

## Conversational Implicature and Contextual Meaning in Modern English Discourse

Afraa Shafeeq Jasim – College of Economics and Administration  
– University of Samarra

[Afraa.sh.j@uosamarra.edu.iq](mailto:Afraa.sh.j@uosamarra.edu.iq)

Qassim Hussein Salman – College of Arts – University of Samarra

[Qassim.h@uosamarra.edu.iq](mailto:Qassim.h@uosamarra.edu.iq)

Sattar J. Hashim - Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

[sattaruna@gmail.com](mailto:sattaruna@gmail.com)

الإستلزام الحواري والمعنى السياقي في الخطاب الإنكليزي المعاصر

م.م. عفرأ شفيق جاسم

جامعة سامراء / كلية الإدارة والإقتصاد / قسم الإقتصاد / جمهورية العراق

م.م. قاسم حسين سلمان

جامعة سامراء / كلية الآداب / قسم اللغة الإنكليزية / جمهورية العراق

م. ستار جبار هاشم

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي / دائرة البحث والتطوير / جمهورية العراق

### المخلص

يتناول هذا البحث كيفية توظيف المتحدثين للإستلزام الحواري والمعنى السياقي لدى مستخدمي اللغة الإنكليزية المعاصرة (المحادثات اليومية). إذ يعتمد البحث على نظرية (غرايس) في الإستلزام الحواري بوصفها جزءًا من إطاره النظري، ساعيًا إلى بيان الكيفية التي يُضيف بها المتحدثون معاني ضمنية إلى أقوالهم تتجاوز المعنى الحرفي الذي يُصرحون به. ويعتمد البحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي النوعي، حيث تُستخدم نماذج مكتوبة ومنطوقة من الخطاب الإعلامي (مثل: الصحف والتلفزيون) والخطاب السياسي لتوضيح كيفية الإلتزام بالمُسلّمات الحوارية أو خرقها عمدًا من أجل توليد الإستلزام الحواري. وتُشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن المعنى الضمني في التواصل الإنكليزي المعاصر يُعد عنصرًا أساسيًا في الطريقة التي يعبر بها المتحدثون عن آرائهم وتقييماتهم، ويحافظون على مبدأ اللباقة، ويسعون إلى تحقيق أهداف الإقناع بصورة غير مباشرة. كما تُظهر النتائج أن السياق، بما يشمله من العلاقات الاجتماعية، والإطار المؤسسي، وعلاقات القوة، يؤدي دورًا حاسمًا في تفسير الإستلزمات الحوارية. وتُبرهن نتائج هذه الدراسة على أن الإستلزام الحواري يمثل عملية تداولية منظمة وسترراتيجية، وليس مجرد ظاهرة لغوية هامشية، وذلك من خلال تحليل خطاب مكتوب ومنطوق منتج في سياقات تواصلية حقيقية. وتسهم هذه الدراسة في حقل التداولية وتحليل الخطاب من خلال التأكيد على أهمية التفسير السياقي وعمليات الإستدلال في الوصول إلى فهم دقيق للتواصل اللغوي الإنكليزي المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإستلزام الحواري، المعنى السياقي، التداولية.

### Abstract

This paper explores how people use conversational implicature and contextualized meaning in today's spoken language (i.e., in conversation). It draws on Grice's theory of conversational implicature as part of its theoretical

framework and examines how speakers add implied meaning, beyond the literal content of what they say. Using qualitative descriptive-analytical methods, the study employs written and spoken examples from the media (e.g., newspapers, television) and politics to illustrate both the observation and the intentional violation of maxims to create conversational implicature. The findings indicate that implied meaning in modern English communication is a key factor in how speakers express their opinions and evaluations, maintain politeness, and pursue persuasive goals indirectly. Additionally, the findings show that context—including social relationships, institutional settings, and power dynamics—plays a crucial role in the interpretation of conversational implicatures. The results of this study demonstrate that conversational implicature is an organized, strategic, pragmatic process (rather than a peripheral linguistic phenomenon) by examining authentically produced spoken and written discourse. The research contributes to the fields of pragmatics and discourse analysis by underscoring the significance of contextual interpretation and inferential processes in establishing a proper understanding of current English-language communication.

