



A Suggested Course for Enhancing the Pragmatic Awareness of Interpreting Implicatures by University EFL Learners

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Abstract

Raising the pragmatic awareness of interpreting implicature through explicit instruction in EFL settings using Grice's (1975) has attracted the attention of scholars. However, the application of the theory in actual teaching environments has faced some theoretical challenges and practical difficulties, though the application more often than not involved EFL learners with advanced proficiency in English. While Grice's (1975) theory has impacted the teaching of implicature, it is not in itself sufficient for a course of interpreting implicature in EFL settings, not to mention the settings of university large multi-level classrooms, an area of research which, up to the researcher's knowledge, has not been given due attention. This study is a conceptual one based on logical reasoning and existing knowledge. It proposes that the teaching of Grice's theory avoids the theoretical complications and concentrates instead on the logical underpinning of the theory with a gestalt view of the cooperative principle, maxims, and the non-observance of the pertinent maxims. It also suggests that this theoretical framework be supplemented with a model of intercultural interaction to remedy the culture-bound aspect of implicature. It, therefore, aims to present such a model together with the inclusion of authentic multi-media interactions as teaching material to bridge this gap. On the basis of this theoretical framework, the study offers a course that seeks to provide EFL students with the knowledge and abilities needed to raise their pragmatic awareness to understand implicature, using Grice's (1975) theory in a simplistic theoretical framework, a model for intercultural interaction, multi-media authentic teaching materials, and some techniques to address the issue of large multi-level classes in EFL settings at the university level.

Introduction

Communication is an essential component of human connection since it allows for the interchange of ideas, emotions, and information. However, the act of communicating meaning

in language extends beyond mere word interpretation. The study of implicature digs into the subtle and implicit components of communication, a notion profoundly entrenched in pragmatics and linguistic philosophy. Implicature is the phenomena in which speakers transmit meaning indirectly by depending on common information, context, and conversational implicatures to successfully express their intended message.

H.P. Grice, a British philosopher, initially developed the notion of implicature in the 1970s as part of his theory of implicature and discourse. Grice (1975) introduced the Cooperative Principle (CP), which asserts that in general, speakers in conversation collaborate and expect their interlocutors to follow specific conversational maxims: relevance, quantity, quality, and manner. These maxims serve as rules for creating and analyzing meaningful and informative conversation utterances.

Understanding implicature is critical for good communication because it helps people to understand meaning beyond what is spoken or written. In regular interactions, implicatures are frequently used to express intentions, show politeness, and keep the conversation flowing. They also allow for the expression of subtleties and feelings that may not be expressed clearly, improving the communication experience. We can improve our communication skills, avoid misinterpretations, and engage in more meaningful and efficient information exchanges if we have a better knowledge of implicature.

Several researchers advocate raising the pragmatic awareness of interpreting implicature in EFL settings through explicit instruction (Bouton, 1994, ac cited in Blight, 2002; Kubota, 1995; Blight, 2002; Murray, 2011). The theory that underpins this instruction is Grice's (1975) maxims of the CP. The problem that this study investigates is that the application of this theory has undergone practical difficulties because of the already present theoretical challenges. The present study proposes that explicit instruction on raising the pragmatic awareness of interpreting implicature by university learners in EFL settings cannot solely depend on Grice's (1975) theory. It, therefore, aims at supplementing Grice's theory with an inter-cultural model of interaction and authentic multi-media interactions in order to introduce a comprehensive and effective approach on which a suggested course for teaching implicature in EFL university settings can be based, taking into consideration the fact that these settings involve large multi-level classes.

Theoretical Considerations

Grice's Theory of Implicature

Conversational Implicature

Grice (1975) distinguished two types of implicature: conventional and conversational. Regarding the former type of implicature, he did not say much about it and never offered a thorough analysis. It is just part of the conventional meaning of a word or an expression. The concern of this paper is, however, the latter type of implicature, i.e., conversational implicature.

The meaning that a speaker indicates or suggests by saying something but does not directly convey is referred to as conversational implicature. For example, if someone says, "It is hot in here," they may be hinting that they want someone to open a window or put on the air conditioner, but they are not saying that directly. Conversational implicatures assume that speakers and listeners are working together.

