

# Conversational Implicature for Language Teachers

*Reading between the lines in John Marsden's Tomorrow, when the war began*



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

Author: Alva Thyr

Supervisor: Claes Lindskog

Term: Autumn 2020

Course: ÄEND14 English IV

Individual Paper (15 hp)

English Teacher Education

## Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how John Marsden's *Tomorrow, when the war began* (1993) could be used for reading-between-the-lines practice in the English language classroom. It answers questions relating to how reading between the lines can be understood in relation to Grice's cooperative principle, the effects of implicature in the text and how teachers can use this information to facilitate reading between-the-lines practice. These questions are answered through an analysis of a young adult novel, *Tomorrow, when the war began*, which is considered suitable for use in Swedish upper-secondary English-teaching. The study draws on perspectives from Gricean theory and teaching practice, including reader response and reciprocal teaching. To collect data the novel was coded after five categories based on Grice's theory of conversational implicature. The analysis is focused on how reading-between-the-lines relates to the cooperative principle. This is described using examples from the narrator as well as conversations between characters. These examples form the basis for a discussion of the effects of implicature and how this can inform the planning of teaching activities. The results show that conversational implicature can be a way for teachers to understand reading-between-the-lines in literature and that the effects of implicatures include humoristic comments, character description and the creation of suspense which makes the story more interesting and engaging to read. Teachers can use this knowledge to plan reading activities to activate reading-between-the-lines strategies in several ways.

**Keywords:** Grice's maxims, conversational implicature, reading between the lines, teaching reading, John Marsden, *Tomorrow, when the war began*

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## Introduction

Understanding how something is done can be the key to successfully teaching it to others, but when it comes to reading this is not necessarily easy to do. The advanced reader is usually not actively thinking about how they read and therefore it can be difficult to recognise what makes reading hard to learn for others (Dehaene, 2010, pp. 218-219). In the language classroom, a separation of reading ability into specific sub skills, one of which is reading between the lines, could be a way of focusing instruction to help the struggling or reluctant reader improve their reading abilities (Li & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 161). Such a separation can present smaller individual achievements as a shorter way to accomplishment and learning experience, as opposed to conquering every aspect of reading a text all at the same time.

For those who feel that they cannot read or find the meanings in the text that the teacher is asking for, it can be helpful to focus on gaining a basic understanding of how to read between the lines and find different meanings. In research about reading skills, and the practice of them, reading between the lines is also referred as inferencing, or making inferences (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2019, p. 23). This paper focuses on reading between the lines since this is an important ability that helps readers uncover meanings in a text or in a conversation. One way of understanding this is with pragmatics, which is concerned with communicative intentions and the strategies used to understand and recognise those intentions (Davis, 1991, as cited in Keba & Perry, 2020). Thus, pragmatics research can offer perspectives on spoken and written intention, when and why they occur and how they can be understood, as a way of understanding reading between the lines. This can help teachers give learners a better understanding of contextual language use and how to make inferences.

Within the field of pragmatics, conversational implicature is one way of understanding what makes reading between the lines necessary. Grice (1991) uses the term implicature when referring to instances where the words used to express meaning do not match meaning

intended with the utterance (p. 23). When encountering implicatures, reading between the lines is needed to fully understand the message. A distinction between what is said, or written, and what is meant can be made by considering, in addition to the words themselves, the context in which it was said, general background information and whether the cooperative principle is followed or not (Grice, 1967a/1989, as cited in Kepa & Perry, 2020). According to Grice (1991) conversational implicature follows from exploitation of the cooperative principle. In his view, the cooperative principle represents the idea that participants in a conversation are expected to make contributions which are acceptable to the purpose of the conversation at hand (p. 26). Speakers who exploit this principle in a fashion which results in a conversational implicature expect others to read between the lines and understand the meaning they intend to contribute (Grice, 1991, p. 31). The cooperative principle is explained in more detail as part of the theoretical framework since it is a central part of the theory used for the analysis presented in this paper.

When teaching reading, it is not only necessary to understand the reading skills which make up our reading ability, but also to understand how skills practice can be successfully facilitated in the classroom. When working with literature in the language classroom, the use of meaningful discussion can effectively create opportunities for learning as both collective and individual understandings of the text are negotiated (Roen & Karolides, 2005, as cited in Woodruff & Griffin, 2017, p. 111). Li and D'Angelo (2016) suggest reciprocal teaching as a way of facilitating discussion around texts and meaning in text while Woodruff and Griffin (2017) suggest ways in which teachers can work with reader response to do the same. Reciprocal teaching and reader response move the focus from the teacher's reading and interpretation of a novel to the students, giving them more responsibility for their own reading and learning (Li & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 180; Woodruff & Griffin, 2017). Involving the students with their reading and validating their interpretations, instead of only focusing on the

teacher's interpretation as the most valid one, can be an important part of helping learners become better readers (Sandgren, 2018). These approaches to teaching highlight important aspects of teaching language through reading and connect the practice of reading between the lines to current pedagogy in the language classroom.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the young adult novel *Tomorrow, when the war began* by John Marsden (1993) can be used to practice reading between lines and how teachers can facilitate this practice in their classrooms. To achieve this aim Marsden's novel is analysed and points where reading between the lines is necessary are discussed. The investigation brings together current knowledge about language, language-use, and language-teaching to answer the following questions:

### **Background**

This section begins with an introduction of the theoretical framework which informs the understanding of reading between the lines in this study. Furthermore, it illustrates the importance of this study in relation to the context of Swedish upper-secondary English-education. Lastly, it introduces previous research relating to the topics of implicature in literature, teaching implicature and practicing reading skills in the classroom.

