

Some general thoughts on Paper 1

Chris Potts, Ling 390a: Controlling the Discourse, Fall 2007

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1 Some highlights

1.1 A few excellent generalizations

Matthew Douglass

If a person's response does not directly answer the literal question that it is replying to, we will typically assume the information is relevant and attempt to determine the implied connection (the conversational implicature).

Amanda Bernhard

half the time, it is the *listener* doing most of the implying with pragmatics

Precious Ravina Patterson

these maxims are seemingly violated by a speaker in a conversational implicature. However, the person on the receiving end of the discourse understands what is meant to be implied by the speaker. The hearer enriches the speaker's utterance, perhaps with background information, because he/she assumes that the speaker is following the Gricean maxims, or at least the cooperative principle of conversation.

Josh Basl

When a speaker is feeling conflicting pressures of Quantity and Manner but a stronger pressure from Quantity, he utters a sentence S that has a hint of irrelevance to it but that conversationally implicates S' , and S' 's being conversationally implicated allows the listener to see past the hint of irrelevance.

1.2 Topics (a small sample)

- Reprise questions like *Does a bear shit in the woods?*
- Tautologies like *Boys will be boys*
- Sarcasm
- Using pragmatics to better understand political maneuvering
- The pragmatics of humor
- Devious implicatures and strategic implicatures
- How hard will speakers work to find a way to make your utterance relevant?

2 Grading

- It's very silly to think that one can assign numbers to essays and end up with an ordering that says anything useful about the relative quality of those essays. They are too diverse.
- This is why you've received written comments, typed up, on a separate sheet of paper. (I did not write anything on the papers themselves. My summary comment is all of it.)
- The comments contain some things that apply to most or all of the essays, but mostly they are about just your essay.
- Though comparing the numbers and comments of two different authors is not too useful, it is useful to compare the numbers and comments of a single student over time. (This is part of the reason I type up the comments — it means I can look back at them when grading future work.)
- You can get a baseline estimate of your grade by figuring out the percentage. (Overall, the grades were very high.) But keep in mind that improvement over time will boost everything. At the end of the semester, I'll consider upward trends and obvious efforts to improve (in addition to checking the averages).

3 Improving the essay

If you're unhappy with your grade (or just feel that you could improve your essay), then you are welcome to do that. Many of you have explicit suggestions about this in your comments. The most common issues:

- No unifying theme (or else a unifying theme that isn't at all particular to the paper's examples).
- Perfunctory conclusion.

I've tried to provide individual suggestions for how to get better on the first point. For the second, let me say two things. First, I sympathize. I too find conclusions hard. Second, a good strategy for obtaining an interesting, informative conclusion is to try to think beyond the paper, to additional research you could do, additional connections we could make between your results and outside topics, or overarching lessons we can learn from what you found out.

For this round of revisions, you need not work the new passage into the essay. You can instead just write it in isolation. This might be better in fact — concentrate on the content, not on the style issues that go along with reworking a paper. If you are rewriting a conclusion and feel really stumped, then you can (for this optional assignment only) just write down one of the following sentences and continue from there:

- (1) It's all well and good to analyze specific examples. But it is time to step back and ask, To what use can we put the results of this analysis?
- (2) Together, these examples tell a cautionary tale. As hearers, we should take care to . . .
- (3) The above examples suggest that this kind of pragmatic analysis can yield insights into the way _____ works.