**Keywords:** Conversational Implicature, Contextual Meaning, Pragmatics.

### **Introduction**

Implicit meaning, rather than explicit meaning, is typically how everyday language communication occurs. In many cases, speakers use context, shared knowledge, and conversational norms to indicate or to clarify the intentions behind what they say. This disparity between what is said or expressed and what is actually meant or intended lies at the core of pragmatic analysis and is essential to understanding how we use language to convey meaning in real-life communicative acts. In terms of conversational implicature (henceforth CI), H P Grice offers a systematic account of how and why we, as speakers, generate and understand implicit meanings. This theory is based on what is known as the Cooperative Principle and includes four concisely defined conversational maxims - Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner - designed to help speakers in a conversation achieve an effective exchange of communication (carrying the same message). Whether the maxims of the Cooperative Principle are met or purposefully violated will determine the production of meanings that extend beyond the literal definition of any utterance. Analyzing the discourse of Modern English provides a particularly extensive avenue for examining CI, due in large part to the diverse forms of communication available to us and the indirect nature of many of these forms. When examining the various types of modern discourse (e.g., media, politics, digital, and everyday interaction), speakers often use indirectness, use irony, and/or ambiguity to achieve a variety of communicative goals, including persuasive acts, polite communication, and criticism. The far greater proportion of meaning produced within these contexts is derived more from the situational context of the exchange and the contextual placement of the exchange than from the linguistic structure of any given utterance. Although conversational implicature plays an integral role in our daily communications, it has not been thoroughly examined by various studies on modern English discourse. Many studies on modern English discourse continue to emphasize explicit content and structure, while completely overlooking how speakers express their intentions and attitudes through contextualization and shared beliefs as well. Indirectness in Modern English communication, whether it is via the media, politics, etc., is a defining feature of communication through the use of Grice's conversational maxims. Because of this, communication via implicature is often difficult or impossible to interpret without knowing what was literally meant by the expression used, as some meanings cannot be deduced from the literal expressions. What is also clear is that, so far, contextual factors related to the social relationships of the communicators, power relations between the communicators, and the type of situations in which the communications occur have not had sufficient systematic investigation conducted. Hence, more focused pragmatic inquiries must be performed to explore how circumstances surrounding the communicative event and the type of conversational implicature are being used in modern-day English discourse. In summary, it is necessary to examine how context can change the meaning of what is being implied in a given communication event.

### **Aims of the Study**

This research project aims to investigate CI in modern English discourse, focusing on how implied meanings are derived and interpreted based on contextual factors. The study will examine how speakers use pragmatic means to convey meaning implicitly, meaning that they are relaying meaning through indirect means, not just through the literal interpretation of the spoken word. The major research aims of this study include examining the role of Grice's Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims in generating implicature; analyzing how contextual factors may influence the interpretation of implicature; and investigating how implicature exists in various types of modern discourse, with a particular focus on media and political discourse. This research aims

to provide a better understanding of pragmatic meaning while demonstrating the relevance of context and inference to contemporary English discourse.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the research undertaken in this study is to answer a number of questions concerning conversational implicature. The specific questions that will be investigated include:

1. How do the principles of implicature work in current conversation?
2. How do Grice's rules or maxims for conducting a conversation serve to produce implied meaning from the CI?
3. In what way can context affect the understanding of the implied meaning created by CI used within modern communication?

