On trying and lying: Cultural configurations of Grice's Maxim of Quality

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Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true
   a) Do not say what you believe to be false
   b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
H. P. Grice 1989: 45–47

Abstract

Gricean communication takes place when an audience recognizes an utterer's intention to communicate some specific content by producing a particular locution. This general view is discernible in Grice's wording of the maxim of Quality, which pivots on the idea of utterer "trying" to avoid falsehood. The cultural model of utterance interpretation among the Mopan Maya of Eastern Central America however, does not refer to the intentions of the utterer. For example, falsehoods are categorized by Mopan as blameworthy violations of Quality ("lying") whether or not the utterer was aware of the falsehood at the moment of utterance. Ethnographic evidence suggests that even mutually known falsehoods are not interpreted figuratively among traditional Mopan, who do not produce or recognize fiction. But since Mopan conversation otherwise proceeds in general very much as it does in other languages, the Mopan findings suggest that intention-seeking must not in fact be necessary to most ordinary conversational interaction. This conclusion supports post-Gricean views in which routine conscious interrogation of interlocutors' intentions are not necessarily required for the conduct of ordinary conversation in any society. Overall, the data suggest that Grice was perhaps right that the figurative interpretation of novel flouts requires intention-seeking on the part of audiences. It also suggests, however, that intention-seeking in conversation may be reserved for cases in which a maxim violation is suspected, and may be confined to those cases in which the status of utterer's intentions is culturally understood to be relevant to the question of whether a violation has indeed taken place.

1.   Introduction

As Grice's formulation makes clear, a violation of his maxim of Quality is first and foremost a failure to "try" on the part of the speaker. Among American college students (Heider 1958; Malle and Knobe 1997), an actor is taken to be "trying" to produce a particular outcome only if it is understood that s/he holds appropriate states both of belief and of desire with respect to his or her action. If the action is deliberately performed, but without on the one hand any belief that it will produce a particular outcome, or on the other without any desire to produce the outcome, English-speaking audiences will not accept that the actor "tried" to produce the outcome. In this research paradigm, the notion of "trying" is understood as a synonym for the much-vexed philosophical term "intention". It is in this sense that I use the word "intention" where it occurs below.

For Grice, the importance of the notion of intention in conversational interpretation goes well beyond the Maxim of Quality alone; it forms the departure point for an entire theory of communication. Gricean communication takes place when an audience recognizes an utterer's intention to communicate some specific content by producing some locution: "For some audience A, U intended his utterance of x to produce in A some effect (response) E, by means of A's recognition of that intention" (Grice 1989: 122). In full accord with this understanding, Grice's wording of the Maxim of Quality makes clear that the simple fact that an utterer speaks falsehood is not enough to create a violation. False utterances lacking the belief component of "trying" are not considered violations—they are considered mistakes. False utterances lacking the desire component are also not considered violations. It is for these cases that Grice elaborated his theory of the pragmatic flout.

Flouting of a Gricean maxim arises, of course, when utterers produce under conditions of mutual knowledge (Clark and Marshall 1981) linguistic tokens that might under other circumstances count as violations of a maxim (for example, for the Maxim of Quality, making a false utterance). In such a case the mutual knowledge condition allows audiences to use what they know about utterers' belief-states to make inferences about utterers' desire states as well. If an audience knows that an utterer knows that the audience knows that an utterance is false, then the audience assumes that there can be no rational component of any desire on the part of utterer to deceive. The audience then bestows a figurative reading such as fiction, metaphor, allegory or ostensible lie on the mutually known falsehood. (The tropes of irony, sarcasm, and other kinds of double-voicing [Bakhtin 1980 (1935)] are not here considered to arise as

flouts of the Maxim of Quality. Rather, with Wilson and Sperber [1992] and Haiman [1990], I view these as special kinds of quotation, reliant if anything upon flouts of Manner [Grice 1989] to signal their figurative construal).

1.1. *Across Cultures*

While it probably goes without saying that the Gricean view is intended to encompass interaction among all of the peoples and in all of the many tongues of the world, students of interaction in various parts of the world have frequently reported the existence of folk models of responsibility in meaning and action which are distinct from the Western one which gave rise to Grice's views (Danziger 2006, 2001, 1996; Duranti 1992; Gaskins 2006; Gaskins and Lucy 1986; Ochs Keenan 1976; Robbins 2001; Rosaldo 1982; Rumsey 1990; Warren 1995; see also Brice Heath 1982, 1983). In these cases, credit, responsibility and blame are all assigned with respect to tangible outcomes of actions, including degree of damage caused, rather than with respect to the intentions of the actors (for the historical view see Foucault 1978; Morris 1972; Snell 1953; Trilling 1974).