### **Theoretical framework**

This section presents Grice's theory of conversational implicature which is central to the analysis presented in this paper. The section is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the cooperative principle, which forms the basis of the theory used in the analysis. The second part formulates the idea of reading between the lines in terms of breaking or flouting the cooperative principle and its maxims.

### *The cooperative principle*

As previously mentioned, what is said, or written, can be determined by three different factors: the context, the words themselves and the cooperative principle. This cooperative principle has been explained by Grice (1991) as the expectations placed on an utterance by those who hear, or read, it. At the core of the cooperative principle are the maxims of quality, quantity, manner, and relation which each represent a different aspect of the expectations placed on utterances (Grice, 1991, pp. 26-28). When these are adhered to the meaning of the words is straightforward in the context where they were uttered. If it is assumed that the conversational principle is being observed, the hearer will make the necessary interpretations to maintain this assumption, even if the maxims are not being followed (Grice, 1991, p.30). This is when reading between the lines could occur, since the deduced or inferred meaning may be different from the meaning of the words uttered. As the maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner are key features of Grice's theory, which can be used to identify implicatures, they will be further explained below:

*The maxim of quantity* refers to the expectation that replies of interlocutors will be informative enough (Grice, 1991, p. 26). For example, if you ask your partner if they want pasta or soup for dinner and their reply is 'Yes', this reply is not informative enough since you still have no idea which of the foods they would like for dinner.

*The maxim of quality* refers to the expectation that people only say what they know to be true, or have reason to believe is true (Grice, 1991, p. 27). For example, an expression like 'Why am I always cleaning the fucking floor!' does not follow this principle, since the statement cannot be considered reasonably true.

*The maxim of manner* refers to the expectation that others reply in a way which is brief, orderly, and not obscure or ambiguous (Grice, 1991, p. 27). This means that when someone is

talking, they are expected to give details succinctly and in the right order so that no ambiguity is created around what they mean to say.

*The maxim of relation* represents the expectation that others will say things that are relevant to the conversation at hand (Grice, 1991, p. 27). For example, we would not expect someone to reference their relationship history when answering a question about x in algebra class.

### ***Flouting or breaking a maxim***

Even though the conversational maxims above govern the expectations placed upon a talk exchange, situations where they are not observed may occur. According to Grice (1991) the cooperative principle may be assumed to be in effect even when the maxims are not observed. For example, a speaker may flout a maxim, making it obvious that the maxim in question is not observed. When that is the case, assuming the speaker could fulfil the maxim without breaking another, a conversational implicature occurs where reading between the lines is necessary to maintain the assumption that the cooperative principle is followed (Grice, 1991, pp. 30-31). The conversational maxims may not be observed in other ways as well. For example, they may be broken quietly in a misleading fashion, a speaker may opt out and make it clear that they are not being cooperative or a non-observance of one maxim may be necessary to observe a different one (Grice, 1991, p. 30). While reading between the lines seems to be mainly related to conversational implicature, it is possible that it can occur in other cases where a maxim is being broken as well.

### **Relation to educational policy**

Developing reading skills, such as the ability to read between the lines, is ultimately part of the English teacher's mission. The syllabus for English in Swedish upper secondary school states that teaching should help students develop their "[u]nderstanding of spoken and written English, and [...] the ability to interpret content" (Skolverket, n.d.-b). The ability to interpret



content can be explained as not only understanding the literal meaning of words, but also considering their meaning in context and reading between the lines (Skolverket, n.d.-a, p. 6). Since conversational implicatures requires the reader to interpret content beyond the literal meanings of the words an understanding of this could help teachers plan teaching which fulfils the goals of the syllabus for the subject of English in Swedish upper-secondary-school. Reading between the lines can also be considered a necessary skill when it comes to the use of books as a tool for learning and communication. The curriculum for upper-secondary education in Sweden states that this ability, to “use books [...] as a tool in the search for knowledge, communication, creativity and learning”, is something all students who finish a national programme should have (Skolverket, 2013). Consequently, reading between the lines is a skill which teachers of English in Swedish upper-secondary-school should understand to fulfil their mission and responsibilities toward their students.

### **Literature review**

This section presents previous research which relates to the objectives of this study in three different sections. Firstly, it considers implicature in literature to show how Grice’s theory and other related theories have been used to study literature. This relates to the literary analysis which is central to the study presented in this paper. Secondly, research which connects literature with language teaching is considered, primarily from the perspective of student-teachers within a Swedish research context. This places the study within the context of English educational research for Swedish upper secondary school. Lastly, current research in reading comprehension and reading engagement is considered to form a basis for the understanding of how teachers can use the analysis when teaching.