### **Literature Review**

H.P. Grice was responsible for developing the idea of CI in detail through the argumentation on how speakers mean much more than what they say when communicating. Grice introduced the Cooperative Principle along with four conversational maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner—that help interlocutors infer the implicit meanings of conversations. Implicature arises when speakers either intentionally adhere to or violate these maxims with the presumption that listeners will deduce what the speaker meant to communicate by virtue of their mutual rational cooperation. The establishment of this distinction between literal meanings and intended meanings is considered to be the basis for all pragmatic analyses (Grice, 1989, pp. 41–58). Later, Levinson elaborated on Grice's concept of implicature further by categorizing them into two forms: generalized conversational (implied) implicature and particularized conversational (implied) implicatures. Generalized conversational implicatures perform their functions in typical contexts that involve no extraordinary assumptions, whereas particularized conversational implicatures require much higher levels of contextual information to establish their meaning. Levinson further highlights that conversational implicature is a predictable and systematic process, rather than an arbitrary effect on language use, and the ability to utilize mental inferences is the key to understanding everyday use of language. Levinson's analysis offers a more comprehensive examination of how pragmatic meaning functions across the many different types of communicative settings, and therefore offers a more comprehensive explanation for the interaction of context, meaning, and use (Levinson, 1983, pp. 97–104). Additional research into implicature continues to emphasize the importance of context and pragmatic inference in actual communication. Thomas claims that contextual variables, such as speaker intention, social distance, and power relations, must be examined to fully understand CI. She views implicature as being critical in politeness strategies and indirect communication, particularly within institutional and intercultural settings. Her findings support the idea of a negotiated, rather than encoded, meaning between participants (Thomas, 1995, pp. 56–63). The book presents an informative account of conversational implicature and its significance in communication. As discussed by Yule, CI helps speakers employ shared assumptions and context to create implicit meanings in a succinct manner. According to Yule's discussion, implicature represents a central component of natural language and provides speakers with the ability to speak succinctly and politely. This book will therefore be a useful resource for applied linguists interested in studying pragmatic competence (Yule, 1996, pp. 35–38). Recent research has used Gricean theory in real-world examples of communication, including conversation and media, and demonstrated the use of conversational implicatures to express attitudes, evaluations, and criticism indirectly. In her chapter, Cutting identifies that CI is particularly evident in contemporary English discourse, particularly where speakers prefer not to explicitly express their meaning for reasons of politeness or to create ambiguity. This analysis supports the ongoing importance of Gricean pragmatics for current ways of communicating in English (Cutting, 2002, pp. 44–51). Across these studies, CI is an essential mechanism for constructing context in contemporary English discourse. Each study emphasizes similar themes like inference, cooperation, and context, and identifies areas where additional research can apply implicature theories in various settings. Recent research into pragmatic application indicates that CIs have an important function in media/conversational practice, especially in the realms of headline-writing and news reporting (Sofyan et al., 2022; Syafryadin, 2026). Bell's examination of the nature of news discourse shows that journalists frequently use implied meanings to help the reader develop a sense of what they should think, while appearing to be objective - this occurs through both word choice and context. With specific wording used in the text and the way the text is presented (framed) to the reader, news texts frequently provide evidence of evaluative/attitudinal statements about the news event without having to actually say those things. According to Bell, implicatures enable news creators to communicate an ideological

