Lying, Sincerity, and Quality
Andreas Stokke

--- Penultimate draft. Forthcoming in J. Meibauer (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Lying, Oxford University Press ---

1 The Gricean Category of Quality

Paul Grice established an understanding of conversations as guided by a presumption of cooperation. Grice suggested that this kind of activity is governed by his Cooperative Principle and the maxims of conversation, which were to be thought of, roughly, as principles that rational creatures would (or should) follow given a mutual recognition of one or more purposes or directions for the talk exchange.[1]

The Cooperative Principle is stated as follows (Grice 1989: 26):

> **Cooperative Principle**
> Make your 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.

In turn, the maxims were divided into four categories, Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. Among these the category of Quality included a supermaxim and two specific maxims (Grice 1989: 27):

> **Supermaxim of Quality**: Try to make your contribution one that is true.
>
> > **First Maxim of Quality**: Do not say what you believe to be false.
> >
> > **Second Maxim of Quality**: Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

---

[1] See in particular Grice (1989: 26-29).

Lies are paradigm cases in which Quality maxims are violated. Most theorists of lying agree that when you lie you say something you believe to be false. Hence, a lie is a violation of, at least, the First Maxim of Quality. But moreover, it is sometimes suggested (cf. e.g. Wilson 1995: 200; Wilson and Sperber 2002: 586; Dynel 2011: 151; Fallis 2009: 33-34; Fallis 2012: 577) that lying – whether as a general phenomenon or at least with respect to a particular range of cases – can be understood in terms of violations of one or more of the Quality maxims.

This chapter first considers attempts to characterize lying in terms of the First Maxim of Quality (Sections 2-3.) It then turns to attempts to characterize lying in terms of the Supermaxim of Quality (Sections 4-5.) Finally, the common view that lies are insincere assertions is considered in relation to the Gricean view that the maxims of Quality have a special status in relation to the other maxims and the Cooperative Principle (Sections 6-7.) (The chapter does not consider lying in relation to the Second Maxim of Quality. For some relevant discussion, see Ch. 22 of this volume.)

 2 Covert and Overt Violations

Given that lying involves saying something one believes to be false, lies are violations of the First Maxim of Quality. But moreover, a great many ordinary examples of lies are cases in which a speaker violates the First Maxim of Quality *covertly*. Arguably the most common type of lying is that in which the liar says something she believes to be false while hoping that the hearer will not detect that she is doing so. In particular, the typical purpose of lies is to deceive in the sense of making the hearer acquire a false belief. The success of this ordinarily depends on the hearer's being unaware that the speaker is relating disbelieved information.

Grice himself observed that covert violations of maxims often have deceptive effects. In distinguishing different ways in which a speaker can fail to fulfill the maxims, Grice wrote,

> He may quietly and unostentatiously *violate* a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be liable to mislead. (Grice 1989: 30)

Hence, it is not unnatural to think that lying, in general, might be characterized in terms of such covert violations. For example, Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber (2002), who call the First Maxim of Quality the *maxim of truthfulness*, suggest that

> Lies are examples of *covert violation*, where the hearer is meant to assume that the maxim of truthfulness is still in force and that the speaker believes what she has said.　　(Wilson and Sperber 2002: 586)

As we said above, many ordinary lies conform to this pattern. You tell me you have an important meeting across town and ask me when the bus leaves. Contriving to make you late for the meeting, I tell you that it leaves at 1 p.m., even though I know it leaves at 12.45 p.m. For my ruse to work, it is essential that you do not detect that I am saying something I believe to be false.

In this case, as in most other cases of deceptive lying, the liar not only tries to make her victim think she herself believes what she is saying, she also tries to make the victim believe what is said.[2] The point of my lying to you about when the bus leaves is for you to come to believe the falsehood I told you. So, looking at such familiar examples of lying, one might think that to lie is to say something with the aim of getting one's listener to believe it, while one is covertly violating the First Maxim of Quality, that is, one is hoping that the listener will think one is obeying the First Maxim of Quality. One way to spell out this idea is as follows:

Lying as Covertly Violating the First Maxim of Quality
A lies to *B* if and only if
(LC1) *A* says that *p* to *B*, and
(LC2) *A* believes that not-*p*, and
(LC3) By saying that *p* to *B*, *A* intends that *B* come to   believe   that *p*, and
(LC4) By saying that *p* to *B*, *A* intends that *B* come to   believe   that *A* believes that *p*.