### ***Implicature in Literature***

The analysis of implicature in literary works is not a new idea and has been done previously by literary scholars. In *Towards a Speech Act Theory for Literary Discourse*, Mary Louise Pratt became one of the first scholars to argue the application of Grice's theory in literary discourse. In her view every implicature in literature ought to be considered conversational due to the nature of the exchange (Chapter 5). More recent scholars have used the theory when studying conversation between characters in literature. For example, Risdianto (2016) makes use of the theory in an analysis of the dialogue in Oscar Wilde's "Happy Prince" to show that dialogue in the text is easier to understand when the cooperative principle is followed (p. 219). These conclusions can be considered obvious since the relationship they illustrate directly follows from the definition of conversational implicature. However, they do provide a starting point for the reverse assumption that a text is made more difficult to read when the cooperative principle is not followed.

The study of implicature in fictional dialogue has been further extended to include on-screen TV-dramas. In a recent study of implicature in *How to get away with murder* and *Fresh prince of Bel Air* the most common effect of flouting a maxim was shown to be for dramatic and comedic effect respectively (Tosic, 2020, pp. 23-24). While studies like Tosic's may be focused on the use of Grice's theory to study conversation, this is not its only possible application. Where reading is concerned dialogue does not only occur between characters; it also occurs between the reader and the text (Pratt, Chapter 4). Thus, further applications of the theory can be useful at the intersection of literary studies and language education in a consideration of reading between the lines and reading skills practice.

### ***Teaching reading and teaching language***

Some of the recent research around teaching literature in English education is focused on the use of critical literary theory as a means of increasing student's critical thinking. For example,

Hagvall (2018) examines the possibility of using critical theory to increase students' ability to understand the minds and feeling of others. Building upon a Marxist analysis of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Jensén (2016) argues that critical analysis of literary fiction can help students recognise and problematise issues in their everyday lives (p. 27). While insights from studies like this can be useful, especially since they connect to secondary goals in the English syllabus, such as views and culture in places where English is spoken (Skolverket, n.d.-b), critical thinking and language abilities can be practised in other ways as well. For example, focusing on implicature in literature is also a way in which learners' critical thinking and language abilities could be improved (Anggraini et al., 2019, p. 82; Abdelhafez, 2016, pp. 452, 458). Implicature analysis explains how hearers interpret the intentions of the speaker, and this is really the few tools for meaning making which we have when reading, since we cannot ask the author for clarification. However, how teachers can use implicature analysis is less researched than the use of critical theory, and more research is needed to begin understanding how teachers can use it.

### ***Teaching reading between the lines***

To understand how reading between the lines can be taught, research about teaching reading comprehension and meaning making will be considered here. Learners use reading strategies differently, depending on their reading ability and their reason for reading, and one of the important aspects to consider when working with reading ability is to engage students with their own learning and designing teaching which motivates the use of reading strategies (Skolforskningsinsitutet, 2019, p. 66). One of the reading strategies which involves reading between the lines is inferencing. To encourage inferencing Li and D'Angelo (2016) suggest reciprocal teaching methods such as asking questions to the text which are aimed at revealing information which is not read on the lines of the text. They stress that these questions should not always be tailored to the making of inferences and questions targeting known information

are valuable as well (p. 181-182). Teaching students about Grice's theory is therefore not necessarily required for learners to practice reading between the lines. This, however, does not mean that an understanding of Grice's theory is irrelevant for the teacher since it can help them understand how meaning is understood by the reader.

Findings from an investigation of reading engagement and poetry in Swedish upper secondary school suggests that encouraging learners to present personal interpretations has a positive effect on learners' enjoyment of the material (Sandgren, 2018). Supporting learners' personal interpretations remains important even when studying novels, especially where reading between the lines is concerned since readers' background knowledge and language familiarity may cause them to lean towards different interpretations. Reader response theory, according to Tyson's (2015) definition, emphasises the reader's role in any interpretations recognising "that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them" (p. 162). What Grice's theory, together with an understanding of how people read, can add to this is an explanation of how others interpret intentions when those are not clear on the part of the speaker, or in the case of literature, the writer. Woodruff and Griffin (2017) emphasise the importance of using evidence to support interpretations, stating that even though reader response can move the focus from the teacher's interpretation to that of the student, this shift does not mean that any interpretation is valid (pp. 108-110). With an understanding of reading between the lines, teachers should be better equipped to help their students pinpoint where their interpretations are coming from.

## **Materials and Method**

This section begins with an introduction of Marsden's novel, *Tomorrow, when the war began*, which is used as the primary material for this study. This is followed by an outline of the data collection process and analytical procedures. The section is then concluded with a discussion of the limitations of the project, anticipated problems and how these were mitigated.

### **Marsden's novel and its use for educational purposes**

The young adult novel *Tomorrow, when the war began* by John Marsden is about a group of Australian teenagers who are doing what they can to survive and fight against invaders of their country. When the invasion first happens the group, consisting of Ellie and her friends Corrie, Homer, Fi, Kevin, Lee, and Robyn, are out camping in the bush. They have no idea their country has been invaded until they return from the trip and find their homes abandoned. The story follows this group as they learn what is going on and decide what to do next. The reader is shown how the teenagers and their relationships develop as they respond to the reality of living in a country which is now occupied by foreign military forces.