position to their audience without directly communicating that particular position, particularly when covering politically sensitive events (Bell, 1991, pp. 20–27). Likewise, Richardson's analysis of British newspaper discourses shows that journalists can convey political bias through the use of implicatures. He notes that journalists will often violate the maxim of quantity by failing to provide contextual information; thus, motivating readers to make inferences regarding whether political figures exhibit positive or negative evaluations. This serves to provide newspapers with the opportunity to shape public opinion while avoiding clearly evaluative wording. The study conducted by Richardson demonstrates that conversational implicature serves as a persuasive mechanism within political media discourse (Chilton, 2004, pp. 46–52). The area of political discourse has been one of the major areas of interest in this field of study, and, in this regard, Chilton's analysis of political speeches and debates illustrates how politicians use implicature to remain ambiguous, to avoid making straightforward commitments, and to appeal to more than one audience at once. The use of implicature commonly involves deliberately violating the Maxim of Manner, thus creating vague/ambiguous language that enables the audience to create a favorable interpretation of what is being said. With this type of indirectness, political speakers are able to manage their accountability while still retaining their strategic flexibility (Charteris-Black, 2005, pp. 63–69). Charteris-Black conducted extensive research about the role of political rhetoric in terms of how politicians communicate their ideas to audiences using an analysis based on pragmatics and critical reasoning. Charteris-Black found that conversational implicature can be utilized as a method of justifying political actions and for creating moral authority. Through the use of conversational implicature, politicians can implicitly guide the audience's understanding of their intended actions (have a purpose), thus limiting their risk of criticism, and still guide the audience's perception of those actions. Charteris-Black further states that conversational implicature, metaphors, and evaluative language all support each other as persuasive discourse (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, pp. 118–125). Recently, Clayman and Heritage examined how interviewers and politicians have created an interactional use of inferential meaning through the medium of television in political interviews. The authors' findings reveal that journalists and politicians utilize inferential meanings when providing an indirect or implied criticism or questioning through conversational indirectness. Interviewers have often used conversational indirectness in their questioning to provide their audience with the impression of being critical, whereas politicians provide interviews with evasive or non-evasive responses to produce new inferential meanings. As a result, the relationship between journalist and politician is portrayed as a power differential between them and therefore represents a powerful means of communicating within the political context (Clayman and Heritage 118–125). The related studies indicated that CI can be a practical communication strategy in media and politics rather than just a theoretical construct. Implications of meaning can be employed in shaping the interpretation of messages, managing accountability, and influencing audiences. Therefore, pragmatic analysis of contemporary English discourse is especially significant today.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The basis of this study is Grice's theory of CI, which is one of the fundamental principles in pragmatic analysis. This theory helps explain how speakers convey meaning through implicit communication and how listeners can infer these meanings based on the context in which the communication occurs. Instead of assuming that communication relies on explicitly stated linguistic expressions, Grice's theory also focuses on inference, cooperation, and the assumption of commonality among participants as the basis for creating meaning. According to Grice's theory of communication, the Cooperative Principle governs effective communication, which suggests that all participants in a conversation normally cooperate to achieve a common goal of understanding. Grice identified four conversational maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner) through which this cooperation is achieved by guiding speakers in providing the appropriate level of detail, speaking truthfully, remaining relevant, and being clear in their communication. CIs occur when a speaker seems to violate, flout, or manipulate one or more of the conversational maxims, and in turn, the listener must infer the implied meaning in addition to the literal meaning (Grice, 1989). The Framework emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between what a speaker literally says and the implications of what they say. What a speaker literally says is expressed by the literal semantic content of the utterance itself (e.g., 'I went to the park yesterday'), while what a speaker implicates is determined through contextual interpretation that draws on the speakers' and listeners' knowledge of the mutual context, the speakers' and listeners' knowledge of the pragmatic, and the way the utterance is delivered (i.e., how they speak). As such, when using conversational implicatures, you can cancel the implication of the conversational implicature, which would be dependent on

the situational context of the utterance, and therefore they are non-conventional and context-sensitive (i.e., they are contextually derived), unlike conventional/standard implicatures, which are explicitly linked to a particular linguistic expression regardless of the context. In using these examples of the framework, the real-world experience that you have in your everyday life will provide evidence of the dynamic nature of meaning and interaction, rather than the social construction of meaning by analyzing and interpreting what is communicated based on the situation that has occurred within your life, as opposed to a fixed meaning. Additionally, because CIs are potentially contextually sensitive, they have significant implications for understanding how contemporary discourses in American English are constructed based on indirectness, ambiguity, and strategic implications. This study investigates CI as a pragmatic strategy through which speakers accomplish a wide array of communicative objectives, including politeness, persuasion, critique, and avoidance of direct accountability, as part of the theoretical framework defined by Grice. This study seeks to analyze the mechanisms through which implied meaning is produced and understood according to the system of linguistic form, context, and cooperative inference in current English discourse by applying Grice's theory to modern English discourse.