---

[2] There are also deceptive lies that only have the goal of making the hearer believe that the speaker believes what is said, without aiming to make the hearer believe what is said. Fallis (2010: 9) gives the following example: "A crime boss, Tony, discovers that one of his henchmen, Sal, has become an FBI informant. But Tony does not want Sal to find out that his treachery has been uncovered. So, to keep his disloyal henchman at ease, Tony says with pride to Sal one day, "I have a really good organization here. There are no rats in my organization."" See also Chisholm and Feehan (1977: 153).

This account of lying is a version of the traditional view that lying is a species of deception.[3] That is, when you lie, you intend to deceive your listener into believing something you believe to be false.

However, many theorists of lying reject the idea that lying necessarily involves intentions to deceive.[4] That is, even if you do not aim at deceiving your listener, you might still be lying. One central type of counterexample to the traditional view involves so-called *bald-faced lies*. To a first approximation, a bald-faced lie is a consciously undisguised lie, i.e. a lie that is told despite the recognition that the relevant participants realize that it is a lie.

Here is (a version of) an example that Thomas Carson gives:[5]

The Cheating Student
A student accused of cheating on an exam is called to the Dean's office. The student knows that the Dean knows that she did in fact cheat. But as it is also well known that the Dean will not punish someone unless they explicitly admit their guilt, the student says,

(1) I didn't cheat.

Many writers on lying think that, although the student says something she believes to be false, she does not intend to deceive the Dean.[6] More particularly, the student does not satisfy either (LC3) or (LC4). The student does not intend that the Dean come to believe that she did not cheat, nor does she intend that the Dean come to believe that she herself believes that. Even so, the student is lying. Hence this is a bald-faced lie.

As this suggests, even though the bald-faced liar says something she believes to be false, bald-faced lies are not *covert* violations of the First Maxim of Quality. That is, they are not cases in which the speaker violates the First Maxim of Quality while "the hearer is meant to assume that the maxim of truthfulness is still in force and that the speaker believes what she has said." (Wilson and Sperber 2002: 586) In other words, if one thinks that bald-faced lies are genuine lies, then one cannot think that to lie, in general, is to covertly violate the First Maxim of Quality.

---

[3] See e.g. Augustine (1952b); Isenberg (1964); Chisholm and Feehan (1977); Bok (1978); Kupfer (1982); Davidson (1985); Simpson (1992); Adler (1997); Williams (2002); Frankfurt (2005); Faulkner (2007); Dynel (2011).
[4] E.g. Carson (2006); Sorensen (2007); Fallis (2009); Stokke (2013); Saul (2012). See also Ch. 28 of this volume.
[5] See Carson (2006: 290); (2010: 21).
[6] Lackey (2013) disagrees. For a reply, see Fallis (2014).

Some writers on lying argue that bald-faced lies are not lies. For example, Jörg Meibauer (2014) argues that bald-faced lies are not lies because the bald-faced liar

> does not really present p as true in the context since he *lets shine through* that p is false. He would not feel committed to the truth of p, and he would not be ready to provide further evidence. (Meibauer 2014: 140)

However, this arguably runs contrary to the way most theorists and non-theorists will be inclined to think of the case of the cheating student.[7]

First, there is no reason to think that the student "lets shine through" that her statement is false. Of course, the student knows that the Dean knows that what she is saying is false. But she is not indicating this in any way. For example, if one says something one believes to be false while winking at the speaker, this is naturally understood to be a way of "letting it shine through" that what one says is false, and many would take this kind of case as one in which no assertion has been made. But nothing of the sort is going on in Carson's example. There are undoubtedly also more subtle ways of "letting it shine through" that what one says is false. Yet there is no reason to think that something like this characterizes bald-faced lying in general.

Second, the student is clearly committed to her statement. There is no way for the student to defend herself later by claiming not to have been in earnest, or the like, as you can do if you are winking or making a joke.

Third, the student might not be ready to provide further evidence, simply because there is no further evidence, but that does not show that she is not committed to the statement. Indeed, if the student *could* produce evidence that would make it doubtful that she cheated, she would.

If one accepts that bald-faced lies are genuine lies, an alternative suggestion is to characterize lying simply in terms of violations of the First

---

[7] Meibauer (2014) discusses a different example concerning a husband who denies being unfaithful even though both he and his wife know that he is being unfaithful, and both know that they know this. There may be cases in which the notion of letting one's untruthfulness "shine through" is applicable, and this may be one of them. (Indeed, it seems undeniable that something like this sometimes happens, whether in cases of bald-faced lying or not.) However, insofar as the suggestion is supposed to be illuminating of bald-faced lying in general, it should equally apply to the case of the cheating student.

