Her face appears at the hatch.*) Are you back?

6 PETEY. Yes.

7 MEG. I've got your cornflakes ready. (*She disappears and reappears.*) Here's your cornflakes

He rises and takes the plate from her, sits at the table, props up the paper and begins to eat. MEG enters by the kitchen door.

Are they nice?

8 PETEY. Very nice.

9 MEG. I thought they'd be nice. (*She sits at the table.*) You got your paper?

10 PETEY. Yes.

11 MEG. Is it good?

12 PETEY. Not bad.

13 MEG. What does it say?

14 PETEY. Nothing much.

15 MEG. You read me out some nice bits yesterday.

16 PETEY. Yes, well, I haven't finished this one yet.

17 MEG. Will you tell me when you come to something good.

18 PETEY. Yes.

(Pinter, *The Birthday Party*, Act 1)

7. Grice proposed four broad categories of maxims.

Echoing Kant, I call these categories Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. The category of QUANTITY related to the quantity of information to be provided, and under it fall the following maxims:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Under the category of QUALITY falls a supermaxim — 'Try to make your contribution one that is true' — and two more specific maxims:

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

Under the category of RELATION I place a single maxim, namely, 'Be relevant'.

Finally, under the category of MANNER, which I understand as relating not (like the previous categories) to what is said but, rather, to HOW what is said is to be said, I include the supermaxim — 'Be perspicuous' — and various maxims such as:

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

And one might need others.

In the original, there are **four categories** and **nine maxims**. In most of the recent writings, people talk about the **four maxims with sub-maxims**. Describe it either way, but be consistent.

8. How can the CP or its maxims be broken or breached?

You can **flout** a maxim by **blatantly failing to observe it** — *i.e.*, the intention is not to mislead.

A is asking B about a mutual friend's new boyfriend:

A: *Is he nice?*

B: *She seems to like him.*

B was on a long train journey and wanted to read her book. A was a fellow passenger who wanted to talk to her:

A: *What do you do?*

B: *I'm a teacher.*

A: *Where do you teach?*

B: *Outer Mongolia.*

A: *Sorry I asked!*

Petruchio has come to ask Baptista for his daughter's hand in marriage (in *The Taming of the Shrew*)

PETRUCHIO: *And you, good sir! Pray, have you not a daughter
Call'd Katherina, fair and virtuous?*

BAPTISTA: *I have a daughter, sir, call'd Katherina.*

Geoffrey is a vicar, trying hard to curry favour with his bishop. The speaker is Susan, his wife, who couldn't care less about the church, religion (or, for that matter, for Geoffrey).

We were discussing the ordination of women. The bishop asked me what I thought. Should women take the services? So long as it doesn't have to be me, I wanted to say, they can be taken by a trained gorilla. 'Oh yes,' Geoffrey chips in, 'Susan's all in favour. She's keener than I am, aren't you, darling?' 'More sprouts anybody?' I said.

Alan Bennett, *Talking heads*, p. 32

This interaction occurred during a radio interview with an unnamed official from the United States Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti:

INTERVIEWER: *Did the United States Government play any part in Duvalier's departure? Did they, for example, actively encourage him to leave?*

OFFICIAL: *I would not try to steer you away from that conclusion.*

You can **violate** a maxim by **unostentatiously not observing a maxim**. If a speaker violates a maxim, s/he is probably intending to mislead.

Alice has been refusing to make love to her husband Martin. At first he attributes this to post-natal depression, but then he starts to think she might be having an affair:

'Allie. I've got to ask you this.'

He stopped.

'Ask me then —'

'Will you give me a truthful answer? However much you think it'll hurt me?'

Alice's voice had a little quiver.

'I promise.'

Martin came back to his chair and put his hands on its back and looked at her.

'Is there another man?'

Alice raised her chin and looked at him squarely.

'No,' she said. 'There isn't another man.'

And then Martin gave a long, escaping sigh, and grinned at her and said he thought they had better finish the champagne, didn't she?
(Elizabeth George, *Playing for the ashes*, p. 91)

It turns out that Alice was having an affair with another woman.

An English athlete, Dianne Modahl, the defending Commonwealth Games 800 metres champion, pulled out of her opening race in Victoria, Canada (August 1994), and returned to England. Caroline Searle, press officer for the England team, said:

'She has a family bereavement; her grandmother has died.'

The next day, it was announced that Ms Modahl had been sent home following a positive test for drugs. (Her grandmother, though, had really died.)

The reason for violating a maxim might have something to do with there being a **clash of maxims**. You can also **opt out** of the CP or a maxim by indicating that you are unwilling or unable to co-operate.

The Conservative MP, Teddy Taylor, had been asked a question about talks he had had with Colonel Gaddafi:

'Well, honestly, I can't tell you a thing, because what was said to me was told me in confidence.'

