

Differences between Relevance Theory and Cooperative Principle

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Abstract

Cooperative principle is mainly illustrated by Grice. It has several maxims to be follow. Relevance theory is promoted by Sperber and Wilson. It is the development and amendment to cooperative principle. This paper mainly introduces the differences between relevance theory and cooperative principle. They can be summarized into four aspects: adding the word “ostensive”; the definition of meaning; the explanation of context and objects and methods.

Keywords

Relevance Theory; Cooperative Principle; Differences.

1. Introduction

Relevance Theory is a new approach to pragmatics. It attempts to answer not only philosophical questions about the nature of communication, but also psychological questions about how the interpretation process unfolds in the hearer’s mind. Cooperative Principle, promoted by Grice, is a very important factor in the process of generating implicature. Grice said that 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. Relevance Theory is seen as the development of Cooperative Principle. It does not merely criticize the latter but also adds and amends the shortcomings and disadvantages of Cooperative Principle. Cooperative Principle makes explanation from a broad aspect, so it is too abstract to be used in specific context. Striking up from the perspective of human cognition, Relevance Theory illustrates relevance principles in a comprehensive way, thus overcoming insufficiency of Cooperative Principle. After research, there are four differences between Relevance Theory and Cooperative Principle.

2. Differences

2.1. Adding the Word “Ostensive”

As for inference mode, Relevance Theory adds the word “ostensive” into Grice’ inference mode. Sperber thinks that context is needed when people understand words with several meanings, which is named as a set of assumptions. Nevertheless, in some situations that context is provided but “ostensive” is lacked, hearer cannot make inference and exactly understand discourse. Thus, only words from speaker are ostensive can provide hearer the direction and orientation of inference, thus reaching the aim of exactly understanding speaker’s intention and discourse meaning.

2.2. The Definition of Meaning

Grice prompted that meaning is speaker’s intention. In order to make discourse X convey meaning; speaker S must do the following steps: making X makes hearer A have reaction r; making hearer A identify speaker’s intention B; hearer’ identification to speaker’s intention B at least can partly explain the reason why hearer make specific reaction. In other words, only when these three conditions are realized at the same time, discourse are communicative.

However, Sperber and Wilson think the definition is too strict and meanwhile is not completed, because speaker can successfully convey meaning without fulfilling all three conditions. For example, Mary told Peter that I had a sore throat on Christmas Eve. Mary said this in order to achieve the following goals: (a) making Peter believe that she had a sore throat in Christmas Eve; (b) making Peter identify her intention (a); (c) making Peter's identification to her intention at least can partly explain the reason why Peter believed it. However, if Peter identifies Mary's intentions (a) to convince him that she has a sore throat on Christmas Eve but does not believe her, then only Mary's intentions (b) are achieved: Peter is able to identify her intentions (a) and Mary's other two intentions (a) and (c) are not. Although Mary was not able to convince Peter that "she had a sore throat on Christmas Eve", it can still be said that she has also successfully communicated because Peter has identified her intentions. Sperber and Wilson called intention (a) as informative intention and intention (b) as communicative intention. Once communicative intention is satisfied, communication is successful. As for intention (c), only intention (a) is satisfied, can it be achieved.

Communicative intent itself is a second-level intent: the first-level intent (information intent) is satisfied once the communicative intent is recognized by the listener. In general, informational intent and communicative intent are satisfied at the same time. But there are cases (as shown in the example above, Peter doesn't believe Mary's words) even if the corresponding information intent is not met. Therefore, correlation theory holds that meaning is the communicative intention of the speaker, not the intention of information

2.3. The Explanation of Context

The second is the difference in contextual concepts. The context of the principle of cooperation is almost an all-encompassing category involving the context of language knowledge discourse, the socio-cultural background knowledge of world knowledge communication, and the specific situational factors of communication, which is considered to be a comprehensive reasoning process of human knowledge factors plus specific situational factors. The understanding of discourse is based on "shared knowledge." While this context is fixed and unchanging in the minds of both communicators in advance, correlation theory holds that in verbal communication, the listener's assumptions about the world are stored in the brain in the form of conceptual representations, constituting a person's "cognitive environment".

