A Theory of Communicative Responsibility

R. Kelly Aune
Department of Speech
University of Hawaii at Manoa
Genesis of Theory

- Builds on Grice, *Theory of Conversational Implicature*

- Grice invoked *Cooperative Principle*

  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.

- Be consistent with maxims of quantity, clarity, relevance, and quality
Need to Expand TCI

- Problems -- Grice left implicit
- the “accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange” and
- how to “make your conversational contribution such as is required”
- In short -- what does it mean to be cooperative? to what end are we being cooperative?
Need to Expand TCI

• A message can seem oblique in one setting, appropriate in another, and condescending in yet another

• Interrogation can be appropriate in a journalistic setting but inappropriate between a boyfriend and girlfriend in casual conversation

• How do we manage this variance with such facility?
The CRT Extension

• CRT addresses the questions:

• How do we know how implicit or explicit to be in a conversation?

• How do we know when it is appropriate to interrogate, and how much interrogation is acceptable?
Assumptions of CRT

• Primary goal of communication: create a desired state of understanding between communicators

• Communicators hold themselves and their communicative partners responsible for creating the state of understanding

• All communication requires implicature and inference-making
Assumptions of CRT

• Responsible communicative behavior is achieved, in part, via the use of appropriate inference-making and implicature to achieve the desired state of understanding

• Judgments of communicative responsibility will affect communicative behavior
CR and Communicative Behavior

• As personal assessments of CR increase, communicators will engage in less implicating and less inference-making.

• As personal assessments of one’s CR increase, one will increase the extent to which one is being explicit in message encoding.
Communicative Tasks

Less mindful → Heuristic completion → Logical Inference → Interrogation → More mindful

Less Conventional Implicature → Less mindful

Common/Logical Implicature → More mindful

Message Receiver

Message Source

Highly Explicit
Tests of CRT

• Early tests showed people form judgments of CR in systematic ways, consistent with propositions of CRT

• Examined effects of perceptions of common ground on CR and behavior
Common Ground & CR

- Participants used map, gave directions to
  - hypothetical UHM student (i.e., culturally similar CS), or
  - hypothetical student of U. of Pretoria, South Africa (i.e., culturally dissimilar CD)
- Quantitative and qualitative differences in communicative behavior resulted
Common Ground & CR

- Participants in CD condition judged their personal CR higher
- CR was positively correlated with
  - message length \( r = .37 \)
  - message redundancy \( r = .36 \)
  - references to natural landmarks on map \( r = .26 \)
Common Ground and CRII

• Variation on Fussell & Krauss studies
• Participants wrote descriptions of abstract images for hypothetical stranger, classmate, best friend
• No personal CR differences across levels of relationship, but
• CR showed trait-like behavior
Personal judgments of CR positively correlated with message length $r = .31$

Personal judgments of CR positively correlated with redundancy $r = .33$

(Preliminary analyses) Personal judgments of CR positively correlated with use of literal rather than figurative language $r = .25$
CR & Cross-Cultural Effects

- Japanese & American participants wrote messages in response to a communicative predicament.
- Japanese respondents assigned greater CR to the message recipient than did Americans.
- Message length was not significantly correlated with recipient CR but redundancy was $r = -.28$. 
Behavior Inconsistent with CR

- Identical dialogues between Anna & Mike
- Anna Researcher/ Mike participant
  - Interrogation appropriate IA
- Anna girlfriend/ Mike boyfriend
  - Interrogation inappropriate II
Behavior Inconsistent with CR

- Anna in IA context was perceived to have greater CR than Anna in II context
- Anna in II context was perceived to be behaving more inappropriately than Anna in IA context
Summary

• People systematically assign levels of responsibility for creating understanding in communicative situations

• People adjust their communicative behavior according to perceptions of CR

• People will create longer, more redundant messages when they judge themselves more communicatively responsible

• Higher personal CR is associated with use of more generalizable, accessible content in messages