Ruth Rendell, a famous crime novelist, was being interviewed by an equally famous psychiatrist, Professor Anthony Clare. Clare asked Rendell about her husband:

AC: *You married him twice. You've been interviewed many times, but I've never seen a satisfactory explanation for that very interesting fact.*

RR: *Well [pause] I don't think I can give you one. That is not to say that I don't know it but I do know it but I cannot give it. I don't think that to give it would be a very good idea, particularly for my husband.*

The first speaker is a caller to a radio chat show. The second speaker is the host, Nick Ross:

CALLER: *... um I lived in uh a country where people sometimes need to flee that country.*

ROSS: *Uh, where was that?*

CALLER: *It's a country in Asia and I don't want to say any more.*

Jenny Thomas suggest an additional category in which maxims can be broken which was not suggested by Grice — you can **suspend** a maxim, when in particular social, cultural or situational contexts, a particular maxim is deemed unimportant.

The speaker in this example is the daughter of a murdered man. She is talking to Officer Jim Chee of the Navajo Tribal Police:

'Last time you were with that FBI man — asking about the one who got killed,' she said, respecting the Navajo taboo of not speaking the name of the dead. *'You find out who filled that man?'*

→ Don't say *Macbeth*; say 'the Scottish play'

→ Witnesses in court are not assumed to provide a *whole* truth — this has to be wheedled out from them, because they are not expected (or required) to volunteer information that might incriminate themselves.

→ People are not expected to tell the 'whole truth' in funeral orations or obituaries either.

→ People might also suspend the maxim of manner in telegrams, telexes, some international telephone calls, etc.

Part 2 (Activity – about 25 minutes)

Examine this extract from Kubrick and Raphael's screenplay *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Bill and Alice are at a society party. (Turns have been numbered for easy reference.)

The bandleader brings the music to a stop.

1 BANDLEADER: Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you're enjoying yourselves. The band is going to take a short break now and we'll be back in ten minutes.

The guests applaud as the band leaves the stage.

2 BILL (*indicating Nick*): Let's go over and say hello to him.

3 ALICE: Honey, I desperately need to go to the bathroom. You go and say hello and I'll meet you ... where? At the bar?

4 BILL: Good.

BILL kisses ALICE on the cheek as she leaves the ballroom.

INT. ANTE-ROOM – ZIEGLER MANSION – NIGHT

Crowded with guests. ALICE walks by a waiter holding a tray with glasses of champagne. She takes a glass without stopping and drinks it 'in one' as she moves away.

INT. BALLROOM – ZIEGLER MANSION – NIGHT

On stage, by the piano, Nick Nightingale sorts through some sheet music as the band takes its break. Bill walks up to the stage.

5 BILL: Nightingale! Nick Nightingale!

NICK looks around to see who is calling his name. He jumps down from the stage and he and BILL greet each other like old friends.

6 NICK: Oh, my God! Bill! Bill Harford! How the hell are you, buddy?

7 BILL: How long has it been?

8 NICK: Oh, jeez! I don't know, about ten years?

9 BILL: *And* a couple. Do you have time for a drink?

10 NICK: Sure.

BILL puts his arm round NICK's shoulders as they walk to the other end of the ballroom.

11 BILL: God, you haven't changed a bit!

12 NICK: Thanks, I *think*. So how you doing?

13 BILL: Not too bad, you know, not too bad. I see you've become a pianist.

14 NICK: Oh, yes. Well my friends call me that. How about you? You still in the doctor business?

15 BILL: You know what they say, once a doctor always a doctor.

BILL takes a couple of glasses of champagne from a waiter standing with a tray and hands one to NICK.

16 NICK: Yes, or in my case, never a doctor, never a doctor.

17 BILL: I never did understand why you walked away.

18 NICK: No? It's a nice feeling. I do it a lot. Cheers.

They 'clink' glasses as a man in evening dress walks up to NICK. This is ZIEGLER's SECRETARY.

19 SECRETARY: Excuse me ... Nick, I need you a minute.

20 NICK: Be right with you. (*To Bill*) Listen, I gotta go do something. If I don't catch you later, I'm gonna be down the Village for two weeks in a place called the Sonata café. Stop by if you get a chance.

21 BILL: I'll be there. Great seeing you.

22 NICK: Good seeing you too.

They exchange friendly pats as Nick goes.

(1) Put down about three adjectives to describe the relationship between Bill and Alice:

(2) Examine turn 3 by Alice. First of all, give it a speech-act label:

Now provide two alternative ways of performing that speech act:

(a)

(b)

Were all of them totally co-operative on the surface? Did they involve violations, floutings, opting outs, etc.? Would each of the choices suggest a different relationship between Alice and Bill?