*Tomorrow, when the war began* was selected as the object for this study for several reasons. Firstly, it was important to choose a novel which could be considered suitable for teaching in Swedish upper-secondary-school in terms of the content it provides.

*Tomorrow, when the war began* was chosen because it is a modern young adult novel written by an Australian author. The syllabus for English requires teachers to cover different kinds of literature as well as connecting teaching to different parts of the world where English is spoken (Skolverket, n.d.-b). Teaching this novel connects to both these goals since it is one type of literature which is set in Australia, a place where English is spoken. Furthermore, the novel has been investigated previously for its potential use in English education. Whaldén (2016) finds that the content of the novel could be used to teach social justice and democratic values in the Swedish upper-secondary English-classroom. Lastly, while the novel has not

been used for implicature analysis before, several implicatures were found in the first couple of pages during the initial reading of the novel. This indicates that it should be possible to find necessary evidence to achieve the aim and answer the research questions. Since the novel can be of in the teaching of content it would be beneficial to understand how it can be used for reading practice as well. This would allow teachers to cover aspects of both language and content with the inclusion of this novel, or parts of the novel.

## **Method**

In this study qualitative content analysis is used to generate data points from the material. According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to explore underlying meanings and themes in the material to produce a description of a phenomenon. This is advantageous in a study focused on reading between the lines where the objective is to identify meaning related patterns in the material. The analytic approach will be directed based on Gricean theory of conversational implicature as discussed in the theoretical framework. The choice of a directed approach is intentional as it provides the researcher with a clear definition of what reading between the lines means which serves to further delimit the project. An explanation of the analytic procedure follows below.

Five categories, based on Grice's maxims, have been used for coding and analysis in this project. The categories consist of one category for each of the four maxims and one for cases which were unclear or where multiple maxims affect the reading. During the initial reading of the novel instances of reading between the lines were marked with a colour corresponding to the maxim category it seemed to be associated with. This material is further analysed and marked places which stand out as examples of the relationship between reading between the lines and Grice's maxims are brought up in the analysis section of this paper. The analysis is focused on qualitative data, with the objective to describe how reading between the lines is related to Grice's maxims. The selections were made based on how they

would illustrate this relation for the purpose of teaching, and it is possible that a different researcher would make different selections. The results of the analysis are then discussed to show the effect of these implicatures in the novel and to connect it with the perspectives on teaching found in the literature review.

### **Limitations**

A qualitative content analysis, such as the one performed in this study, conducted with only one researcher is easily susceptible to subjectivity which may reduce the quality of the results. This can be mitigated by adjusting the scope of the study, as well as clearly defining the method and theoretical concepts to make reproduction easier. The analytic procedure in the present study is heavily influenced by the researcher's choices, thus different results may occur if different ones were made. For this reason, the scope of the study is adjusted to focus on obtaining a description of a phenomena in a particular novel. This description does not exclude the possibility that other descriptions could be made, nor does it claim to be a generalisation. To ensure that coding and analysis remain consistent, the criteria for each coding category is stated as explicitly as possible in the theoretical framework. Choosing a directed approach with a starting point in a theoretical framework was a methodological decision made to help this process since it guides the researcher to check and re-check the analysis as new insights about the theory and its applications may have been gained throughout the process (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 5). When using Grice's theory there is some concern that the different categories go into each other, which is why a category for unclear cases was added to the analysis.

This study is further limited in terms of the data it considers with the primary data being qualitative rather than quantitative. While quantitative data regarding the amount of implicatures and the relationship between different kinds of implicatures could be gathered from the material such data is not suitable for answering the research questions. Since the aim

of the project is to learn if and how Marsden's *Tomorrow, when the war began* can be used for reading between the lines practice, qualitative data about the relationship between reading between the line and implicature is considered most useful. The interest of the study lies on gaining an understanding of how reading between the lines is related to Grice's maxims in Marsden's *Tomorrow, when the war began*, not providing a complete account of every implicature-related reading-between-the-lines occasion in the novel since that would be a much more extensive study than intended.

Lastly, it should be noted that while suggestions for teaching practice are made in the discussion these have not been tested by the researcher. The suggestions for teaching are based on the analysis of Marsden's novel with reference to previous research and best practices concerning the teaching of reading and language education. It is not the intention of the researcher to present these as the only options for teaching based on the analysis of the novel.

### **Analysis**

The following section contains five sub-sections discussing reading between the lines in relation to each of the conversational maxims and cases concerned with multiple maxims. Quite a few possible implicatures have been marked in the novel for further analysis during initial coding of the material, and examples from both the dialogue between the characters and the narration are analysed here. Not every possible implicature have been considered but the ones shown in the analysis below are some of the ones which stand out as reasonable examples to answer the research questions and achieve the aim of this paper. The last section which discusses cases where multiple maxims are involved or where it is unclear which maxim is in effect was included since it can sometimes be difficult to discern which maxim is related to the implicature.