   The particular view of linguistic meaning and of blame for violation which relies on intention-seeking is also not the only one held even by modern Western folk in all conversational contexts. Consider for example, how one's signature on certain documents is considered binding whether or not one has read the fine print or the widespread resistance to modernization of the language of prayer. These are testimony to an everyday philosophy that takes the idea of responsibility for the relation between act and outcome as unrelated to the actor's belief or desire states. Mental state of utterer notwithstanding, those words are still divine, and having signed, one's bond has willy-nilly been engaged.

   Intention-seeking in conversation is perhaps most relevant in the context of a suspicion of a violation, and only in those culturally defined situations where the intentions of perpetrator (rather than degree of damage) are relevant to assessment of the severity of any kind of wrongdoing. Conversational analysts have in fact noted (Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984: 110) that utterer's intentions are perhaps most often considered by audiences only when there has been some form of trouble in the course of the interaction. It is only when potential violation is discovered that investigations must be undertaken as to the mental state of the utterer, in order to determine whether in fact a failure to "try" (violation of the maxim) has taken place. In cases of normal Gricean compliance, utterer's belief-states perhaps need not be an issue of interrogation for

audiences. Grice's intention-heavy formulation of the maxim of Quality is therefore perhaps derived from a cultural habit of post-hoc intention-seeking as part of the quest for responsibility where blame (or perhaps exceptional credit) is to be awarded.

We have, in short, access to many examples of cases in which audience assessment of utterers' intentions count for very little either in the interpretation of their utterances or in the assignment of responsibility for their actions. Such cases raise questions about the applicability of intention-seeking as a thoroughgoing and universal practice in the routine interpretation of conversational utterances, but unfortunately are normally documented only anecdotally. In what follows, I undertake a principled demonstration of the fact that among the Mopan Maya of Eastern Central America the question of whether an utterer does nor does not "try" to avoid falsehood is not considered relevant to the categorization of an utterance as a blameworthy violation of speech Quality. Blameworthy violations of Quality are understood by Mopan to occur regardless of an utterer's knowledge that s/he has spoken falsehood. Conversely, violations are understood not to occur if the utterer's words are in fact true, even without the utterer's knowledge of their veracity. I then draw out the implications of these observations for the question of intention-seeking in theories of utterance interpretation more generally.

1.2.   *Figurative Language*

As has recently been well explicated (Carston 2005; Haugh 2008), scholars in the field of linguistic pragmatics are today deeply divided on the question whether the Gricean theory, which relies so heavily on constant audience assessment of utterer intentions can adequately describe what utterers and audiences in fact do when conducting conversations. Those who question the Gricean view argue that, far from being pre-established in the minds of utterers, the meanings of utterances are emergent in the conduct of discourse, and subject to modification with each passing turn at talk. Since an utterer's belief or desire states may thus shift or change as the interaction progresses, the ultimate meaning of an utterance may have little or nothing to do with a simple act of audience recognition of utterer's pre-existing intentions. The actual mechanics of conversational interaction may, in short, owe more to "fast and frugal" (Gigerenzer and Goldstein 1996) procedures such as shared egocentrism (Barr and Keysar 2005), common ground (Clark 1996) and linguistic/cultural convention (Danziger 2006; Keller 1998; Sperber and Wilson 1986; see also DuBois 1986) than Grice's view would propose. Most utterances per-

haps need not routinely be interpreted to carry content about their utterers' intentions in order for conversations to proceed normally.

The fully Gricean view of the role of intention-seeking in the interpretation of routine conversation is therefore to some extent today in disfavor. The status of non-conventionalized flouts, however, remains an area of debate when it comes to the question of intention-seeking on the part of audiences. Recent work (Gibbs 1994) on metaphor comprehension has to some extent undermined Grice's proposal that literal meanings of metaphorical utterances are computed first, and that additional processing takes place once these are found to be false. The particular metaphors that were studied however, were highly conventional ones, and most recently the "graded salience" hypothesis (Giora 2003) has proposed that figurative language is interpreted differently according to (among other factors) its degree of novelty for the interpreter. Novel flouts would require more mutual knowledge assessment than conventionalized ones. This suggests that while both routine non-figurative conversation and familiar figures of speech might be interpreted directly, novel speech figures might require the full Gricean calculation for their interpretation. If so, the novel flout, possibly unlike most other forms of conversational exchange, would indeed depend upon audience calculation of utterer's belief-states for its success. While the actual occurrence of novel flouts might arguably be considered rare in conversation, as long as their occurrence remains a possibility they will also have to be considered—if only in order to be rejected—by truly Gricean audiences who reach a verdict of violation in any given conversational case. Similarly and more simply, a diagnosis of mistake, as distinct from lie, also cannot be reached without audience consideration of utterer's belief states.