Maxim of Quality, covert or overt. In a much discussed paper, Don Fallis (2009) suggested a definition of this kind:[8]

> **Lying as Violating the First Maxim of Quality**
> *A* lies to *B* if and only if
> (LV1) *A* states that *p* to *B*, and
> (LV2) *A* believes that the First Maxim of Quality is in effect, and
> (LV3) *A* believes that not-*p*.

According to this definition, lying is not a matter of covertly violating the First Maxim of Quality. Rather, on this view, a lie is simply a statement that violates the First Maxim of Quality, whether covertly or overtly. Bald-faced lies satisfy these conditions, i.e. they are statements of disbelieved information made while the speaker believes that First Maxim of Quality is in effect.

However, as we will see next, there are familiar ways of violating the First Maxim of Quality without lying. In particular, standard cases of *irony* are counterexamples to (LV1)-(LV3).[9]

3 Irony and Flouting Maxims

Everyday examples of irony are cases in which someone says something while intending to convey the opposite. For example, suppose you ask me whether I enjoy talking to your friend, Allan, whom I think is boring and uninteresting. I respond by (2).

> (2) [Ironically] Yeah right, I really enjoy talking to Allan!

This is a straightforward example of the kind of irony in which what the speaker means is the negation of what is said. What I want to convey by uttering (2) is that I do not enjoy talking to Allan.

---

[8] In another paper Fallis (2010) discusses various proposals for how to define the specific case of deceptive lying, i.e. the type of lying that bald-faced lying is not an instance of.

[9] Cf. Stokke (2013). For similar arguments, see Pruss (2012); Faulkner (2013). Among floutings of the First Maxim of Quality, Grice (1989: 34) included metaphor, meiosis, and hyperbole. If one thinks that, in these cases, the speaker says something false, they align with cases or irony in that they are not cases of lying. For discussion, see Saul (2012). See also Ch. 28 of this volume.

Although I did not lie, I said something I believe to be false, namely that I enjoy talking to Allan.[10] Fallis acknowledges that an ironic speaker of this kind "is certainly *saying* something that he believes to be false." (Fallis 2009: 53) In other words, (LV1) and (LV3) are both satisfied in this case. If (LV2) is also satisfied in cases of irony, then such cases are counterexamples to the suggestion that to lie is to violate the First Maxim of Quality.

It is sometimes suggested that the First Maxim of Quality is not in effect in these cases. For example, Wilson and Sperber (2002) write that

> Metaphor, irony and other tropes [...] are *overt violations (floutings)* of the maxim of truthfulness, in which the hearer is meant to assume that the maxim of truthfulness is no longer operative, but that the supermaxim of Quality remains in force, so that some true proposition is still conveyed. (Wilson and Sperber 2002: 586)

Similarly, Fallis argues that the First Maxim of Quality "is not in effect" in these cases and that "by flouting this norm of conversation, [the ironic speaker] turns it off." (Fallis, 2009, 53)

But although understanding irony as involving *flouting* the First Maxim of Quality is in line with the Gricean analysis of this kind of speech act, the claim that when a speaker flouts a maxim, she does not believe it is in effect is in direct opposition to it.

According to the orthodox, Gricean conception, irony is an example of (particularized) conversational implicature.[11] That is, it is a speech act in which the speaker flouts a maxim of conversation, in this case the First Maxim of Quality, in order to trigger the kind of reasoning on the part of the audiences that Grice held was the source of such implicatures. Familiarly, the Gricean view is that an implicature of this kind arises when it is required in order to square the fact that the speaker said what she did with the presumption that she is observing the maxims and the Cooperative Principle.

---

[10] Grice himself held a particular, strong conception of the notion of *saying* something. According to this notion, that *S* said that *p* entails that *S* meant that *p*, and that *S* meant that *p* entails that *S* intended her audience to believe that *p* as a result of their recognizing this intention. (See Neale 1992: 523). This chapter uses *say*, and cognates, in the less strict sense according to which one may say something without intending to communicate it.

[11] Cf. Grice (1989: 34).

For this reason, to flout a maxim, in the sense that is intended to trigger implicature, is to "blatantly fail to fulfill it." (Grice, 1989: 30) For Grice, "when a conversational implicature is generated in this way, [...] a maxim is being *exploited*." (ib.) That is, the speaker violates a maxim in a way that is obvious to everyone involved in order to get them thinking about what her intentions could be in doing so.