### **Reading between the lines and the maxim of quantity**

During the initial coding of the material, it was found that quite a few instances where reading between the lines occurred seemed to be related to the maxim of quantity. The maxim of quantity refers to the expectation that a speaker will say no more and no less than what is required (Grice, 1991, p. 26). In *Tomorrow, when the war began* the narrator will on occasion leave pieces of information out, technically flouting the maxim of quantity, but the reader is on most of those occasions able to fill in the blank. Consider for example the following passage from the novel: “So, at last we knew. A coldness crept through me. I felt the goosebumps prickle my skin. This was the new reality of our lives” (Marsden, 2016, p. 84). Ellie, the narrator, has just spotted a former teacher of hers while scouting out a location to discover whether invaders of their country are keeping a group of civilians as hostages there. While the narrator at this point does not clarify what “the new reality of [their] lives” is, everything which has happened in the narrative up until this point allows the reader to fill in the blank and infer that the new reality is that their country has been invaded (Marsden, 2016, p. 84). Making inferences in this way, to fill in gaps, is one way in which reading between the lines occurs. What can be questioned, however, is whether this is an implicature or not. It seems like the maxim of quantity is being flouted here, since more could be said about what “the new reality” is, but if the reader can easily fill in the blank then the narrator does not need to say more. Thus, the implicature in this case is conversational since the reader has enough knowledge to understand the meaning behind the words even though the expression could be more cooperative than it is.

The issue with the maxim of quantity in novels is that when the narrator is describing something in too much or too little detail the reader assumes that there is a purpose for this, or else it would not be included in the narrative. So even when it seems that maybe too much or not enough information is included the reader assumes that the maxim of quantity is not being

broken and learns, or tries to learn, something from information that is given or not given. Consider the first sentence of *Tomorrow when the war began*; “It’s only half an hour since someone [...] said we should write everything down, and it’s only twenty-nine minutes since I got chosen” (Marsden, p. 1). In this first sentence the narrator flouts the maxim of quantity by leaving out exactly what ‘everything’ refers to and why they should write it down. This comment, which is the first one in the entire novel, sets up the story and its purpose is to create interest in the story. When reading between the lines it can be predicted that something will happen, which is important enough to warrant being written down.

In addition to driving the story forward as discussed above, flouting the maxim of quantity can offer information about the characters and their circumstances. For example, when Ellie slides down the log during the first trip to Hell, she comments that she was “hoping [she]’d scared them all away before Fi followed [her] down” (Marsden, 2016, p. 25). Here the narrator is flouting the maxim of quality, purposefully adding superfluous information about sliding down the log and setting up a situation where the reader learns more about the characters and their relationships with each other. However, this statement also leaves out information and reading between the lines is necessary to fully understand the implications about the characters. Much like when the narrator did not specify ‘the new reality of their lives’, the reason for hoping all the bugs would be scared away is not specified here. Yet, the reader can infer the assumption that Fi would dislike the bugs since that would explain why this comment is included by the narrator.

### **Reading between the lines and the maxim of quality**

Since the maxim of quality refers to the expectation that everyone always says what they know is, or believe to be, true (Grice, 1991, p. 27), it is assumed that reading between the lines in this category will be related to evaluating the truthfulness of information. At times this may be difficult to do when the narrator does not give any indication as to what is truth

and what is not. When Ellie, the narrator, is describing the agreement between the teens and the parents during the initial stage of planning the excursion to Tailor's Stitch, she mentions how they need to invite at least six people, because the parents require them to bring a group of at least that size. She tells the reader that this is because the parents "thought there was less chance of an orgy if there were more people", but instead of admitting this the parents said it was for safety reasons (Marsden, 2016, p. 5). In this exchange the narrator is reading between the lines, accusing the parents of breaking the maxim of quality to hide the true reasons for the restrictions. However, it is possible that the narrator is also flouting the maxim of quality and that the assumption about the parents' reasoning is not serious. Because of the maxim of quality, the expectation that everything included in a conversation, or text, is truthful, the likely assumption is that the narrator is reasonable, but they do not have to be. That Ellie is calling the parents out on their subterfuge is clearly written on the lines of the text; however, it is not indicated whether this is true or not. Therefore, it is possible that some readers will assume that she is not serious about her accusations and simply making fun, while other readers will accept her information as truth. In either case, the assumptions made by the reader about the truthfulness of the narrators' comments are made between the lines of the text.

Statements which flout the maxim of quality are not only made by the narrator, but they also occur in conversations between characters. During one of the nights when the group first stays in Hell several military planes are seen and heard flying across the sky. The next morning the following conversation takes place:

'It's probably the start of World War Three' said Lee. 'We've probably been invaded and don't even know.'

[...]

‘Imagine if we came out in a few days and there’s been a nuclear war and there was nothing left and we were the only survivors,’ Corrie said. [...]

‘If there’d been a nuclear war we wouldn’t survive,’ Fi said. ‘That fallout’d be dropping softly on us now. [...]

‘Seriously,’ said Robyn, ‘what do you think those planes were doing?’

