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### *Irreality, negative meanings and intensifiers*

poster presentation in workshop: 120 Negation and  
polarity: interfaces and cognition (Pierre LARRIVÉE &  
Chungmin LEE)

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## Irreality, negative meanings and intensifiers

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This presentation points out that the irreality is sometimes related to negative meanings (rejection) or intensifiers (affirmation), and show why people occasionally choose such unreal expressions instead of “no” or “very much.” This is a violation of Grice’s maxims particularly concerning manner. Grice (1975) proposed the Cooperative Principle, and the four maxims of which are: (1) The maxim of quantity (2) quality (3) relation (4) manner (Be perspicuous: 1. Avoid obscurity of expression. 2. Avoid ambiguity. 3. Be brief. 4. Be orderly.) By intentionally violating this principle, the speaker leaves a stronger impression upon the listener than if simply and directly saying “no” or “very much.” Larrivée (2004:45) states that “La définition sémantique de la valeur de négation est délicate,” and points out various fields that negation concerns. With reference to rejection, he states, “le rejet conteste un assertion,” and examines the validity and nature of refusal by inserting terms such as “en effet,” “Tu parles!,” and “Mon œil!” (*ibid.*: 46) There are numerous ways of rejecting and affirming, and this paper reveals two similar but different motivations that characterize their functions.

I will divide unreal expressions into two categories. First, the false and opposition from the truth/real world can convey a negative attitude (rejection /possible dispraising) of the speaker.

(1) Alice: Will you take me to Paris?

John: If the sun rises/rose/were to rise in the west.

Besides the anti-veridicality, polarity is being used. As a rejection, “west” is preferred to “north” or “south” to say “no,” since people normally see those directions as rigid oppositional pairs.

(2) Bert: Do vegetarians eat hamburgers?

Ernie: Do chickens have lips? (Yule: 1999:43-44)

The simple relevant answer is “no.” They convey an offensive and risky attitude. The contrast between reality vs. anti-veridical irreality (truthfulness vs. falseness) is the motivation for interpretation. If the reply were less anti-veridical and potentially realizable, it would not become a rejection, but rather a simple transaction. (Alice: Will you take me to Paris? /John: If I get a pay raise this month.) This should also be distinguished from below.

(3) Rick: Hey, coming to the wild party tonight?

Tom: My parents are visiting.

(3) is not based on polarity/irreality. By omitting “no” and giving a reason, the listener can infer it as an indirect and polite rejection through conversational implicature.

Second, not all the irrealities are connected to rejection or “no.” In “Do you love me? /Eight days a week, I love you,” the irreal excessive limit-breaking amount is interpreted as an intensifier. “Eight” cannot be replaced by “one /two /three /four /five /six /seven /nine /or more” to mean “very much.” Excessive degrees on certain scales can be illustrated by irreal expressions, but not always negative evaluative. Here they denote a large amount exceeding the norm, or intensifying the degree.(i.e.“I love you as deep as the sea /as high as the sky”) These are another type of anti-veridical and irreal expressions, but those based on scales, rather than oppositions.

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