One cannot flout a rule (or a maxim), in this sense, if one does not believe that it is in effect. Suppose that it is a rule in our town that you cannot cross at a red light, except on Sundays where doing so is allowed because there is little or no traffic on those days. On days other than Sunday, I can flout this rule. That is, I can violate it in a way that calls attention to itself, and will most likely get people thinking about what my intentions could be in doing so. But I cannot do so on Sundays. Even if I cross at a red light in a way that calls attention to itself on a Sunday, I do not thereby flout the rule against crossing at a red light. No one will attempt to interpret my actions by trying to square my behavior with a presumption that I am obeying the rule against crossing at a red light. The reason is clear - the rule is not in effect on Sundays.

In order to flout a rule, I must assume the rule is in effect. And moreover, when flouting a rule, I do not intend for my audience to think the rule is "no longer in force" (Wilson and Sperber 2002: 586). Rather, my purpose is to trade on the fact that the rule is operative, and believed to be operative by everyone involved, so that my overtly violating it will trigger the intended inference.

Similarly, when someone is being ironic, on the Gricean view, their strategy is to violate the First Maxim of Quality in a conspicuous way. This strategy depends on the belief that the First Maxim of Quality is in effect. Consequently, when someone is being ironic in this way, they satisfy (LV2), in addition to (LV1) and (LV3). For example, when I utter (2) I am assuming that the First Maxim of Quality is in effect. This is the reason I think I can succeed in communicating that I do not enjoy talking to Allan by saying that I do, given that it is obvious that I believe the former, and not the latter. However, given this, ironic utterances are incorrectly classified as lying, according to (LV1)-(LV3).

As we have seen, there are two ways of characterizing lying in terms of violations of the First Maxim of Quality. According to one proposal, lies are covert violations of the First Maxim of Quality. This position is committed to denying that bald-faced lies are genuine lies. If one wants to avoid that commitment, another proposal is that lies are violations (covert or overt) of the First Maxim of Quality. However, this position is committed to the implausible claim that classic cases of ironic utterances are lies.

4 False Implicature

Lying is distinguished from irony in that, while both are instances of saying something believed to be false, the liar hopes to get this disbelieved information across to the listener, while the ironic speaker hopes to get across the opposite of what she says. Another way of putting this is to note that, while both liars and ironic speakers violate the First Maxim of Quality, only the liar also violates the Supermaxim of Quality. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to think that lying can be characterized in terms of violations of the Supermaxim of Quality.

One proposal along these lines is that to lie is to contribute something one believes to be false. Assuming that this kind of view could be worked out satisfactorily, it would meet the challenge posed above. It would predict that ironic utterances, such as my utterance of (2), are not lies. Even though I said something I believe to be false, I did not violate the Supermaxim of Quality because what I wanted to contribute to the conversation was something I believed to be true.

Given the Gricean understanding of irony as an instance of conversational implicature, these are cases in which what is implicated is something believed to be true. However, we also sometimes implicate things we believe to be false. In particular, saying something one believes to be true in order to implicate something one believes to be false is a familiar type of dissimulation. The suggestion that to lie is to violate the Supermaxim of Quality amounts to the claim that cases of false implicature are cases of lying.

Such a view has been endorsed by a few writers on lying (e.g. Meibauer 2005; Dynel 20) Yet this view is rejected by the majority of theorists, and is arguably also counterintuitive.[12] Fallis writes,

> you are not lying if you make a statement that you believe to be true. In fact, you are not lying even if you intend to deceive someone by making this statement. (Fallis 2009: 38)

Similarly, Bernard Williams (2002) gives the following example:[13]

---

[12] See also Ch. 15 of this volume.

[13] Despite what might be inferred from this passage, Williams does not endorse the view that you lie only if you say something false, but rather agrees with the majority view that you lie only if you say something you believe to be false. See Williams (2002, 96).

> "Someone has been opening your mail," she helpfully says, and you, trusting her, take it that it was not the speaker herself. If you discover that it was the speaker, you will have to agree (if through clenched teeth) that what she said was true. So, you must also agree, she did not tell you a lie. (Williams 2002: 96)

The claim that saying something one believes to be true in order to implicate something one believes to be false is a way of lying thus rejects one of the most fundamental distinctions we make about verbal insincerity. This is the distinction between lying *per se* and other forms of linguistic deception and misleading.

