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 ←————————————————→ More mindful

←——————————————————————→

Heuristic completion   Logical Inference   Interrogation

Message Receiver

←——————————————————————→

Common/Logical Implicature Less Conventional Implicature Highly Explicit

Message Source

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

Common Ground and CRII

- 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