If Gricean intention-seeking takes place anywhere in conversation then, it takes place in the interpretation of non-conventionally false utterances, where audience detects the falsehood. In such cases, audience beliefs about utterers' belief and desire states would seem to be the only arbiters which can decide between the alternative interpretations of mistake (blameless non-violation), novel flout (blameless pseudo-violation) and lie (blameworthy violation) of the Maxim of Quality. If novel flouts of Quality were found among the Mopan, we could reasonably conclude that intention-seeking in the context of false utterance indeed occurs among them, despite their documented philosophical intuitions to the contrary. In order to examine this possibility, a second stage of the investigation considers the range of artistic Mopan speech practices, with special attention to the question whether novel flouts of Quality, such as fiction, are readily found among them.

2.   The Mopan Maya

The Mopan Maya of Southern Belize in Eastern Central America are speakers of an indigenous Native American language of the Mayan family. They are subsistence farmers living a traditional peasant lifestyle (Danziger 2001; Gregory 1984; Howard 1975; Osborn 1982; Thompson 1930) in which formal education rarely extends past primary school (Crooks 1997). Children are monolingual until school age, and even many adults are not fluent bilinguals. The last century of Colonial and post-Colonial history in this region has had to do with British and not with Spanish-speaking rulers, so that where people are bilingual, it is in English, not Spanish. Written literature is not abundant and reading is rarely regarded as a pleasurable or leisure activity. Electronic media are also not widely available as sources of textual entertainment. Oral narratives are, however, repeated and enjoyed as a form of entertainment and instruction. Stories about magical and cannibalistic "wild people" are told, for example, as are others in which the Sun and Moon are personified as human-like individuals.

Blame for wrongdoing in Mopan society is assessed by the amount of damage done rather than by the perceived degree of prior intention to commit the crime. Indeed the question of a perpetrator's mental state is considered so irrelevant as not always to be included even in the re-telling of sensational crime stories (Danziger 2006). Mopan children's transgressions are routinely punished for the degree of damage caused and not for the degree of malice aforethought involved—to the point where the standard defense "I didn't mean to!" is unavailable to children in this society (see Danziger 2001:50, 2006. See also Gaskins 2006; Gaskins and Lucy 1986). Routinely, when adults come into conflict with one another, Mopan protagonists do not ruminate on the others' possibly valid alternative perspectives or motives, focusing instead on observable actions or slights (cf. Danziger 1996, 2008; Gregory 1975).

None of this means (contra Nuyts 1994) that Mopan agents do not have belief and desire states, nor even that Mopan do not know that they do. Words for mental states such as "want", "believe" and "know" exist in Mopan and are commonly used in Mopan talk. What it does seem to mean is that Mopan audiences do not consider these mental-state notions relevant to the assignment of blame for wrongdoing. If this holds true for interpretation of linguistic action as well, what counts as a violation of Quality should not turn on assessment of belief states, there should be few allowances made for mistakes, and the conditions for producing and understanding novel flouts of Quality should be absent from this society.

2.1. *The Definition of Lie*

In Mopan, much as in other parts of the world, there is moral disapproval of falsehood in speech. Stories, statements or anecdotes that are discovered not to be true are referred to as *tus* 'lying'. A negative connotation is always present to some degree in uses of this word.

The morally negative connotations of *tus* ('lying') notwithstanding, and again much as in other societies, Mopan everyday life is replete with occasions on which individuals are known to have lied (*tus*), and indeed, occasions on which individuals will admit to having themselves been guilty of lying (*tus*). What is striking to the outside observer is the degree to which this characterization appears to apply to all utterances perceived as literally false, regardless of what might be known of the belief or knowledge states of the utterer. In one rather sensational case for example, a Mopan neighbor was exceedingly distraught late one evening to learn that a friend of hers had been the victim of a fatal car accident in town. She vowed to my hostess that she would be up before dawn the next day to catch the only available transport into town in order to attend the funeral. In the event, our neighbor did not appear the next morning to catch the bus. "*Uchi u tus*" commented my hostess, without a trace of ironic hyperbole (which would in any case have been highly inappropriate given the tragic seriousness of the occasion): 'She lied'. In this example I was struck on the one hand by the apparent sincerity of the "liar's" intention, in a context of very evident emotional engagement, and on the other with the probable involuntary nature of the transgression (failing to wake up on time).

Such anecdotes are persuasive, but are limited in their ability to demonstrate conclusively that no calculation of intention was made before the characterization of *tus* ('lying') was assigned. Perhaps my hostess was actually of the opinion that our neighbor had never intended to catch the bus, but thought instead that our neighbor had simply spoken as she did in order to preserve appearances. In other words, perhaps the basis for my hostess' judgment of violation (*tus*) was that she believed (although I did not) that our neighbor had said something that she (the neighbor) actually believed at the time to be false.