Most of us are sensitive to this distinction in everyday matters. But the difference between lying and other forms of deception is also central to many systems of law and to a number of religious traditions. The enormous amount of attention paid to the difference between lying and misleading while not lying in everyday affairs, in legal practices (see e.g. Solan and Tiersma 2005), and in religious contexts such as that of the medieval casuists (see e.g. Williams 2002) will be seen as fundamentally misplaced by a view that insists on conflating lying and false implicature.

Moreover, even philosophers (e.g. Adler 1997; Williams 2002; Saul 2012) who think that, in certain circumstances, lying and falsely implicating may be equally morally problematic, still take great care to distinguish the two phenomena. Jonathan Adler (1997) discusses the following biblical example:

> Abraham, venturing into a dangerous land and fearing for his life if Sarah is taken as his wife, tells Abimelech the king that she is his sister. God appears to Abimelech to warn him away from taking Sarah because "She is a married woman." Frightened, Abimelech confronts Abraham, who defends his obvious deception by denying that he lied:
>
>> ... they will kill me for the sake of my wife. She is in fact my sister, she is my father's daughter though not by the same mother; and she became my wife... (Adler 1997: 435)

Most commentators, going back at least as far as Augustine (1952a), have defended Abraham as not having lied, although he was guilty of deception. Augustine wrote of Abraham,

Thus, he concealed something of the truth, but did not say anything false in concealing the fact that she was his wife and in saying that she was his sister. (Augustine 1952a: 152)

The method of deception Abraham uses is that of implicating something he believes to be false. Suppose that Abraham's original utterance was:

(3) She is my sister.

The most obvious, Gricean way to explain this case is as exploiting Grice's (1989: 26) First Maxim of Quantity:

First Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange).

The king will take Abraham as having implicated that Sarah is not his wife because that assumption is needed to make his uttering (3) consistent with the presumption that he is obeying the First Maxim of Quantity.

But if to lie is to violate the Supermaxim of Quality, Abraham counts as having lied, contrary to the judgments of most who have thought about this case. Abraham makes a statement that he believes to be true, namely that Sarah is his sister, while intending to deceive the king by implicating that she is not wife. But intuitively, he is not lying. While all lies violate the Supermaxim of Quality, not all such violations are lies.

5 Saying and Communicating

In order to do justice to the difference between lying and other forms of linguistic insincerity, an account of lying must specify that lying involves saying disbelieved information, as opposed to contributing it in some other way, e.g. by conversational implicature. Responding to the kind of criticism rehearsed in Section 3 above, Fallis (2012) has suggested an account of lying according to which

you lie if and only if you intend to communicate something false by saying that thing. (Fallis 2012: 577)

Fallis argues that this proposal

preserves the intuition that lying has to do with the violation of a norm of conversation. According to this definition, you lie if you

intend to do something that would violate the norm against communicating something false if that norm were in effect. (ib.)

As discussed earlier, given that bald-faced lies are lies, lying does not necessarily involve an aim of getting one's listener to believe what one says. Fallis therefore proposes to interpret "communicating something false" along the lines of contributing something false to the conversation. This account of lying, therefore, can be seen as a version of the claim that to lie is to violate the Supermaxim of Quality. But moreover, it specifies that, in lying, the violation is perpetrated by saying something one believes to be false, as opposed to implicating it, or conveying it some other way.

My ironic utterance of (2) is a case of saying something I believe to be false. But I am not intending to violate the Supermaxim of Quality, since what I say is not what I intend to contribute to the conversation. Rather, what I intend to contribute to the conversation is the opposite of what I say, i.e. something I believe to be true. So I am not lying, according to this proposal.

More generally, according to this account, anytime I say something I believe to be false, and thereby intend to contribute that thing to the conversation, I am lying. Correspondingly, even if I intend to contribute something I believe to be false to the conversation, as long as I do not say anything I believe to be false, I am not lying. This proposal therefore avoids counting ironic utterances and false implicatures as lies, while allowing that bald-faced lies are lies.

6 Sincerity and Assertion

We have seen that while all lies are violations of the First Maxim of Quality, the phenomenon of lying, in general, cannot be adequately understood in terms of violations of the First Maxim of Quality, whether covert or overt. Moreover, we have seen that, while all lies are violations of the Supermaxim of Quality, the phenomenon of lying, in general, cannot be adequately understood in terms of violations of the Supermaxim of Quality.

