A new look at Grice's (1975) 'Logic and Conversation'
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With Grice's seminal 'Meaning' (1957) and 'Logic and Conversation' (1975), a new discipline was born: Gricean pragmatics. This area of study revolves around speakers' intentions, and hearers' inferences about speakers' intentions. In 'Logic and Conversation' (1975), more specifically, a principle guiding human conversation (and indeed human interaction) called «The Cooperative Principle» was introduced, along with the idea of conversational implicature. While post-Griceans, such as Relevance Theorists (e.g. Carston, Sperber and Wilson) focused on so-called Particularized Conversational Implicatures (PCIs), neo-Griceans (e.g. Horn and Levinson) devoted their attention to Generalized Conversational Implicatures (GCIs). Especially GCIs linked to the first maxim of Quantity («Be informative»), called «scalar implicatures», have attracted a lot of interest in theoretical and experimental work alike. This is probably attributable to the fact that, in the introduction of 'Logic and Conversation', Grice suggested that the aim of his article was to show that the divergences in meaning between logical operators (such as that of negation, disjunction and existential quantification) and their natural language counterparts («not», «or», and «some») are illusory. In other words, his aim was to reconcile logic and natural language semantics (hence the title 'Logic and Conversation').
In this talk, I will propose a "deep reading" of Grice's 'Logic and Conversation'. We will think critically about the notions of «maxim flouting», «clash between maxims», about implicatures' characteristics such as «non-detachability», «cancelability», «calculability», and the possibility of non-redundant affirmation, as well as about Grice's famous principle «Modified Occam's Razor» (a version of Occam's Razor applied to semantics) which has often been used as a guiding principle in Gricean pragmatics. I will also talk about the Gricean derivation of scalar implicatures and its problems.
The aim of this talk is to develop a better understanding of 'Logic and Conversation' and to question the common doctrine of scalar implicature theory. This will be a common enterprise between speaker and audience, with hopefully a fruitful and animated discussion afterwards.