‘Coming back from Commem Day,’ Fi said, as she had during the night. ‘You know how they have all those flypasts and displays and stuff.’ (Marsden, 2016, p. 40)

There are several things happening in this conversation. Lee and Corrie are engaging in hyperbole, making up extreme scenarios about why those planes were there, which they most likely do not consider to be the truth. Understanding that their comments are hyperbole occurs mostly between the lines. However, it is flagged by Robyn’s comment since she urges them to be serious which points towards the assumption that they were not being so before. Compared to the hyperbolic statements made by Lee and Corrie Fi’s comments appear more reasonable. The suggestions that they would notice the effects of a nuclear war and that the planes were probably returning from an exhibition are quite reasonably based on reality as it is known by the characters. Thus, Lee and Corrie are flouting the maxim of quality since their comments about nuclear war and world war three cannot be reasonably considered accurate.

### **Reading between the lines and the maxim of manner**

In *Tomorrow, when the war began* the maxim of manner, which refers to the expectation that others remain brief, orderly, and non-ambiguous (Grice, 1991, p. 27), is often flouted by the narrator to create suspense. Details of the story are told out of order and their significance is not confirmed until several chapters later. This creates scenarios where it is possible to read between the lines and guess what will happen later in the story. For example, throughout the

beginning of the novel the narrator reveals details about the invasion out of order, breaking the maxim of manner. It begins with a conversation in Hell after a series of military planes flew by during the night. Parts of that conversation are speculations and untruth, as previously discussed in relation to the maxim of quality. However, there is information around this conversation which call those assumptions into question. When the planes were first spotted the narrator comments on how “it hadn’t occurred to [them] that there was anything strange about dozens of aircraft flying fast and low at night with no lights” (Marsden, 2016, p. 39). From the point of view of the characters Fi remains the truthful and reasonable one in the conversation about why those planes were there, but the circumstances that surround the conversation makes the other statements seem reasonable as well. Lee’s final comment captures the reality of their situation, even though the characters do not know it yet, letting the reader suspect what will happen further on in the story. He says that “[i]f you were going to invade that’d be a good day to do it [...] Everyone is out celebrating. The Army and Navy and Air Force are all parading around the cities, showing off [...]” (Marsden, 2016, p. 41). All together this flouts the maxim of manner both by creating ambiguity around who is right in the conversation about why the planes were there and by not telling the story in an orderly manner.

The narrator continues to build on this as the characters return from their camping trip, flouting the maxim of manner by letting on details that could be explained by an invasion without letting the reader know for sure that this is what has happened. Just before they arrive at Ellie’s home, she mentions that “[she doesn’t] know if [she] was happy that day – the tense and edgy feelings were getting stronger [...] – but [she does] know [she has] never been happy since” (Marsden, 2013, p. 54). Once the teens arrive at her home, they find the dogs dead, no signs of life, the food spoiled and no power. Little details continue to be revealed, such as Lee whispering with Robyn who becomes afraid and arguments about what

may have happened. They find a battery powered radio but no radio stations come in, meaning that it is possible no radio is being broadcast. These irregularities point towards an invasion as a likely explanation, but this is not confirmed until several chapters later when the narrator reveals that this is the conclusion the characters have arrived at as well.

### **Reading between the lines and the maxim of relation**

The maxim of relation refers to the expectation that contributions to a communicative exchange remain relevant to its purpose (Grice, 1991, p. 27). Much like the maxim of quantity, the issue with the maxim of relation in literature is that the reader can assume that every detail included in the story is there for a reason. Thus, when analysing what is read everything may be considered relevant. Reading between the lines when that is the case then becomes a question of figuring out the effect of these details and understanding what it means that they are included. One example of this is when Ellie goes off on her own to think after she learns that Homer is interested in Fi:

I went for a walk back up the track, to the last of Satan's steps. The sun had already warmed the great granite wall and I leaned against it with my eyes half shut, thinking about our hike, and the path and the man who'd built it, and this place called Hell. 'Why did people call it hell?' I wondered. All those cliffs and rocks, and that vegetation, it did look wild. But wild wasn't Hell. [...] Maybe Hell was people.  
(Marsden, 2016, pp. 43-44)

This is a long reflection about a great many things, with a lot of information which is largely irrelevant to what is happening, namely that Ellie realises how her assumptions about Homer may not be true to who he really is, and she feels bad about that. After Homer's revelation that he is not above feelings, like Ellie thought he was, she goes off on the reflection about Hell cited above. The place and concept of Hell really has nothing to do with Homer. But

when the narrator intertwines this reflection about Hell with the reflection about Homer's character the reader gets a feeling for how Ellie feels about a great many things and an insight into her mind. The narrator sets up Ellie's new understanding of Homer against her understanding of the world in general, using the description of Hell above, as well as comparisons to other things. However, what Hell has to do with anything is not necessarily clear and the purpose of this reflection about Hell remains open to interpretation.

The maxim of relation is also flouted in conversations between characters. For example, this occurs in the beginning of the novel when Ellie is asking Lee if he wants to come with them on their camping trip. When told which days they are planning the trip for he replies with: "I'm meant to be playing at the Commemoration Day concert" (Marsden, 2019, p. 10). In this instance the reader can read between the lines and infer that the Commemoration Day concert occurs on the same dates as the planned camping trip, or else neither Lee's answer nor the fact that Ellie asks again for confirmation about his availability would make sense.