Rather, as the proposal in Fallis (2012) indicates, to characterize satisfactorily what it is to lie, an account must focus on (i) what is said, (ii) what is believed, and (iii) what is communicated, or contributed to the conversation. Saying something and thereby proposing to contribute it to the conversation is a hallmark of *assertion*. Many writers on lying accordingly subscribe to the generic view that to lie is to assert something

one believes to be false (e.g. Chisholm and Feehan 1977; Adler 1997; Williams 2002; Carson 2006; 2010; Sorensen 2007; Mahon 2008; Fallis 2009; 2012; Saul 2012; Stokke 2013; 2014.) On these views lies are insincere assertions.

This approach assumes that lies, including bald-faced lies, are genuine assertions. That is, it is assumed that the fact that you believe that *p* is false does not make your saying that *p* fall short of being an assertion that *p*, provided that the further conditions on assertion are satisfied. This idea is rooted in classic speech act theory. In J.L. Austin's "doctrine of the Infelicities" (1955: 14), insincere assertions were classified as *abuses*, that is cases in which one performs a speech act while failing to have certain requisite thoughts or feelings. Crucially, for Austin, abuses of this kind were to be distinguishes from *misfires*, the latter being cases in which the act one purports to perform does not occur at all. [14] And similarly, according to John Searle's (1969) influential treatment, the sincerity condition on asserting that *p* is that the speaker believe that *p*, yet failing this condition does not prevent one's utterance from being an assertion. [15]

But while traditional speech act theory considers insincere assertions as genuine assertions, as we will see below, it is less clear that it is open to the Gricean to accept that an act of saying disbelieved information can be a genuine contribution to a conversation.

7 Quality and Insincere Assertion

Fallis (2012) takes his Gricean account, according to which to lie is to violate the Supermaxim of Quality by saying something one believes to be false, as an instance of the generic view that to lie is to assert disbelieved information. Hence he takes contributing disbelieved information by saying it as instances of insincere assertion. This view suggests, then, that to assert sincerely is to obey both the First Maxim of Quality and the Supermaxim of Quality, that is, to contribute something one believes to be true by saying it. Conversely, violating either maxim (or both) would constitute insincere assertion.

On such a view, however, insincere assertion would cover both lies and cases of falsely implicating while not lying. Yet it is open to this kind of theorist to specify that lies are cases in which the assertion itself is insincere, that is, cases in which both the First Maxim of Quality and the Supermaxim of Quality are violated, whereas falsely implicating are cases

---

[14] See in particular Austin (1955: 18).
[15] See in particular, Searle (1969: 65).

of insincere assertion only in the sense that the Supermaxim of Quality is violated, while the First Maxim of Quality is observed.

However, the general proposal to characterize insincere assertion in terms of Quality maxims faces a more fundamental challenge. According to Gricean orthodoxy, the Quality maxims enjoy a special status in relation to the other maxims and the Cooperative Principle. First, in "Logic and Conversation", immediately after presenting his maxims, Grice comments,

> [G1] it might be felt that the importance of at least the first maxim of Quality is such that it should not be included in a scheme of the kind I am constructing; other maxims come into operation only on the assumption that this maxim of Quality is satisfied. (Grice 1989: 27)

Second, in the "Retrospective Epilogue" to *Studies in the Way of Words*, Grice wrote,

> [G2] The maxim of Quality, enjoining the provision of contributions which are genuine rather than spurious (truthful rather than mendacious), does not seem to be just one among a number of recipes for producing contributions; it seems rather to spell out the difference between something's being and (strictly speaking) failing to be, any kind of contribution at all. (Grice 1989: 371)

The first of these claims, G1, states that unless the speaker is obeying the First Maxim of Quality, the other maxims do not apply. The second, G2, states that unless the speaker is obeying "the maxim of Quality", by which Grice means the Supermaxim of Quality, she is not making a contribution to the conversation at all. So, taken literally, since lies are violations of both the First Maxim of Quality and the Supermaxim of Quality, G1 and G2 together imply that the other maxims do not apply to lies and that lies are not contributions at all.

The first of these consequences is threatened by the fact that lies can trigger conversational implicatures, just like other assertions.[16] Consider, for example, the following dialogue.

> Thelma has been drinking, but Louise is unaware of this.

> (4)   Louise. Are you OK to drive?

---

[16] For similar arguments, see Thomason (1990); Davis (1998).

Thelma. I haven't been drinking.