Conversational implicatures are classified into two types, according to Grice (1975): generalized and specificized. Generalized implicatures are those that may be deduced from the ordinary meaning of words or phrases in any situation. For example, if someone says, "Some of the candidates passed the test," they are saying that not all of them did, since if they stated,

"All of the applicants passed the test," they are hinting that not all of them did. Particularized implicatures are ones that are dependent on the speakers' and listeners' unique context and previous knowledge. For example, if someone says "I have to go now," they might mean a variety of things depending on the context, such as "I am bored with this conversation," "I have an important appointment," or "I do not want to talk to you longer."

Conversational implicatures are vital for comprehending and generating natural and effective communication because they allow speakers to transmit more information than what is explicitly uttered while also allowing listeners to infer the speaker's goals and attitudes.

In order to determine whether a specific conversational implicature is present, the hearer will respond based on the following information: (1) the term's conventional meaning and the identity of any possible references; (2) the CP and its maxims; (3) the utterance's context, whether linguistic or not; (4) other background information; and (5) the fact (or supposed fact) that both participants have access to all pertinent information falling under the previously mentioned headings and that both participants know or assume this to be the case.

Explanation of Grice's Cooperative Principle and Maxims. Grice (1975, p. 45) stated that our conversations do not often consist of a string of unrelated statements, and it would be illogical if they did. They are typically, at least to some extent, "cooperative efforts," and each participant may, to some extent, identify a shared goal, set of goals, or at the very least, a direction that is acknowledged by both parties. He formulated a general principle expected to be observed by participants in a conversation. He called this principle the *Cooperative Principle* (CP) which runs 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" (Grice, 1975, p. 45). Under this principle, he further recognized four maxims and sub-maxims. These are:

1. Quantity: this maxim is pertinent to the amount of information provided:
 - a. "Make your contribution as informative as is required (For the current purposes of the exchange)."
 - b. "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required."
2. Quality: this maxim is related to the truthfulness of the contribution:
 - a. "Do not say what you believe to be false."
 - b. "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence."
3. Relation: "be relevant."
4. Manner: "Be perspicuous."
 - a. "Avoid obscurity of expression."
 - b. "Avoid ambiguity."
 - c. "Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)."
 - d. "Be orderly." (Grice, 1975, pp. 45-46)

Non-observance of the Cooperative Principle's Maxims. Grice (1975: 49) noted that the maxims which he proposed may not be observed by the interlocutors in an interaction. He motioned three ways: **flouting** a maxim, **violating** a maxim, or **opting out** of observing a maxim, and **infringing** a maxim. According to Thomas (1995, p. 72), since Grice, a number of authors have argued that **suspending** a maxim should be the fifth way.

To understand these terms properly and consistently, Thomas' explanation will be adopted as she stated that "it is extremely irritating to note that Grice himself does not always use the terms consistently and remarkably few commentators seem to make any attempt to use the terms correctly" (p. 72). However, this does not mean that Grice (1975) will be disregarded altogether. It is also worth noting that the suggested examples are mostly inspired by Thomas (1995).

A *flout* happens when a speaker deliberately fails to observe a maxim at the level of what is uttered in order to generate an implicature (Thomas, 1995, p. 65), for instance, A is asking B about a mutual friend's new job.

A: What do you think of Susan's new job?

B: Well, she seems to be excited about it.

Speaker B gives less information than is required probably because the speaker lacks adequate evidence as to whether Susan's new job is good or not.

Whereas *violation* occurs when a participant in a talk exchange unobtrusively disregards a maxim, for example, one can imagine a context where a politician (a candidate for presidential election, cancelled his campaign rally and flew to Switzerland). His spokesperson, said: 'He has a medical emergency.' The next day it was revealed that the politician had been accused of tax evasion and money laundering. He had transferred millions of euros to a secret Swiss bank account. What the spokesman had said was true; the fact that there was an emergency, but the implicature (that the reason for the politician's flight to Switzerland was a *medical* emergency) was false.