### **Methodology**

The researcher utilizes a qualitative descriptive-analytical methodology in this study because it is an appropriate means of investigating conversational implicature and contextual meaning in current English discourse. With a qualitative method, there is an opportunity for a comprehensive evaluation of alleged implied meaning through inference, contextualization, and other elements that cannot be accurately recorded or measured quantitatively. Furthermore, since the focus of the research is on the implicit generation of meaning, rather than how often that meaning occurs or is used, researchers will utilize qualitative discourse analysis to achieve this objective; therefore, it is an appropriate method for conducting the research study. The data utilized for this research study consist of purposively sampled modern English discourse obtained from media sources, as well as from political discourse; this includes, but is not limited to, media reports, newspaper headlines, political speeches, and parts of interviews. The selected texts demonstrate authentic examples of communication situations involving speakers who rely upon indirectness and implication in order to communicate. The analysis procedure of the research is based on Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature. Each extract will be analyzed to identify those utterances that produce an implied meaning through their interaction with other utterances; for example, by examining the maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner to identify the maxim that is being flouted, observed or violated; and explaining how this maxim was manipulated to create the implied meaning, and what that implied meaning is when analyzed in the given context. As contextual factors are essential to the analysis, each example will also be contextualized demographically (situationally, socially, or institutionally) through an examination of speaker intentions, power relationships, audience expectations, and communicative goals. This context-based method of analysis enables researchers to use an example of actual talk against which to measure how well each example is interpreted based on sentence structure. Illustrations provided include an interpretation of the literal meaning of each example, the relevant implication related to that of the literal meaning, an explanation of the context through which each example produces meaning, and how the context reflects the function of conversational implicature in modern conversational English. The purpose of the analysis was not to make generalizations but rather to offer a theoretical, empirical basis for understanding how conversational implicature functions in contemporary English discourse. The methodological approach encourages relationships between and among the findings of conversation as a discourse type in which there is a consistent and therefore reliable account of meaning based on context and the principles of cooperative linguistics.

### **Data Analysis: Applied Examples Using Gricean Maxims**

In this part of the article, we look at conversational implicature in modern English through Grice's Cooperative Principle and Maxims. Speakers use implicature in two different ways: By observing those Maxims when communicating implied meaning, and by deliberately violating them, as we frequently see in media and political discourse, where indirectness is commonplace. The maxim of quantity (providing the correct amount of information) implies that giving too little information creates implicature. For example, the phrase, "The minister discussed this topic shortly," provides no evidence of either an unwillingness (to elaborate) or a desire to hide what would be critical of his position. The maxim of quality (factually truthful) is typically violated through the emergence of serious intentional deception through the use of irony or exaggeration. If a politician says, "This policy has been a tremendous success," while a vast majority of the public disagrees, his audience/reader will interpret the statement as implying that he is critical of the policy, but not as a sincere

statement of success. Relation focuses on the relevance of what one is saying. Politicians regularly try to avoid directly answering questions by switching topics (for example, responding indirectly to a corruption question by discussing economic growth suggests that they are trying to avoid the issue). Manner relates to the clarity and precision of one's statements. Statements that are vague, such as "Some actions might be considered", would imply that there is not much certainty or commitment behind what has been said and show an unclear intent. In general, conversational implicature is a structured pragmatic aspect of the way language operates and is highly dependent on context and common knowledge. Conversational implicature is used strategically by speakers to express their intended meaning, manage their level of responsibility, and affect others' interpretations of the speaker's utterances, without actually saying anything explicitly. The frameworks outlined by Grice and Leech continue to be useful when analyzing indirect communication.