In this case Louise will take Thelma as having implicated that she is OK to drive. In turn, this implicature will be explained by appealing to the Maxim of Relation, "Be Relevant." (Grice 1989: 27) In other words, even though Thelma violates both the First Maxim of Quality and the Supermaxim of Quality, the Maxim of Relation still applies to her utterance. In turn, given the Gricean account of the reasoning involved in figuring out implicatures, the Cooperative Principle is likewise in operation for Thelma's utterance.

The second consequence from above, i.e. that lies are not genuine contributions, likewise appears doubtful. First, the fact that the other maxims apply to lies is evidence that lies are contributions to the conversation on a par with truthful utterances. Second, as noted, many agree that lies are assertions, and at least one reason for this is that the liar is attempting to communicate what she says.

So, a quick conclusion is that the behavior of lies with respect to implicature generation shows that Grice was wrong about the special status of Quality. Yet this conclusion is arguably too quick. Matthew Benton (in press) has argued that Grice's remarks concerning the special status of Quality should be understood in a way that emphasizes the audience's presumptions about the speaker. In general, the Gricean explanation of communication, and in particular of implicature-generation, relies not on observations concerning when the maxims are *in fact* obeyed, but concerning when the speaker is presumed to be obeying the principles. Implicatures arise from the audience's attempt to make sense of what the speaker said given the presumption that she is obeying the Cooperative Principle and the maxims.

Along these lines, one way of understanding G1 is as follows:

[G1*] Unless the audience presumes that the speaker is obeying the First Maxim of Quality, the audience does not presume that the speaker is obeying the Cooperative Principle and the other maxims.

This re-statement of G1 does not rule out an explanation of how Thelma's lie in (4) can give rise to the implicature. Since she is unaware of Thelma's insincerity, Louise is presuming that Thelma is obeying the First Maxim of Quality. So, even if the First Maxim of Quality has a special status among the maxims, since it is still presumed to be obeyed, the hearer's presumption that the other maxims apply is not blocked.

We can imagine a similar re-statement of G2 as follows:

> [G2*] Unless the audience presumes that the speaker is obeying the Supermaxim of Quality, the audience does not presume that the speaker is making a contribution to the conversation.

Again, in the case of (4), Louise is clearly presuming that Thelma is obeying the Supermaxim of Quality, and hence according to this way of interpreting Grice's claim about the centrality of the Supermaxim of Quality, it does not rule out that lies such as Thelma's are genuine contributions.

Louise's utterance is an example of a deceptive lie told in order to implicate further disbelieved information. However, as we have seen, lying is not necessarily deceptive. Bald-faced lies are not cases in which the audience presumes the speaker is obeying either the First Maxim of Quality or the Supermaxim of Quality. Rather, they are cases in which the audience knows that both maxims are violated. For example, the Dean in the case of the cheating student knows that what the student says, and wants to contribute, is false, and that the student knows it is false. The phenomenon of bald-faced lying therefore casts doubts on the Gricean conception of the centrality of Quality.

To see that bald-faced lying is evidence against G1*, notice that bald-faced lies can trigger implicatures. Consider a non-deceptive variant of the example above, as in (5).[17]

> Louise knows that Thelma is drunk. Thelma realizes that she knows this, and she realizes that Louise can see that she knows that Louise knows, etc.
>
> (5)   Louise. Are you OK to drive?
>   Thelma. I haven't been drinking.

In this case Louise will understand Thelma's reply as providing an affirmative answer to the question. That is, she will take Thelma as having implicated that she is OK to drive. To be sure, Louise will not *believe* this implicature, anymore than she will believe what was said. But the fact that the reply is understood as conveying that Thelma is OK to drive shows that Thelma's utterance is interpreted according to the Maxim of Relation. Yet Louise is not presuming that Thelma is obeying either the First Maxim of Quality or the Supermaxim of Quality. That bald-faced lies can trigger conversational implicatures, therefore, is evidence against G1*.

---

[17] Adapted from Bach and Harnish (1979: 58).

Further, G2* predicts that audiences of bald-faced lies do not take the bald-faced liar as making a genuine contribution to the conversation. So, both in the case of the cheating student and in the case of Thelma's bald-faced lie in (5), according to G2*, the hearer does not interpret the speaker as making a contribution to the conversation. However, as is often pointed out, bald-faced lies have all the characteristics of standard assertions, i.e. the bald-faced liar *warrants the truth* of what she says (Carson 2006; Carson 2010; Saul 2012) and bald-faced lies are proposals for *changing the common ground* of the conversation (Stokke 2013). For example, the student's lie about having cheated is the reason she escapes punishment, that is, the fact that she "goes on record" with this claim is the basis for the Dean's further actions.