(3) Put down about three adjectives to describe the relationship between Bill and Nick:

(4) In turn 7, Bill does not seem to respond to Nick's question (turn 6), so that he has to repeat it in turn 12. Characterise this in terms of the notion of co-operation. Why has this happened?

(5) At the end of turn 13, Bill makes an obvious statement. Is it felicitous as an assertive (representative)? Is there any implicature? How did you arrive at them?

(6) In turn 14, Nick says 'My friends call me that'. Again, assess that in terms of co-operation. What are the implicatures?

(7) Is turn 16 redundant? Why, or why not?

(8) In turn 18, Nick does not directly answer the question in turn 17. What are the implicatures? How did you arrive at them?

(9) Do the characters communicate through implicatures rather than directly saying things? How come? What does this tell you about how they relate to each other?

Part 3 (Analysis)

Consider the following opening scene from Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* (first presented 1960). Ben and Gus are in a basement room with two beds, flat against the back wall and a serving hatch, closed, between the beds. There is a door to the kitchen and lavatory on the left and a door to a passage on the right.

Gus has been pulling the lavatory chain, but the lavatory does not flush. Ben is reading the paper. Gus enters, and halts at the door, scratching his head. Ben slams down the paper.

1 BEN. Kaw!

He picks up the paper.

What about this? Listen to this!

He refers to the paper.

A man of eighty-seven wanted to cross the road. But there was a lot of traffic, see? He couldn't see how he was going to squeeze through. So he crawled under a lorry.

2 GUS. He what?

3 BEN. He crawled under a lorry. A stationary lorry.

4 GUS. No?

5 BEN. The lorry started and ran over him.

6 GUS. Go on!

7 BEN. That's what it says here.

8 GUS. Get away.

9 BEN. It's enough to make you want to puke, isn't it?

10 GUS. Who advised him to do a thing like that?

11 BEN. A man of eighty-seven crawling under a lorry!

12 GUS. It's unbelievable.

13 BEN. It's down here in black and white.

14 GUS. Incredible.

Silence.

GUS shakes his head and exits. BEN lies back and reads.

The lavatory chain is pulled once off left, but the lavatory does not flush.

BEN whistles at an item in the paper.

GUS re-enters.

I want to ask you something.

15 BEN. What are you doing out there?

16 GUS. Well, I was just —

17 BEN. What about the tea?

18 GUS. I'm just going to make it.

19 BEN. Well, go on, make it.

20 GUS. Yes, I will. (*He sits in a chair. Ruminatively.*) He's laid on some very nice crockery this time, I'll say that. It's sort of striped. There's a white stripe.

BEN reads.

It's very nice. I'll say that.

BEN turns the page.

You know, sort of round the cup. Round the rim. All the rest of it's black, you see. Then the saucer's black, except for right in the middle, where the cup goes, where it's white.

BEN reads.

Then the plates are the same, you see. Only they've got a black stripe — the plates — right across the middle. Yes, I'm quite taken with the crockery.

21 BEN (*still reading*). What do you want plates for?

You're not going to eat.

22 GUS. I've brought a few biscuits.

23 BEN. Well, you'd better eat them quick.

24 GUS. I always bring a few biscuits. Or a pie. You know I can't drink tea without anything to eat.

25 BEN. Well, make the tea then, will you? Time's getting on.

GUS brings out the flattened cigarette packet and examines it.

26 GUS. You got any cigarettes? I think I've run out.

He throws the packet high up and leans forward to catch it.

I hope it won't be a long job, this one.

Aiming carefully, he flips the packet under his bed.

Oh, I wanted to ask you something.

27 BEN (*slamming his paper down*). Kaw!

28 GUS. What's that?

29 BEN. A child of eight killed a cat!

30 GUS. Get away.

31 BEN. It's a fact. What about that, eh? A child of eight
killing a cat!

32 GUS. How did he do it?

33 BEN. It was a girl.

34 GUS. How did she do it?

35 BEN. She —
He picks up the paper and studies it.
It doesn't say.

36 GUS. Why not?

37 BEN. Wait a minute. It just says — Her brother, aged
eleven, viewed the incident from the toolshed.

38 GUS. Go on!

39 BEN. That's bloody ridiculous.
Pause.

40 GUS. I bet he did it.

41 BEN. Who?

42 GUS. The brother.

43 BEN. I think you're right.
Pause.
(Slamming down the paper.) What about that, eh? A
kid of eleven killing a cat and blaming it on his little
sister of eight? It's enough to —
He breaks off in disgust and seizes the paper.
GUS *rises.*

44 GUS. What time is he getting in touch?
BEN *reads.*
What time is he getting in touch?

45 BEN. What's the matter with you? It could be any time.
Any time.

46 GUS (*moves to the foot of BEN's bed*). Well, I was going
to ask you something.

47 BEN. What?

48 GUS. Have you noticed the time that tank takes to fill?