### **Multiple maxims and unclear cases**

In the beginning of the novel when the group first head up to Hell there is an incident where Fi's backpack is repacked. While neither the narrator nor the characters say anything specific about Fi's character at this stage the reader can learn something about her character when reading between the lines. During the brief discussion leading up to the re-organisation of the backpack Fi reveals several items which might be considered superfluous when going on a camping trip, though it is only implied that the other characters think so. The reactions "Oh Fi" and "Dressing gown? Fi!" do not explicitly say that the characters think the items in question are unnecessary (Marsden, 2016, p. 21). It is unclear what maxim is violated by these statements since these expressions are not informative enough nor is it clear what is meant and who is saying it. However, the circumstances of the exchange eventually make it clear

that the items in questions are considered unsuitable for camping in the bush like they are about to. This can be inferred when Fi's backpack is immediately repacked by the others. The contribution of this exchange serves to characterise Fi as someone who is not used to rough living, while the others appear to be people who know what they are doing.

Cases in which it is unclear what maxim is causing the implicature can occur when innuendo is involved as well. The concept of innuendo is tied to the maxims of manner and relation. Consider the following exchange where Kevin says, "Just tell me how and I'll be satisfied. I'm easily satisfied", and Homer replies with, "That's not what Corrie says" (Marsden, 2016, p. 19). Here, Kevin's statement, that he is easily satisfied, and Homer's reply are flouting the maxim of manner since they are both ambiguous. Kevin seems to be talking about how he will be satisfied when he gets the answer he is asking for. However, being easily satisfied can also refer to the intimate relations one has with a partner, who in Kevin's case is Corrie. This is what Homer could be hinting at with his comment, equivalent to the innuendo "That's what she said". Since Corrie and Kevin are close, she would be able to say something in either case, and it is unclear which interpretation is intended by Kevin and Homer respectively. If Kevin is not intending intimate relations with his girlfriend here, while Homer is, then Homer's reply flouts the maxim of relation since the intimate relations between Corrie and Kevin have nothing to do with Kevin being satisfied with getting the answer or not.

## **Discussion**

This section presents a discussion of the analysis in light of the research presented in the literature review. Firstly, it touches upon the effect of the implicatures shown in the analysis. Then it continues with a discussion of teaching-implications, connecting the analysis with points from the literature review to make suggestions for how reading-between-the-lines practice can be facilitated.



## **Creating an engaging narrative**

Before considering how the analysis above can be used to inform the teaching of reading skills, the effects of the implicatures shown in the analysis are discussed here. Anggraini et al. (2019) claim that one of the reasons implicatures are included in *Pride and Prejudice* is that they help create an engaging narrative (p. 81). This can be seen in the analysis above as well. The novel begins with flouting the maxim of quality and not giving enough details, letting the reader know that something will happen, but they need to keep reading to find out what. The narrator continues to build on this, flouting the maxim of manner by letting on details out of order before finally confirming what they mean. In this way suspense and intrigue is added to the narrative which creates interest for the reader, drawing them in. Another way in which implicature makes the story more interesting is through adding details about the characters and their interactions. For example, such implicatures occur when Ellie goes down the log, when they talk about why the military planes flew by at night or when they repack Fi's backpack. Lastly, Tomic (2020) suggests that implicatures in TV-shows can be used for comedic effect. This occurs in *Tomorrow, when the war began* as well, to some extent. For example, when the narrator speculates about the reasons behind the parents' restrictions for the trip or when including innuendo. Overall, it seems that the things which makes a story interesting to read do not always reveal themselves on the lines, so reading between the lines might be a necessary skill to fully enjoy reading.

## **Implications for teaching**

Clearly reading between the lines is an important skill for reader engagement. However, a discussion of how the analysis above can support the teaching of reading skills remains. The teaching implications of the analysis are discussed in four sections highlighting different aspects of the connections between the analysis and previous research. The focus will be on gap-filling and prediction, the understanding of characters, the implementation of a reading-

workshop and questions which encourage inferencing. These implications bring together the analysis with the literature review to make suggestions for teaching which supports reading-between-the-lines practice.

### ***Gap-filling and prediction***

According to the definition used by Skolforskningsintitutet (2019), inferencing relies on finding gaps in the text and drawing conclusions which are not explicitly stated on the lines (p. 23). The analysis shows that gaps in the text occur when the narrator flouts the maxim of quality by leaving out details of the story to be filled in by the reader. Thus, teaching which encouraging students to reflect on the left-out details, such as discussing the meaning of the new reality of their lives, could facilitate reading-between-the-lines practice. When it comes to drawing conclusions that are not explicitly stated on the lines of the text, learners could also be asked to make predictions about future events. Making predictions is suggested by Li and D'Angelo (2016) as a way of encouraging inferencing with reciprocal teaching. Since the narrator in *Tomorrow, when the war began* flouts the maxim of manner and reveals details out of order, it can be a good idea to do this in the beginning of the novel before the meaning of those details is confirmed. For example, when they are returning from the mountain and Ellie is having a bad feeling, it could be a good idea to ask the students why they think that is. In this case predicting future events seems to be possible because the narrator is flouting the maxim of manner throughout this part of the novel.