Opting out happens when a speaker chooses not to follow a maxim by demonstrating an unwillingness to participate in the manner required by the maxim (Grice, 1975, p. 49), for example, imagine a Hollywood star had been asked a question about her relationship with X: 'Well, honestly, I cannot tell you anything since what was communicated to me was done in confidence.'

A speaker is said to *infringe* a maxim when s/he fails to observe it without intending to create an implicature or to deceive (Thomas, 1995, p. 74), for instance, consider this conversation where B does not have a good command of English.

A: Where are you from?

B: I am from China.

A: What part of China?

B: I am from Beijing.

A: Nice. How long have you been living here?

B: I *live* here for two years.

SA: Do you mean you *have lived* here for two years, or you *will live* here for two years?

Finally, *suspension* can be suggested where there is no expectation among participants that the maxims will be fulfilled, so there is no reason to choose not to follow them (thus the non-fulfillment does not generate any implicatures) (Thomas, 1995, p. 76), for instance, mentioning the title of Shakespeare's play Macbeth is frowned upon among the British acting community (although not in public). It is believed to bring misfortune. Instead, they make reference to "The Scottish Play" (Thomas, 1995, p. 77).

As far as suspension is concerned, the cultural universality of Gricean maxims was questioned by Keenan (1976), who discovered various implicature patterns in Malagasy speech. For example, even if they had access to the material, Malagasy speakers typically provided less of it than was necessary. In order to account for these situations, where characteristics of a particular setting may take precedence over those predicted by the Gricean model, the category of suspension of a maxim was later introduced.

Previous Studies on Teaching Implicature by Using Grice's (1975) Theory: Theoretical Challenges and Practical Difficulties

Not all the studies on the explicit instruction of implicature used the maxims in their procedure. Bouton (1994) is an often quoted figure on the explicit instruction of implicature followed the general reasoning underpinning Grice's (1975) theory: in order for an implicature to be received as the speaker intended, the speaker and hearer must share a common sense of at least four aspects of any conversational environment, viz., 1) the speech from which the implicature is to be generated; 2) the roles and expectations of the conversation's participants; 3) the context in which the utterance happens; and 4) the environment surrounding them as it relates to their interaction. Accordingly, the procedure he used in an advanced ESL/EFL course is as follows:

1. A description of each form of implicature, including its label, definition, and a number of examples
2. A discussion of recent implicature examples: Identification of the implicature, an explanation of how the literal meaning did not hold and how the implicature was detected, an explanation of what is actually implied in the messages, an example of learners' experiences with implicature, the identification of similar implicatures in learners' L1, and identification of the implicature itself;
3. Group projects including discussions with implicature;
4. Analysis of fresh instances of implicature presented by the teacher or by the students.

Broersma (1994) did nearly the same as Bouton (1994) and the experiment also involved advanced ESL learners. The focus was placed on examples and context to arrive at the intended interpretation. Both authors noted that the most difficult aspect to teach and learn was that when the interpretation of implicature is dependent on the mutual context of background knowledge between the participants which is definitely difficult to teach.

Other studies used the maxims in their explicit instruction on implicature. Blight (2002) used them to increase Japanese learners' pragmatic awareness through examining the process through which implicatures are interpreted. But, according to Blight (2002, p. 146), the classroom practice revealed a number of issues that indicate this technique would only be appropriate for high competence students. Blight (2002, p. 147) also added that the original form of the maxims has also been challenged by researchers. Most notably, Sperber and Wilson (1986) suggested that Grice's four maxims should be subsumed under a more comprehensive Principle of Relevance. The uncertainty that emerges from attempting to turn implicit meanings into explicit interpretations would be a substantial source of worry in many classes. Blight (2002, p. 147) furthermore suggested that the sample discussions be carefully chosen to avoid exposure to numerous interpretations in order to reduce potential misconceptions. It is also critical for the teacher to emphasize that several interpretations are conceivable in every setting. As a result, rather than attempting to find perfect solutions to each language challenge, the emphasis should remain on mastering the underlying thinking process. This method would likewise be unsuccessful for teaching implicatures that are not derived from the CP. These include implicatures that are distinctive to certain events and cultural settings (see, for instance, Wierzbicka, 1991, pp. 391-402).

