6. Conversational Implicature

Guiding Questions:
1. Is speaker/utterance meaning the same as sentence meaning? What is conversational implicature? How does it differ from conventional implicature? What are the sub-types of conversational implicature? What are the differences between generalized (e.g. scalar) and particularized conversational implicatures?
2. What is the CP? What are its maxims and their respective contents? How can maxims be manipulated so as to create conversational implicature? What does H need to calculate a conversational implicature? How are implicatures calculated?
3. What are the properties of conversational implicature?

6.1 Sentence meaning and speaker meaning

(1) A: Where’s Bill?
   B: There’s a yellow VW outside Sue’s house.
   • Speaker meaning involved more than is said.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1 Sentence meaning &amp; speaker meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semantic propositions</td>
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<tr>
<td>literal code-based</td>
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<td>stable: C-free</td>
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(2) a. \( U = S + \text{context}, \text{ i.e.} \)
   b. \( \text{UM} > \text{SM}: \text{UM} = \text{SM} + \text{added M} \)  
   (added M = implicatures, illoc, presupposition)

Fig. 6.1 Speaker meaning, sentence meaning, and implications (based on Grice 1968)
6.2 Types of implicature

6.2.1 conventional implicature

(3) a. [\text{The Capital of the U.S. is Washington D.C.}] and [\text{the capital of Canada is Ottawa}]
   b. [\text{He went up to the bar}] and [\text{ordered a drink}] cf. \text{He ordered a drink and went up to the bar.}

Properties:  – associated with \textit{specific words} with additional meanings when used;
              – doesn’t have to be in conversation \rightleftharpoons not based on CP/maxims;
              – not depend on special context for interpretation

(4) a. Sue suggested black, \textit{but} I chose white.
    b. \underline{Even} John came to the party.
    c. Mary isn’t here \underline{yet}.

6.2.2 conversational implicature

6.2.2.1 generalized conversational implicature

(5) a. John went into a \textit{car} and found a tortoise on the driver seat.
    b. I’m studying linguistics and I’ve completed \textit{some} of the required courses.

• \textbf{Generalized conversational implicature}:
  – no special knowledge of context is needed to calculate implicature;
  – involves maxim of Quantity

Q: How is the implicature in (5b) different from that in (5a)?

(6) a. all > most > many > some > few
    b. always > often > sometimes > seldom
    c. certain > likely/probable > possible ...
    d. must > should > may > could

• \textbf{Scalar implicature}:
  – \textit{hierarchically} ordered quantifiers;
  – \textit{S} selects most informative (\textit{Quantity}) \& truthful (\textit{Quality}) quantifier on the scale in context;
  – selected quantifier \textbf{implicates negative of all those higher on the scale};
  – \textbf{cancellable} (cf. conventional implicature):

(7) She bought \textit{some} of her shoes in Paris -- um actually I think she bought \textbf{most} of them there.

6.2.2.2 particularized conversational implicature

(8) Rick: Hey, coming to the wild party tonight?
    Tom: My parents are visiting.

(9) Ann: Where are you going with the dog?
    Sam: To the V-E-T.
• **Particularized conversational implicature:**
  - Needs special knowledge of particular context to calculate implicature;
  - Maxim of Manner flouted in (9).

**In-class exercise:** Point out the kind of implicature in each of the following:
1. *They are sometimes really interesting.*
2. A: *Whoa! Has your boss gone crazy?*  
   B: *Let’s go get some coffee.*
3. *He’s still working at his project.*
4. A: *Did you invited Jane and Mary?*  
   B: *I invited Jane.*
5. A: *Do you like ice-cream?*  
   B: *Is the Pope Catholic?*

### 6.3 How are conversational implicatures produced and understood?
#### 6.3.1 Cooperative Principle & its maxims

(10) **The Cooperative Principle:**
Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

**Conversational maxims:**
- **Quantity:**
  1. Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
  2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- **Quality:**
  Try to make your contribution one that is true.
  1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
  2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- **Relation:** Be relevant.
- **Manner:** Be perspicuous.
  1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
  2. Avoid ambiguity.
  3. Be brief.
  4. Be orderly.

#### 6.3.2 hedges (Yule 1996)

**Hedge:** a cautious expression to mark that S may not be fully following the maxims

(11) *I may be mistaken,* but I thought I saw a wedding ring on her finger.
(12) *I won’t bore you with all the details,* but it was an exciting trip.
(13) *... Oh, by the way,* did you hear about Sue’s wedding?
(14) *I don’t know if this is clear at all,* but I think the other car was reversing.

**Summary:**
- S is aware of the maxims;
- S wants to show she is observing them;
- S wants H to think that she is a cooperative conversation partner.
In-class exercise: Identify the hedges in the following and state which maxim each is about:
1. This may be a bit confused, but I remember being in a car.
2. Not to change the subject, but is this related to the budget?
3. I’m not sure if this is right, but I heard it was a secret ceremony in Hawaii.
4. So, to cut a long story short, we grabbed our stuff and ran.
5. He couldn’t live without her, I guess.

6.3.3 ways to create implicatures

Fig. 6.2 Ways of infringing a maxim

(i) Opting out: explicitly indicating S is simply unwilling to cooperate

(15) a. I don’t know.
    b. No comment.

(ii) Violating: quietly and unostentatiously violate a maxim, i.e. non-cooperative without showing it

(16) (A 6-year old is looking for her ball in the study)
    A: Have you seen my ball?
    B: Why don’t you look behind Volume 6 of Dostoyevski’s Collected Works?

(iii) Clash: infringing a maxim when it clashes with another

(17) A: When is Aunt Polly's birthday?
    B: Sometime in May.

