

In Search of Implicatures

Here is a conversation between two characters in *Celestial Navigation* (Anne Tyler):

"In a week or so it will be spring," Brian told me. "Then would be a good time for you to be out there." [Brian]

"It's a good time now," I said. "It's spring now." [Mary]

"This morning I could see my breath." [Brian]

"We're not made of glass, you know." [Mary]

"Mary, that cabin is no better than sleeping out. Maybe you've forgotten. There's no heat, no -"
[Brian]

"I remember that," I said, "but it's the only place I know of to go." Then I saw his face close over, braced for me to begin my story. I said, "And I certainly do thank you. Last time we were there the children loved it." [Mary]

The closed look didn't fade. he said, "Tell me this, Mary. How long were you planning to stay?"
[Brian]

"Well, I hadn't made any definite plans yet." [Mary]

"I mean -" [Brian]

"Probably not long," I said. I felt I had to help him out. [Mary]

"I hope you don't mind my asking but do you have enough money?" [Brian]

"Oh yes," I said. [Mary]

"Because if you don't, now-" [Brian]

"Brian, you know better than anyone that Jeremy's just sold four pieces," I said. [Mary]

Actually the little money Jeremy had made was still in the bank, and I had left the checkbook on his bureau, where he would be sure to find it.

Grice's Maxims ("Logic and conversation", in *Syntax and Semantics: Speech Acts*, 1975, edited by Peter Cole and Jerry Morgan: 45-7):

1. The Maxim of Quantity
 - a. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
 - b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
2. The Maxim of 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.
3. The Maxim of Relevance: Be relevant.
4. The Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous.
 - a. Avoid obscurity of expression.
 - b. Avoid ambiguity.
 - c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 - d. Be orderly.