### ***Focusing on characters***

Another way of encouraging reading between the lines could be to discuss how different characters are characterised in the text. In the analysis it was shown that the characters' personalities were sometimes revealed through reading between the lines, such as when Ellie is sliding down the log and implies that Fi would be afraid of bugs or when the narrator

includes a reflection about the nature of Hell as part of Ellie's re-evaluation of Homer's character. These are instances where students may find reason to look beyond the lines of the text if they are encouraged to speculate about what is learned about the characters. Discussing characters might also allow the teacher to balance discussions between what is read on the lines and what is read between them. Li and D'Angelo (2016) point out that building up the difficulty of extracting information by asking questions which students can easily answer, as well as questions which require more reading between the lines, is an important part of classroom dialogue.

### ***The reading-workshop***

While the suggestions made above focus on extracting information about the text to make reading between the lines necessary, such an approach may not be the only way of engaging students with this skill. One of the goals from the curriculum for English in Swedish upper-secondary-school is that students should critically examine information when reading (Skolverket, 2013). In a reading-workshop, as suggested by Woodruff and Griffin (2017), students could be asked to focus specifically on reading between the lines, without using the extraction of information as motivation. For example, the teacher could assign passages from the novel which are saturated with instances where reading between the lines is possible and ask students to focus on reading between the lines, taking note of how their interpretations match up with the information that is given. When designing a workshop like this an implicature analysis of the text, such as the one above, can help the teacher find suitable passages for students to read. Since reading between the lines is related to implicature, familiarity with Grice's theory can also help the teacher explain clearly what the students should be looking for, such as the amount of information given or the truthfulness of it. This type of activity could be a way of targeting student's critical thinking in relation to text

information, since reading between the lines puts the distinction of what is said against what is meant.

### ***Questions to encourage inferencing***

A big part of encouraging the practice of reading between the lines is to assign reading which gives learners reason to activate this ability. As part of reciprocal teaching related to reading between the lines, Li and D'Angelo (2016) suggest asking questions which encourage inferencing (p. 181). With this approach students should be encouraged to ask questions like when, why, how, and so on, which are designed to reveal information in the text which is not written on the lines. From the analysis one of the passages which stand out in terms of questions you could ask to both encourage reading between the lines and to create discussion is the conversation which occurs in Hell after the military planes pass by. The conversation and the circumstances around it contain enough details to be useful even as an extract in case the teacher does not want to add another novel to the reading list for their class. Questions to ask are firstly, "Why do the characters think the planes flew by?" which targets what the characters are saying, and the follow-up question "How do you know this?" if the first answer needs to be better supported by evidence. Secondly, asking the students why they think those planes flew by can be a way of encouraging them to think about what the characters are saying against what the narrator is revealing.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to investigate how John Marsden's *Tomorrow, when the war began* could be used to practice reading between the lines as well as to make suggestions for how teachers can facilitate this practice in the language classroom. To achieve this aim, the concept of implicature, as explained by Grice (1991), is used to understand how reading

between the lines occurred in the novel. Other theories could have been used, but this one was chosen because of the broad arrangement of explanations it offers the analysis. The analysis of *Tomorrow, when the war began* shows that reading between the lines is needed to maintain the assumption that the cooperative principle is in effect. When reading it can be assumed that the information included in the narrative is there for a reason, even when that reason is not explicitly stated. Thus, when the writing is not explicit, inferencing is required to fill in blanks, making sense of otherwise unnecessary, unrelated, or unclear statements as well as understanding the characters. Furthermore, the analysis points towards the importance of reading between the lines since the effects of implicatures which require it can make the narrative more interesting and enjoyable to read. Readers with a better understanding of contextual language use have a higher chance of continued enjoyment from reading.

The pragmatic perspective of the analysis further provides teachers, and learners, with concrete examples to use when discussing why certain interpretations can, or cannot, be made. This knowledge is then discussed in connection with research about teaching reading and literary analysis to make suggestions for how practice could be facilitated in the language classroom. Facilitating practice relies on planning teaching activities which rely on reading between the lines, for example by asking questions or otherwise engaging readers with information that is not on the lines. Other ways of encouraging reading-between-the-lines practice involves explaining the phenomena to students and asking them to focus on it during reading. By focusing on reading between the lines, learners can be provided with an approach to literature and reading which engages them critically with the text, as well as their own reading and language skills.

It is important to note that none of the teaching suggestions made in this paper have been tested practically in the classroom as part of this project. However, the teaching perspectives were chosen based on previous research and best practices within language

education, so they are still reasonable suggestions which ought to be further tested in the classroom. For example, it would be interesting to investigate what students think about the explanations which can be offered by implicature analysis. Other avenues for further research could include a consideration of other teaching perspectives which could be used with an implicature analysis, how teachers in training respond to the teaching of literary pragmatics, and the efficiency of explicitly teaching Grice's theory in the English as a second or foreign language classroom.

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