Both the inherent complexity and the formulation of Grice's theory provide conceptual challenges. The practice of the underlying assumption that speakers communicate in accordance with a principle of mutual cooperation is typically constrained by each person's self-interest in taking part in a social interaction. Pinker (2007; See also Wane, 2019) comments that pure cooperation is an unrealistic idealization or naive assumption from the perspectives of social psychology, evolutionary biology, and game theory. Conversations are frequently held

between enemies who have opposing interests beyond communication. Even when people are friends or family, they frequently have conflicting agendas.

Furthermore, there are a number of other elements (including politeness practices) that influence the shape of social discourse and may diminish the importance of the CP. In fact, Grice (1975, p. 47) himself stated that there are a variety of additional maxims (aesthetic, social, or moral in nature), such as 'Be polite,' that are generally followed by participants in conversational interactions, and they may also yield nonconventional implicatures.

Gricean maxims may operate differently in inter-cultural settings (See Cignetti & Di Giuseppe, 2015); their perception and adherence might vary among cultures due to various conversational conventions and expectations. Speakers in an inter-cultural situation may be unfamiliar with each other's cultural differences, which can lead to misinterpretation. For example, what is considered a suitable quantity of knowledge (Quantity) in one culture may be deemed too little or too much in another. Mast et al. (2011:71- 75) discovered that self-promoting candidates were favored by French-speaking Canadian interviewers, but Swiss-French interviewer assessments did not discriminate between self-promoting candidates and more modest candidates. Modesty is a type of understatement that can only be fully realized through contextual implicature. Whereas the Swiss and French may disregard this orientation filter, the British and Dutch will generally assume that the less stated, the better. Conversely, expressive societies, such as the United States, tend to assume that all that can be said should be stated (Katan & Taibi, 2021, p. 329).

Flouting the Maxim of Quality is also a commonly used cooperative strategy, particularly in British English, to produce irony. When used successfully, it is a way of building a relationship. For example, if it is raining violently, one might say to one's neighbor, "Lovely day, isn't it?", to which the standard reply would be, "Yes, absolutely wonderful." Both speakers would be playing with the Maxim, and each would appreciate the other's trust in arriving at the implicature on the lines of: "I was joking – it is a miserable day – but let's at least make light of the matter while we can."

According to Katan and Taibi (2021, p. 342), another popular cooperative technique, especially in British English, is to flout the Maxim of Quality in order to create irony. It is a tool for connection development when utilized properly. Saying to a neighbor, "Lovely day, isn't it?", while it is pouring heavily is an example of what one would say. The typical response would be, "Yes, absolutely wonderful." In order to get to the implicature along the lines of: "I was joking - it is a miserable day – but let's at least make light of the matter while we can," both speakers would be playing with the maxim. They would also value each other's trust. Katan and Taibi (2021, p. 342) further argued that as one of us realized soon after coming in Italy, this implicature is not ubiquitous. The neighbor's response was to glance at the rain and explain calmly to the clearly deranged Englishman, "No, it is raining."

Relevance is a difficult maxim to apply since cultural backgrounds impact what is thought important in a discourse. Finally, the Manner principle of clarity and brevity may clash with cultures that favor more indirect or intricate ways of language.

It, therefore, would be insufficient, if not misleading, just to teach implicature from the Gricean angle without including the dimension of culture, what constitutes culture, and how cultures operate.

The Need for A Supplementary Model of Intercultural-Cultural Interaction

The concept of culture is an intricate one, defined differently by different scholars (cf. Dahl, 1998; *Culture and language learning*, 2001 and *SPCM 301: communication across cultures*, 2001). In this paper, the researcher is not interested in reconciling the various perspectives of how culture is envisaged but will concentrate on that point of view which

stresses the non-universal nature of “culture-bound models of reality”. In the context of this, paper Katan and Taibi (2021, p.3) stress this point in the way they perceive culture.