In order to move beyond the level of anecdotal observation, I conducted a formal elicitation designed to gauge the degree to which Mopan audiences do or do not assess utterers' mental states in the context of false utterance. The following story, with associated judgment questions, is adapted from Coleman and Kay (1981), who established that for American English speakers, the belief state of an utterer is a criterial component, alongside literal falsehood of the utterance, in an audience's

assessment that a particular utterance counts as a blameworthy violation of the Maxim of Quality ("lie"). The Mopan language version of the story appears in Appendix A. Parentheses enclose segments that were presented only to some consultants (see discussion below):

1. There's something I'm thinking about, about your language. It's about lying. (First of all, do you think lying is a good thing, or is it a bad thing, or is it just in between?)
2. So there's a story I heard: There were a man and his wife who lived in a house on a hill. One day, the man wanted to go to the village to get drunk. He was a bad man. But he didn't want to tell his wife that he was going drinking. He said to her "I'm going to see my younger brother". It wasn't true. He was going to get drunk. He just said that. Was it a lie?
3. The man left, and soon the wife's mother came up the hill to visit her daughter. She came into the house and asked her daughter "Where has your husband gone?" Well, the wife had believed what her husband had told her before he left. She said to her mother "He's gone to see his younger brother". It wasn't true but she believed it. Was it a lie?
4. Finally, the man was on the road down to the village. He was heading towards the store where he could get liquor. He wanted to go drinking. But then, he got a surprise! There on the road he saw his younger brother! The very one he had told his wife he was going to see! His words had come true! So now, had he lied?

The story allows us to compare judgments between a case of literal falsehood in which the utterer knows his utterance is false (paragraph 2—a "Prototypical Lie" cf. Sweetser 1987), and on the one hand a case of literal falsehood without utterer knowledge of falsehood (Mistake, paragraph 3) and on the other, a case of utterer "knowledge" of falsehood where the knowledge turns out to be erroneous so that this is after all a case of literal truth (Surprise, paragraph 4).

2.2.   *Method*

The story was repeated to a total of 15 Mopan and 13 American English consultants. For all 13 Americans but for only 10 of the Mopan consultants, the three judgment questions (paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 above) were embedded in a longer version of the story, in which two additional episodes not directly relevant to the current argument figured. The difference in responses to the three judgment questions did not differ statistically between the two Mopan conditions of administration (longer and shorter versions of the story) and is not further considered.

Similarly, all 13 of the Americans but only 9 of the Mopan consultants were asked to respond to the question in paragraph 1 (is lying a good thing, a bad thing, or is it just in between?). Comparison of Mopan and US answers to this question is given below. The question whether or not a given participant had or had not answered this question had no statistical effect on the comparison of Mopan responses to the three subsequent judgment questions with the responses of the U.S. sample.

Each Mopan consultant heard the story individually, told in Mopan. Mopan consultants gave oral responses to the questions embedded in the story, which were immediately noted in writing. Any unsolicited additional comments were also briefly noted. This individualized method of response collection was necessary under the field conditions in which research with traditional Mopan was conducted, and results in a relatively small Mopan sample (but see LeGuen in preparation, for related work that will expand the Mayan sample considerably). Mopan respondents are anonymous, although data on approximate age and gender of respondents was recorded.

American respondents heard the story as a group, and each respondent wrote down his or her answers as the story proceeded. Response papers were anonymously turned in to me. Additional written comments were accepted but not explicitly invited. In light of the already well-documented responses of educated Americans to tasks of this kind (Coleman and Kay 1981; Sweetser 1987), as well as the high degree of unanimity in the American responses, special efforts were not made to collect data from a large sample of Americans.

Because this investigation sought to discover whether, under maximum conditions of social and cultural differentiation, differences could exist in the degree to which 'trying' is relevant to the construal of violation with respect to utterance Quality, no attempt was made to mitigate the educational and other demographic differences between the American and the Mopan samples; the Americans were middle-class and college-educated. The existence of massive differences in socialization experience between these two populations, and their possible effects on pragmatic intuitions, was in fact what motivated the study in the first place. It is extremely plausible that results similar to those from Mopan could perhaps be obtained from American respondents more similar to the Mopan ones in terms of education and occupation, or conversely, that educated Mopan consultants would respond very closely to the way that the Americans did. If so, the point that nurture as well as nature plays a role in the perceived importance of mental states for utterance interpretation would only be more strongly made.