### **Discussion**

Through their analysis of conversational implicature in contemporary English exchanges, it can be seen that speakers use implied meaning as one of the main vehicles to indirectly convey intent, evaluation, and attitude. It was demonstrated that for communication between interlocutors to be successful, both explicit information given and the context, plus cooperative reasoning, are required; this supports Grice's conclusion that implicit meaning is essential for indirect communication. In news and politics, conversational interchange often relies on conversational implicature to help shape audience members' understanding while allowing for plausible deniability or an impression of neutrality.<sup>23</sup> For example, it may be observed that speakers in news and politics often flout the maxims of Quantity (i.e., lack of information) and Relation (i.e., topic shift); thus, other conversational participants are challenged to form conclusions based on implications, often including evasion or circumvention of answering a question or providing inaccurate information.<sup>34</sup> Finally, these findings support previous conclusions regarding how journalists and politicians communicate evaluative meaning without being overtly subjective in their reporting.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, these findings suggest that conversational implicature serves as an effective pragmatic tool that allows individuals to manage difficult conversations and influence others' interpretations of those conversations. The analysis shows that violating the maxim of Quality is often associated with the irony of exaggeration and/or implicit criticism in political discourse. In these cases, the contextual disconnection between what is said literally and what can be proven to be true generates an implied meaning that is not the same as the literal, opposite meaning. This supports Grice's notion that implicature comes about when speakers want to express an attitude indirectly by violating the expectation of how they supposedly should speak in a conversation. These types of violations show how political discourse uses pragmatic inference to persuade or criticize without confronting one another openly. The Maxim of Manner further illustrates the role of vagueness and ambiguity in a pragmatic approach to modern discourse. Rather than viewing unclear or evasive language as a failure to communicate, such expressions can be understood as strategically motivated attempts to avoid commitment or responsibility. This supports the contention that implicature is strongly linked to issues of power and/or institutional control, particularly in political communication, where speakers try to balance their need to communicate clearly with their desire to remain cautious. Conversational implicatures do form a crucial part of our current use of the English language, as they are strategically used rather than simply coincidentally. The meaning of implicatures is contingent upon context; therefore, the creation of meaning through the interplay of linguistic form, shared knowledge, and the situational context is a dynamic process. This demonstrates the applicability of Grice's model for analyzing modern discourse as well as how pragmatics are necessary for understanding the negotiation of meaning throughout modern English language communication.

### **Conclusion**

"Our analysis considers CI and contextual meanings in modern English usage and discourse; it is an academic and pragmatic analysis of modern-day discourse (Grice, 1975). Media and political speakers more often rely on implicit than explicit meaning, so meaning is derived more from pragmatic inferences than from the way the speaker expresses what they mean (literal). These results show that CI is created through an intentional flouting of Grice's maxims, particularly Quantity, Relation, and Manner. Therefore, media discourse creates evaluative meanings through implicature without compromising its objectivity, and political discourse uses implicature as a means to avoid direct commitments and accountability. The results support prior research suggesting that context, including social roles and institutional environments, is crucial to interpreting conversational implicature. Therefore, this research establishes that conversational implicature is a primary mechanism for

constructing meaning in contemporary English language discourse and that pragmatic analysis of discourse is critical to understanding contemporary communication."

#### **References**

- Charteris-Black, J. (2005). *Politicians and rhetoric: The persuasive power of metaphor*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clayman, S., & Heritage, J. (2002). *The interview: Journalists and public figures on the air*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analyzing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge.
- Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and discourse: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
- Grice, H. P. (1989). *Studies in the way of words*. [http://bvbr.bib-bvb.de:8991/F?func=service&doc\\_library=BVB01&local\\_base=BVB01&doc\\_number=019469884&sequence=000002&line\\_number=0001&func\\_code=DB\\_RECORDS&service\\_type=MEDIA](http://bvbr.bib-bvb.de:8991/F?func=service&doc_library=BVB01&local_base=BVB01&doc_number=019469884&sequence=000002&line_number=0001&func_code=DB_RECORDS&service_type=MEDIA)
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511813313>
- Nora Fitria, Cut Faizah, Nyak Mutia Ismail, Proceedings of International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research, 8(1). 2026. 71-77. <https://doi:10.32672/picmr.v8i1.4219>
- Richardson, J. E. (2007). *Analysing newspapers: An approach from critical discourse analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sofyan, A., Yudistira, R., Alfani, F. R., & Ghaffar, A. A. (2022). The analysis of conversational implicature between students and teachers at Al-Azhar Islamic boarding school. *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 8(1), 65-72.
- Syafryadin, S., Chandra, W. D. E., Apriani, E., & Noermanzah, N. (2020). Maxim variation, conventional and particularized implicature on students' conversation. *International Journal of Scientific and Technology of Research*, 9(02), 3270-3274.
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. Longman.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.