It is a system for making sense of experience. A basic presupposition is that this organization of experience is never an objective representation of ‘reality’. It is instead a simplified and distorted model that makes sense to one group of people but should not be expected to be universal. So, cultures act as frames within which external signs or ‘reality’ are interpreted.

Where frames are “internal mental representation[s]”, which form the individuals’ map of the world. (Katan & Taibi, 2021, pp.60-61). This map is not a fixed one, but dynamic and changing over time.

It follows logically then that the participants in an intercultural interaction should not be assumed to be able to express through their own use of language these models of reality which are necessarily culture-bound in a way directly interpretable to all the participants in the same way, natives or non-natives. By their own use of language in the context of EFL setting, it is meant that the non-native speakers, though using English as a means of communication, being a global language, they may or may not be able to use the English language to represent “culture-bound models of reality” in the way the natives do. In the EFL settings, the usual assumption is that we should teach British English or American English way of expressing British or American culture. However, the situation is far more complicated than this naïve point of view. In the present globalized world where English is a global language, it is used as a means of communication by non-natives who belong to diversified cultural backgrounds. They may be using English in such a way in order to express their own models of reality as in the case of the above-mentioned example of the Italian vs the British English speakers.

Therefore, we should provide a model of intercultural interaction that is universal in its framework in the sense of not being particular to a specific model of reality. The framework is necessary in that it helps us understand what constitutes cultures and how cultures operate through these constitutive elements. It is, so to speak, a framework adopted for theoretical convenience because the term *culture* in itself is very broad and needs to be dissected in such a way as to make it accessible to learners, though the constitutive elements which are interconnected and interrelated.

The model for intercultural interaction which is believed to include most, if not all, the components of culture is Al-Rubai'i's (2006) model designed originally for the interpreters' practice of intercultural communication. It comprises: cultural identity, cultural patterns, spatial setting, social situation, and behavior. The model is slightly modified here with respect to the spatial setting. Envisaging culture in this way helps the EFL learner perceive culture in a clearer way than just mentioning the broad term *culture*.

1. Cultural identity is simply ‘who we are’ identified on the basis of such various criteria as gender, occupation, race, ethnicity, geography, and nationality (Carbaugh, 1990, p.6).
2. Cultural pattern is a distinct “cluster of interrelated [meaningful] cultural orientations” (Matikainen and Duffy, 2000, p.40). It is a cultural identification marker that does not so much represent the speaker's character as it does the way a particular culture frames its speech, beliefs, values, thinking, nonverbal communication, social interaction, and so on (Al-Rubai'i, 2006, p. 170).
3. The social situation: It refers to the roles that participants in a communication exchange adopt based on their age, gender, ethnicity, and social standing. The interaction of the subcategories of register and style, deference, politeness, and power relations—all of

which function differently in various cultures—is primarily determined by the social situation (Al-Rubai'i, 2006, p. 170-172).

4. Behavior: Culture is manifested via behavior, which can be classified as verbal or nonverbal. The use of words is referred to as verbal behavior. Nonverbal behavior, on the other hand, is used to transmit delicate information that would be difficult to describe in words. Nonverbal communication can take several forms (Argyle, 1988): 1. Facial expression; 2. Nonverbal vocalizations; 3. Gaze; 4. Spatial behavior; 5. Gestures and other bodily movements; 6. Posture; 7. Touch and bodily contact; and 8. Clothes, physique, and other aspects of appearance.
5. The spatial-temporal setting: it is the 'when' and 'where' cultural phenomena take place along the dimensions of place and time. In essence, the spatial-temporal context is the canvas on which culture's tapestry is embroidered. It establishes the physical and historical boundaries within which cultural identity is articulated, cultural patterns are developed, social situations are contextualized, and behavior is performed.

The Suggested Course for Enhancing the Pragmatic Awareness of Interpreting Implicature

Any teaching course involves the necessary categories of course overview, course objective(s), course materials, students' learning outcomes, in addition to students' obligations, forms of teaching, and assessment scheme. The suggested course in this section will draw on insights from the above-mentioned discussion and the later description of course into discrete categories would be tailored by the teachers in accordance with their own EFL setting requirements.