2.3.   Results

2.3.1   *Evaluative Question (paragraph 1)*.   In order to supplement the ethnographic observation that Mopan *tus* carries a negative evaluation, and in order to answer the question that Mopan *tus* should perhaps best be translated simply as morally neutral 'falsehood' rather than as morally negative 'lies', a small number of Mopan and of American adults were asked to provide a forced-choice answer to the question do you think lying (*tus*) is a good thing, or is it a bad thing, or is it just in between (*ki waj a tusu, waj ma ki, wa chen tu p'is*)?

Table 1.   *Moral Judgments*

Is lying a good thing? Ki waj a tusu?	U.S.	Mopan	Total
Good	0	1	1
Bad	5	8	13
In between	8	0	8
Total	13	9	22

Of the 9 Mopan consultants who responded to this question, there was overwhelming agreement that 'lying' (*tus*) is 'not good' (*ma' ki'*). The blameworthiness of *tus* is in fact much greater than that of English *lie*. The size of the Mopan sample is too small to allow for within-sample statistical testing. The difference between the American and the Mopan sample however, is significant to a level of $p < .025$ by Fisher's Exact test (one-tailed).

The fact that Mopan *tus* is considered to be at least as blameworthy as is English *lie* establishes that in Mopan as in English, we are in the territory of a true violation rather than of morally neutral description, excusable mistake or blameless flout. We can assume on this basis that if a Mopan utterance is characterized by a Mopan-speaking audience as *tus*, that we have to do with something morally comparable to an English *lie*—in Gricean terms, a blameworthy violation of the Maxim of Quality.

2.3.2.   *Judgment Question 1: Prototypical Lie (paragraph 2)*.   All consultants, whether American or Mopan, showed remarkable agreement on the fact that the husband's original utterance in the story was a blameworthy violation of Quality (English *lie*, Mopan *tus*). The two populations are statistically maximally alike (p,1.0, Fisher's Exact test, both one tailed and two tailed). This baseline agreement allows us some confidence that any subsequent divergences between the two populations relates to subtleties of interpretation with respect to the circumstances under which false utterances will fall into this category.

Table 2.   *False Utterance which Speaker Knows to be False*

Was it a lie? / Tus waj?	U.S.	Mopan	Total
Yes	13	15	28
No	0	0	0
Total	13	15	28

2.3.3.   *Judgment Question 2: Mistake (paragraph 2).*   In the case of the wife's false utterance to her mother, Mopan and U.S. consultants diverge sharply in their judgments as to whether a blameworthy violation of Quality has taken place. Consistent with Grice's original formulation of the maxim, the U.S. consultants considered the speaker's belief state to be important in judging the blameworthiness of her false utterance, and no U.S. consultant considered that her utterance should be considered a *lie*. By contrast, the Mopan consultants overwhelmingly considered that the false utterance was a blameworthy violation (*tus*), even though it was clear from the story that the speaker herself believed the false utterance at the time that she made it. The difference between the U.S. and the Mopan pattern of responses reaches an extremely high degree of statistical significance ($p < .000003$ by Fisher's Exact test, both one tailed and two tailed).

Table 3.   *False Utterance which Speaker Believes to be True*

Was it a lie? / Tus waj?	U.S.	Mopan	Total
Yes	0	13	13
No	13	2	15
Total	13	15	28

2.3.4.   *Judgment Question 3: Surprise Ending (paragraph 4).*   Once again, the two populations show extreme divergence in their judgments as to whether the utterance should count as a blameworthy violation of Quality. Even though the utterance was understood to have come true after all, U.S. consultants unanimously judged that the speaker's belief that he was uttering a falsehood at the time that he spoke was enough to warrant a verdict of *lie*. Mopan consultants showed the opposite intuition: a large majority of consultants considered that if the words turned out to be true, the utterance could no longer be considered *tus*, regardless of speaker's belief state at the moment of utterance, Once more, the difference between the two populations reaches a high level of statistical significance ($p < .000003$ by Fisher's Exact test, both one tailed and two tailed). It is worth noting that the two Mopan respondents who answered

"yes" to question 3 are different individuals from the two who answered "no" to question 2.

Table 4.   *True Utterance which Speaker Believed to be False*

Was it a lie? / Tus waj?	U.S.	Mopan	Total
Yes	13	2	15
No	0	13	13
Total	13	15	28

Both of the Mopan respondents who judged that the man's utterance remained a blameworthy violation of Quality despite the fact that he did in the end see his brother justified this judgment by pointing to the technicality that because the grammatical future in Mopan (as in English) uses the form *b'el* 'go' , there is potential for ambiguity between a future occurrence of 'seeing' and a present one of 'going'. Since the man didn't travel towards (*b'el* 'go') his brother, but instead met him by accident on the road, the utterance remained false. Note that the logic of this argument is not to waive the priority of literal falsehood over utterer's mental state, but instead to insist on literal falsehood. No American respondent made use of this argument although it was in principle available to them.