A person's cognitive environment is a collection of facts or assumptions that can be manifested. The cognitive environment contains a variety of information that constitutes the underlying cognitive context in which a person understands a discourse. What plays an important role in understanding discourse is not specific situational factors, but old information in the cognitive environment. The process of understanding discourse is the process of interacting with old information in the cognitive environment and new information in the process of communication. The cognitive context used by both communicative parties in the communication process is only one part of the mutual reflection of the cognitive environment. When the facts or assumptions reflected in the cognitive environment of both communicative parties coincide, the overlap of the cognitive environment is produced, and this heavier part constitutes the common cognitive environment of the communicative parties: the cognitive environment is "a fluid notion", which is constantly supplemented and expanded in the process of communication and fixed is the relation of discourse, although the degree of correlation may vary." In this dynamic cognitive environment, each manifestation is mutually explicit.

Therefore, the concept of "mutual manifestation" according to correlation theory successful communication is not based on so-called common knowledge, but on mutual manifestation. The explicit purpose of the speaker is to recognize the speaker's intention to reflect certain hypotheticals, thereby changing the cognitive environment of the listener. The speaker can

manifest many assumptions in communication, but which assumption the listener deals with depends on the impact of those assumptions on the cognitive environment of the listener.

2.4. Objects and Methods

Grice overemphasizes the need to abide by the principles of cooperation. He took the "true" criterion particularly seriously, saying that if it was violated, it would be sufficient to pose a moral problem according to western cultural standards, and so on. However, Sperber and Wilson do not recognize this guideline. According to relevance theory, relevance is the most basic principle in communication. This is not because the speaker must follow this rule, but because relevance is the basis of cognition.

Grice also puts too much emphasis on the role of violating the guidelines. He enumerates a series of methods of violating the norms, suggesting that the speaker may deliberately and publicly violate the norms, with the aim of enabling the listener to recognize and understand his intention to violate the norm (e.g., to get the listener to accurately understand the anti-language and metaphor). Sperber and Wilson objected it. They also believe that linguistic phenomena such as anti-language and metaphor are purely stylistic figurative expressions and have nothing to do with the violation of the norms.

Grice only talks about what in communicative discourse was implicated, not what was said in communicative discourse. Sperber and Wilson pay the same attention to what was said. Pragmatic factors such as the elimination of ambiguity and the determination of allegations are what was said by Grice, and have nothing to do with what was implicated. After the relevance theory was proposed, it was about the difference between explicit and implicit in communicative discourse, as well as the meaning of truth conditionality and non-truth conditional meaning.

To understand discourse, Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory can replace the Grice principle of collaboration. Relevance theory has no guidelines and no rules for the speaker to follow; It only describes the cognitive processes of people for each discourse; The discourse itself is related to the context, and this association enables people to make reasonable inferences about the intentions of the speaker, so as to respond correctly to the discourse. Relevance is the basis of correct cognition. Relevance theory holds that the speaker does not deliberately violate any norm to make the listener understand the intention of the words he is speaking, and does not regard the common linguistic phenomena such as metaphors and anti-language as manifestations of violating the norms.

3. Conclusion

The differences between Grice's pragmatic theory and association theory are analyzed above, but the two also have some commonalities. The theory of associations is based on the Grice doctrine. Grice's idea that the goal of pragmatic theory is to "explain how the listener grasps the intent of discourse" was accepted by Sperber and Wilson, who proposed the theory of association. They also recognize the importance of reasoning in understanding. Although they differ from Grice's approach, they agree with Grice about the role of the general principle of communication in the reasoning process. From Grice's conversational implications to Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, this is another new development in pragmatic theory. The potential explanatory power of association theory presents a promising prospect for the comprehensive study of pragmatics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics.

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