Classes of EFL learners in the Iraqi setting, whether in public or private universities, are, more often than not, large with respect to the number of students and multi-level with respect to English language proficiency. These two aspects are the most challenging ones in any EFL course for teaching the four skills, not to mention the skill of interpreting implicature. It follows that these two aspects should be given due attention in order to achieve the ultimate goal of raising pragmatic awareness for the interpreting of implicature.

Taking the level of EFL learners in the Iraqi context and the size of the classes, the present researcher suggests that the teacher gives a minimum of theorization and a maximum of exemplification. Depending on previous teaching experience of linguistics in general and pragmatics in particular, the students are more responsive to exemplification than to theorization, even though critical thinking tasks were involved. In a course evaluation study on teaching linguistics through critical thinking where more emphasis was placed on the use of minimal theorization but more exemplification in teaching alongside critical thinking tasks, the students' perceptions were highly positive. The results ranged from very good (33%-45%) to excellent (31%-50%) (Al-Rubai'i, 2023a). Instead of delving deep into the CP, its maxims, and non-observance of the maxims, it seems more appropriate to give them a gestalt view of what these three elements are and then to focus on two important points: the fact that some implicatures are conventional and in a sense universal so to speak, depending on general human experience and reasoning, whereas the others are non-conventional and more culture-bound in nature.

It is equally important to address this issue of class size and the students' multilevel that the teacher adopts certain techniques to minimize the effect of these two variables. When teaching such classes, the researcher usually starts with a diagnostic test and assigns students

to various levels ranging from C minus to A plus. This test helps to give the teacher an insight into the level of learners in the classroom and also enables the teacher to follow up learners' progress throughout the course. This test is also necessary in the assignment of tasks, activities, and the formation of groups in the classroom. It cannot be conceived that in such classrooms, the issue of different levels is not taken heed of. It is advisable to assign activities on the basis of learners' level at the beginning of the course, and this is in fact what the present researcher does, then increase the level of difficulty gradually to help the low-level students improve and face the challenge of learning and also help the high-level students improve even more and overcome their frustration of being in an environment where only the low-level students are cared for in the classroom. Highly motivated learners can also be given extra activities as homework. As for group formation, this test is also fundamental because it enables the teacher to form multi-level groups where the high-level can supervise the low-level and so act teacher's assistants in large classes. In this way a positive and collaborative environment is created (See Al-Rubai'i, 2023b).

Speaking of culture-boundness, it is the present researcher's belief that since English is now a global language, the teacher should not only concentrate on the British or American map of the world, but should include in the lesson other maps of the world by speakers speaking English as a global language. It is not one size fits all when it comes to the cultural aspect of implicature. Therefore, a proper explanation of what the concept of culture is, what constitutes culture, and how culture operates through its constituent elements is deemed necessary following the model already presented.

With regard to course materials, Vellenga (2004) questioned the likelihood of learning pragmatics from English education textbooks, which, as Murray (2011) mentioned, is seldom, if ever, mentioned in English teaching textbooks. Cignetti and Di Giuseppe (2015) also voiced their concern that ESL textbooks do not provide adequate pragmatic input as far as implicature is concerned. Armstrong (2007, p. 92) suggested the inclusion of multi-media interaction material including radio clips, as well as clips from TV talk shows, dramas, movies, or sitcoms. Derakhshan et al. (2014, p. 19) proposed authentic "video-driven clips" as a teaching material. The importance of this material cannot be overemphasized as the videos do not only involve audio but also visual aspects which are essential for the interpretation of implicature. Intonation and stress, as well as such non-vocal communicative features as proxemics, posture, and clothing play a vital role along verbal communication to understand implied meaning.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to advance the theoretical understanding of the teaching of implicature to raise the pragmatic awareness of its interpretation by EFL learners at the university level. Using logical reasoning, critical thinking, and existing literature, the study developed some ideas and a framework for a suggested course on this issue. The study proposes that these suggestions can guide future empirical research on the teaching of implicature in the mentioned settings. The next step would be the application of this framework to guide the process of teaching, validate the theoretical and practical claims made in this study, and build a comprehensive understanding of the suggested course.

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