(iv) Flouting: deliberately & ostentatiously fail to observe a maxim, i.e. S exploits a maxim and expects H to realize that he is flouting it yet still being cooperative

(18) A: Where’s Bill?
    B: There’s a yellow VW outside Sue’s house.

    • Implicatures depend mainly on non-ling CP, but linguistic signs also have a role in inferring speaker meaning.

(19) The frying pan thought that he should go with the toaster.
6.4 Properties of conversational implicatures

• **defeasibility:** it is possible to cancel an inference by adding premises to the original ones

(20) a. You have won $5. \hspace{1cm} (q = ‘only 5, and no more’)  
b. You have won **at least** $5. \hspace{1cm} (q \text{ suspended: ‘I’m not committed to truth of } q\text{’})  
c. You have won $5, in fact, you’ve won **10**. \hspace{1cm} (q \text{ cancelled/denied: ‘I’m sure } q\text{ is false’})

• **non-detachability:** implicature is attached to semantic content of U, not linguistic form; alternative expressions w/ similar meaning will keep the implicature:

(21) a. John is a genius.  \hspace{1cm} (Irony: \( q = ‘J \text{ is an idiot’})  
b. John’s an enormous intellect.  
c. John’s a big brain.

• **non-conventionality:** implicatures are not part of the conventional meaning of linguistic expressions

(22) A: Smith doesn’t seem to have a girlfriend these days.  
B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.  
- \( q \) is inferred from \( p \), but is not part of the conventional/literal meaning of \( p \).

• **indeterminability:** given \( p \), the associated \( q \) may not be exactly determinable:

(23) a. John is a machine.  
b. John is cold.  
c. John is efficient.  
d. John is precise.  
e. John is a workaholic.

• **calculability:** it is possible to work out the steps that H must follow to infer \( q \) from \( p \).

Grice’s summary of H's calculation of implicatures in terms of
• kinds of knowledge needed to calculate implicature: (24);  
• a general pattern: (25)  \hspace{1cm} (Levinson 1983: 113-4).

(24) For H to calculate the implicature \( q \) from \( p \), knowledge of the following is needed:  
\begin{enumerate}
  \item conventional meaning of \( p \);  
  \item the CP and its maxims;  
  \item context of \( p \) (e.g. its relevance);  
  \item background info;  
  \item that (i)-(iv) are shared by S and H.
\end{enumerate}

(25) A general pattern for working out an implicature:
\begin{enumerate}
  \item S has said that \( p \);  
  \item there’s no reason to think S is not following the maxims, or at least the CP;  
  \item S must think that \( q \) in order to maintain both (i) and (ii);  
  \item S must know that both S and H know that \( q \) must be supposed if S is considered cooperative;  
  \item S has done nothing to stop me, the H, from thinking that \( q \);  
  \item therefore, S intends me to think that \( q \), and that \( p \) implicates \( q \). 
\end{enumerate}
Johnny: Can I play nintendo?
Mother: How is your homework getting along, Johnny?

**implicature** = you can if you have finished homework.

- How is it created: via flouting.

- step-by-step analysis from J's point of view:
  1. M asked a Q re. progress of my homework (I understand its **conventional M**);
  2. the Q does not appear to be a **relevant** answer to my Q for permission (i.e. violation of maxim of **Relation**);
  
   **[context of p]**
  3. but I still think that M is cooperative and tries to communicate with me; **[CP]**
  4. if 1-3 are true, then I must look for another understanding q which will satisfy all the maxims;
  5. since **prior knowledge** of Mom's expectation tells me that I am expected to do my homework before I can play, the q must be that I can play nintendo if I have finished my homework;
   
   **[background knowledge]**
  6. Now that q satisfies all the maxims, esp that of Relevance, it must be M's intention that I think q. Therefore, M's Q implicates q.

Notes: 1. (25): 'check-maxim' step, (x), between 1 and 2, to find out if any maxim has been (apparently) violated.
2. Grice: 2p phases of 'flouting': **TRIGGER** (i.e. violation of one or more of the maxims) and **INFERENCE** (searching and justifying q as implicature).

A: Uncle buck is coming for dinner.
B: I'd better lock up the liquor.

**TRIGGER**

251 B has said that p (p=B will lock up the liquor);
(x) Checking the maxims, A finds that B's U does not appear very relevant to A's earlier remark; [violation of Relevance]

**INFERENCE**

252 But A still assume B is cooperative;
253 If A accepts the above as given, s/he has to think that q, by invoking background knowledge, context and again, the maxims;

   Background: Uncle Buck has been a heavy drinker: he will drink up all wine if he sees it;

254 B must share with A the knowledge tht q (=Uncle Buck is a heavy drinker and will drink up the wine if he sees it) must be supposed if B is considered cooperative;
255 B has done nithing to stop A from thinking that q;
256 So, B intends A t think that q, and that p ‘I'd better lock up the liquor' implicates...'
**In-class exercises:** For each of the following conversation,
- what conversational implicature is generated in the exchange?
- how is it created? (straightforward, clash-violated, flouting)
- give a step-by-step analysis of how the implicature is explicated.

1. A: What time is it?
   B: Well, the milkman has come.

2. [A child walks into the kitchen and takes some popcorn]
   Father: I thought you were practicing your violin.
   Child: I need to get the [violin] stand.
   Father: Is it under the popcorn?

3. A: Where is Naples?
   B: Somewhere in Europe.

4. A: Where is Bill?
   B: There is a yellow VW outside Sue's house.

5. A: Let's get the kids something.
   B: OK, but not I-C-E C-R-E-A-M.

6. Student: Was Mozart born in France?
   Teacher: Was Naponeon born in China?