2.4.   *Discussion*

As predicted, the Americans' judgments about whether a given utterance counted as a blameworthy violation of Quality (*lie*) depended far more upon their beliefs about utterer's belief state, and on their resultant understanding of whether s/he 'tried' to speak the truth, than upon their beliefs about the actual falsehood of the utterance (see also Sweetser 1987; Coleman and Kay 1981). But the Mopan results show just the opposite. In determining whether a particular utterance counted as *tus*, it mattered far more to the Mopan respondents whether the utterance was actually false than whether the utterer believed it was false when s/he made it. In particular, Mopan judgments about the surprise ending to the story (paragraph 3) make absolutely clear that the 'behavioral commitments' (Malle and Knobe 1997) of the speaker are not the issue for Mopan audiences who are asked to make the judgment whether a given false utterance counts as a blameworthy violation of Quality. In this case, audience understanding of the nature of the speaker's intentions at the moment of speaking (including his intention to dupe his wife) have not changed. But the Mopan interpretation of the speech act category into which this utterance falls certainly has.

The importance of utterer's mental state for the American respondents is corroborated by inspection of their comments on the judgments they made. The comments are rife with mention of what the story participants "knew" "believed" and "intended", to the virtual exclusion of other considerations. Mopan comments also acknowledge the difficulty of the judgments that were required, the awkwardness of the wife's situation, and the oddness of the narrative twist at the end. But the Mopan comments do not mention participants' knowledge or belief states. In fact, two consultants separately suggested that God himself had taken care that the brother should be out on the roadway that day—exactly in order that the wife back home should not have lied (*tus*) to her mother!

Overall, we see a considerable difference between Mopan and American judgments in this elicitation. The intention of the utterer to speak what s/he believes to be false counts highly in the American classification of the speech act, and distinguishes blameworthy violations from other kinds of speech acts. By contrast, actual truth value counts highly for Mopan in designation of a speech act as a blameworthy violation. No category of forgivable mistake as distinct from violation appears in the Mopan data, but the judgment of violation is withdrawn if the utterance turns out to be true, even unbeknownst to the original utterer. This indifference to utterer's belief-state on the part of Mopan audiences means that the question of whether an utterer "tries" to make the utterance true cannot be relevant to the judgment. Mopan speakers do often prefer silence or explicit linguistic hedging to verbal commitment, especially under doubtful empirical conditions such as the reporting of another's intentions (Danziger 1996, 2008. For other cultural groups for which this is also reported see Basso 1970; Irvine and Hill 1992). My contrived Mopan wife, for example, was certainly quite rashly verbose in her reply to her mother's query. The most idiomatic Mopan formulation in this kind of situation would include a quotative to indicate that what she is reporting are the words of another.

There is clear evidence here for the fact that Grice's maxim of Quality undergoes considerable cultural inflection between the Mopan and the American contexts. The inclusion of the predicate "try" in Grice's wording of the maxim reflects a culturally particular and not a culturally universal view of what constitutes a blameworthy violation. Mopan audiences in short, appear here to be following a Maxim of Quality that reads simply:

Quality: Make your contribution one that is true
       a)   Do not say what is false
       b)   Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

3.   Violations and Flouts

Since Grice was clear that the intention-seeking which goes into utterance interpretation should ultimately be accessible to awareness (1989: 30–31), we might predict from his model that conversation under cultural philosophies like that of the Mopan, which disregard utterer's belief and desire states, should be pragmatically quite distinct from that which takes place under cultural philosophies which place great weight on utterer's belief and desire states. Contrary to the Gricean prediction however, Mopan conversation does not in general appear to operate under pragmatic principles which are very different from those which govern conversation in cultures which emphasize utterer's intentions. There is some culturally dictated caution in making unverified statements, and perhaps there are even a relatively high number of accusations of 'lying' (*tus*) among the Mopan, since even falsehoods uttered by mistake come into the category. But in general, most Mopan conversation is pragmatically unremarkable. As a first conclusion then, these Mopan observations offer support for post-Gricean views in which routine conscious interrogation of interlocutors' intentions are not necessarily required for the conduct of ordinary conversation in any society.

In addition to the possibly minor conversational function of distinguishing mistakes from lies (which we have now seen to be cross-culturally non-universal), intention-seeking is also necessary, even in post-Gricean theories, if interactants are to distinguish between blameworthy violations and the blameless flouts of Quality which result in figurative construals such as metaphor or fiction. The mutual knowledge stipulation for the production of a novel flout of Quality means that an audience consults utterer's belief-states in deciding how to construe a false utterance. In this case, the audience uses what it knows about the utterer's beliefs about audience beliefs in order to infer that the utterer is lacking the desire component of "trying" to deceive, since audience knows that utterer knows that such an attempt would fail. If novel flouts of Quality could be found among the Mopan, this would be serious grounds for re-considering the conclusion that Mopan regard what they know about an utterer's belief-states as irrelevant to their interpretation of his or her utterance. We could reasonably conclude that intention-seeking indeed occurs among the Mopan, conscious philosophical intuitions to the contrary notwithstanding (in this case Grice would of course be wrong about the ultimate derivation of all interpretations from conscious rationalizations). Before concluding my argument, therefore, I examine the world of traditional Mopan verbal art for the possible occurrence of novel flouts of Quality, particularly institu-

tionalized fiction. Mopan attitudes and reactions to introduced fiction are also described.