The case of bald-faced lies shows that, contrary to the Gricean claim about the centrality of the First Maxim of Quality and the Supermaxim of Quality, it is not a condition on making a contribution to the conversation, and accordingly being interpreted in accordance with the Cooperative Principle and the other maxims, that one's contribution is presumed to be a truthful one.

References

Adler, J. (1997). "Lying, deceiving, or falsely implicating", *Journal of Philosophy* 94: 435–452.
Augustine. (1952a). *Against lying*. In R. Deferrari (Ed.), *Treaties on various subjects* (Vol. 16, pp. 125–179). Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.
Augustine. (1952b). *Lying*. In R. Deferrari (Ed.), *Treaties on various subjects* (Vol. 16, pp. 53–120). Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.
Austin, J.L. (1955). *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Bach, K., & Harnish, R. (1979). *Linguistic communication and speech acts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Benton, M. (in press). "Gricean quality".
Bok, S. (1978). *Lying: Moral choice in private and public life*. New York: Random House.
Carson, T. (2006). "The definition of lying", *Noûs* 40: 284–306.
Carson, T. (2010). *Lying and deception: Theory and practice*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Chisholm, R., & Feehan, T. (1977). "The intent to deceive". *Journal of Philosophy* 74: 143–159.

Davidson, D. (1985). "Deception and division". In J. Elster (Ed.), *The multiple self* (pp. 79–92). Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Davis, W. (1998). *Implicature: intention, convention, and principle in the failure of Gricean theory*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dynel, M. (2011). "A web of deceit: A neo-Gricean view on types of verbal deception", *International Review of Pragmatics* 3: 139–167.

Fallis, D. (2009). "What is lying?" *Journal of Philosophy* 106: 29–56.

Fallis, D. (2010). "Lying and deception", *Philosophers' Imprint* 10: 1–22.

Fallis, D. (2012). "Lying as a violation of Grice's first maxim of quality", *Dialectica* 66: 563–581.

Fallis, D. (2014). "Are bald-faced lies deceptive after all?" *Ratio Online*, 1–16.

Faulkner, P. (2007). "What is wrong with lying?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 75: 535–557.

Faulkner, P. (2013). "Lying and deceit". In H. LaFollette (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of ethics*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Frankfurt, H. (2005). *On bullshit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Grice, H. (1989). *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Isenberg, A. (1964). "Deontology and the ethics of lying", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 24: 465–480.

Kupfer, J. (1982). "The moral presumption against lying", *Review of Metaphysics*, 36: 103–126.

Lackey, J. (2013). "Lies and deception: An unhappy divorce", *Analysis*, 73: 236–248.

Mahon, J. (2008). "The definition of lying and deception", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Meibauer, J. (2005). "Lying and falsely implicating", *Journal of Pragmatics* 37: 1373–1399.

Meibauer, J. (2014). "Bald-faced lies as acts of verbal aggression". *Journal of Verbal Agression* 2: 127–150.

Neale, S. (1992). "Paul Grice and the philosophy of language". *Linguistics and Philosophy* 15: 509–559.

Pruss, A. (2012). "Sincerely asserting what you do not believe", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 90: 541–546.

Saul, J. (2012). *Lying, misleading, and what is said: An exploration in philosophy of language and in ethics*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Searle, J. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simpson, D. (1992). "Lying, liars and language", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52: 623–639.

Solan, L., & Tiersma, P. (2005). *Speaking of crime: The language of criminal justice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sorensen, R. (2007). "Bald-faced lies! Lying without the intent to deceive", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 88: 251–264.

Stokke, A. (2013). "Lying and asserting", *Journal of Philosophy* CX: 33–60.

Stokke, A. (2014). "Insincerity", *Noûs* 48: 496–520.

Thomason, R. (1990). "Accommodation, meaning, and implicature: Interdisciplinary foundations for pragmatics". In P. Cohen, J. Morgan, & M. Pollack (Eds.), *Intentions in communication* (pp. 325–363). Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press.

Williams, B. (2002). *Truth and truthfulness: An essay in genealogy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wilson, D. (1995). "Is there a maxim of truthfulness?" *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 7: 197–212.

Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (2002). "Truthfulness and relevance", *Mind* 111: 583–632.