3.1.   *Mopan Attitudes toward Fiction*

One or two prosperous Mopan families have since the 1980s owned electrical generators and VCRs. But it has always been difficult in remote Mopan communities to find tapes to play on them. When I left the village after my first long stay (and before I had begun researching issues of truth and lies in Mopan), I was asked to bring back videotapes for entertainment when I returned. I did so. The first commercial tape which I supplied was Walt Disney's <u>The Jungle Book</u>. It was received with enthusiasm, as I had hoped it would be—it is colorful and amusing and because of the rainforest setting proved very interpretable even to older and monolingual Mopan people. But it does show some troubling scenes. In this film, a baby is abandoned in the forest and taken by wild beasts— and they don't eat him. Later, the boy develops the disturbing habit of playing happily with jungle cats and other wild animals. Perhaps most alarming of all, in one choreographed scene Mowgli not only touches but actually dances with Kaa the snake. In Southern Belize constrictors are unknown, but the region is home to snakes which harbor some of the world's fastest-acting and deadliest poisons.

At last one day a good friend asked me doubtfully if all of this were really true. When I answered that of course it was not, I was surprised at her shocked reaction. She seemed to think that if this story was not true, it could only be considered *tus* "lies". I discovered that this conclusion holds true for all areas in which narrative output must be assessed or evaluated in Mopan. While narratives in various media offer fascinating plots and themes, no classificatory distinction is made in Mopan between stories involving supernatural creatures and those involving actual accounts of events in the speaker's own life. If stories are discovered not to be true, they are not excused as fictions, they are condemned as *tus*. The basis for literal belief in the content of stories recounted by trusted tellers is clearly not always a strictly empirical one. On one occasion when I asked a storyteller whether a story he had just told that featured talking animals was actually true, he replied in some dudgeon that it was. "But do animals really talk?" I asked. "Not nowadays", he replied, "but they used to."

Mopan verbal art thus includes no genre of literary fiction. In this connection, probably the most telling of all among the Mopan comments on the Definition of Lie story was one that was made by several different consultants as the story first got under way: "*mak' winikil?*" they asked, 'What man was this?'

3.2.   *Mopan Art*

If Mopan verbal art does not include a genre of institutionalized fiction, it is not, for all that, colorless, unexciting, or bland. Although Mopan do not tell anecdote-based jokes, they do enjoy a good pun. And while adults do not readily tolerate children's fantasy play, children are encouraged to rehearse actual adult tasks in play (cf. Carlson et al. 1998). Neither are Mopan incapable of imagistic comparison or relational mapping across domains, cognitive capacities sometimes proposed as connected to the capacity for metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) . These are readily accomplished in Mopan speech through the use of similes, in which literal truth is fully preserved.

Mopan people value the performance of poetic and musical texts, and they heartily enjoy artistic displays of sensation and spectacle. Stories are told for example about giant gorilla-people who live in the forest, or about shape-changing ''wild people'' who lure humans to their village and then cook and eat them. Narrative genres of festive enactment and dance exist among the Mopan. But the stories that are told and enjoyed in these various media are all expected to be literally true. The masks which dancers don in order to portray characters in these dramas are feared as magical personae (Danziger 2001, 1996).

The prohibition on the telling of false stories is commonly explained by Mopan as stemming from the religiously-charged concept of *tzik* 'respect' (Danziger 2001, 1996). *Tzik* forbids incest, murder, unruliness, laziness, and levity as well as dishonesty. In this philosophy, linguistic signifieds are considered to be directly related to their signifiers, without mediation of utterer intention that they should be so. Words and expressions have the power to affect the world in and of themselves, regardless of speakers' intentions and beliefs. A sacred morality thus inheres in the relationship of spoken word to actual world, and the nature of the transgression involved in speaking falsehood is cosmological at least as much as interpersonal. As such, the inner state of the transgressor can count for very little in mitigating any wrong done.

With some understanding of these philosophical underpinnings, it becomes obvious that the blameworthiness of the violations of the Mopan maxim of Quality (*tus*), does not arise entirely from the relationship of such violations to the rupture of communicative cooperation (Grice 1989). Rather, they relate to maintenance of cosmic harmony on the religious and metaphysical level.

To violate the prohibitions of Mopan *tzik* 'respect' is called in Mopan *p'a'as*, a term which takes in every kind of abuse of *tzik* ('respect'), and whose translational range goes all the way from 'teasing' through 'mock-

ery' and 'insult' to 'blasphemy'. Such abuses certainly occur. The claim here is not that the local philosophy of *tzik* ('respect') cannot be violated. It is that, because of Mopan ideas about the direct metaphysical relation of world to world, and the concomitant unimportance of utterer's intentions in the nature of the wrong done by speaking falsehood, it cannot, in Gricean terms, be flouted.

4.   Conclusion

As Grice formulated his Maxim of Quality, a judgment of violation ("lies") is not reached simply by audience's judgment that an utterance is literally false. Because of the stipulation of "trying" in the maxim, deciding upon an appropriate construal in the context of uttered falsehood requires calculation by audience of utterer's belief and desire states with regard to this falsehood. In order for a Gricean audience to arrive at a construal of lie, construals of mistake and of flout must first be considered and discarded, as audiences verify that both the belief and the desire components of utterer's "trying" to obey the maxim are indeed absent. By contrast, the formal elicitation here reported documents that in Mopan Maya, literal falsehood is indeed interpreted as a blameworthy violation of conversational Quality, regardless of what the audience knows about the belief or desire states of the utterer. Grice's specific formulation of the Maxim in terms of "trying" does not therefore apply across all cultures, and may need to be re-formulated to fit specific cultural cases.

Despite their indifference to utterers' belief-states in the context of false utterance, Mopan everyday conversation can readily be observed to proceed in much the same way as elsewhere in the world. More generally, therefore, the Mopan data support the post-Gricean position that, in all cultures, the mechanisms of routine conversational exchange are able to manage largely without recourse to conscious seeking-out of utterer's intentions and belief-states.

Even post-Griceans however, might agree that the figurative interpretation of novel falsehood which is involved in the interpretation of fiction must derive from audience attention to utterer's mental state, via the fact that such interpretation depends upon mutual knowledge of the utterance's falsehood. If fiction could be found in the Mopan repertoire of verbal art, we could assume that intention-seeking in fact does take place in this culture, conscious philosophical intuitions and reflective judgments to the contrary. But while many forms of institutionalized verbal art, including narrative spectacle, occur in traditional Mopan culture, the figurative reading of novel falsehood (fiction) is not among them. This observation

reinforces the conclusion that audience beliefs about the belief states of utterer are indeed not consulted by Mopan before reaching the judgment that a false utterance violates the maxim of Quality.

Overall, the data suggest that although Grice was perhaps right that the figurative interpretation of novel flouts requires attention to utterers' mental states on the part of audiences, he was probably wrong in proposing that such seeking is a necessary, constant or universal aspect of utterance interpretation across all times and places. Intention-seeking in conversation may be reserved for cases in which a maxim violation is suspected, and it may be confined to those cases in which the status of utterer's intentions is culturally understood to be relevant to the question of whether a violation has indeed taken place.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A The Mopan Story

Orthography is as in England and Elliott (1990).

Parentheses represent segments not heard by all participants—see discussion

1. Yan a k'ui in tuklik aleeb'e, yok'ol a t'an, yok'ol a tus. Tus aleeb'e. (Ichil a tukulu, ki waj a tusu, waj ma ki, waj chen tu p'is?)
2. Pes yan a kweenta in wuyaj. Jun tuul winik, yan u yotoch pol witz'. Yan u yätan. A winiki, u k'ati kuchij u b'el ich kaj ti uk'ul boj. K'as a winiki. Pere k'ui, mu k'ati u yadaj ti u yätana. U yadaj ti'i ''Bel in kaa in wila in witz'iin''. Ma' jaji. Uk'ul b'oj u b'el. Pere chen u yadaj ti b'oob'e'. Tus waj?
3. Aleeb'e, b'ini a winik. A nooch ch'upu, tali ti sut etel u yal. Oki ich naj. U k'ata ti u yal (tukaye) ''Tub'a b'ini a wicham?'' Ix ch'upu, u tz'oksaj leek a k'ui u yadaj u yicham samij. ''B'ini u yila u yitz'iin'' kut'an ti u na'. Ma' jaji, pere u tz'oksaj. Tus waj?
4. U yada'a: leek a winiki, te' keen ti b'ej. Tan u b'el tojil tienda, u k'ati uk'ul. Pere k'ui'i, sati u yool! Te' ti b'ej u yilaj u yitz'iin! Leek ilik u yadaj ti u yätan ti b'el u kaa u yila'! Jajaji u t'an! Aleeb', uchi waj u tus?