

4 Reinforceability

It is often possible to add explicitly what is anyway implicated with less sense of redundancy than would be the case if one repeated the coded content.

- (6) This evening, you can go to the movies or listen to a radio show — but not both.
- (7) “I have four dollars on me (in fact, I have exactly four).”
[cf. #“I have exactly four dollars on me (in fact, I have exactly four).”]
- (8) “Some (but not all) of the problems are too hard.”

Because conversational implicatures are inherently tentative — cancellable at almost any moment — reinforceability makes functional sense: it strengthens the implicature to an entailment, removing any doubt about whether or not it was intended.

5 Nondetachability

Any expression with the same coded content will tend to carry the same implicatures (a principled exception has to be made for Manner implicatures).

- (9) Sometimes nondetachability gets complicated:
- Can you pass the salt (please)?
 - Can you reach the salt (please)?
 - Can I have the salt (please)?
 - Are you able to pass the salt (?please)?
 - Do you presently have the ability to pass the salt (*please)?

Why are manner implicatures “a principled exception”?

6 Calculability

The more or less transparent derivation of the inference from the premises that include the assumption of rational conversational activity.

- (10) [Context: both Sam and Lisa need \$10 for their movie tickets]
Lisa: “I have \$5 dollars”
 \nrightarrow for all n greater than 5, Lisa does not have n dollars.
- Any statement of the form “I have n dollars” for n greater than 5 is more informative than Lisa’s actual utterance.
 - By quantity, Lisa will make the maximally informative statement relevant for the present goals of the participants.
 - It is relevant whether Lisa has (at least) \$10.
 - Thus, Lisa must not have more than 5 dollars.

It would be a major breakthrough to find a formal system in which such patterns of inference could be made precise, i.e., truly algorithmic.

7 Nonconventionality

The noncoded nature of the inferences and their parasitic dependence on what is coded.

- In semantics, we confront the usual arbitrariness of the sign. The only answer to “Why does *dog* pick out dogs?” should be a historical one — there is no formal, or semantics-internal, reason for this connection.
- But the fact that *some* implicates *not all*, that *or* implicates *not and*, etc., derives from the meanings themselves, not their connection to these words per se. And the relevant meaning relationships are grounded in nonnegotiable, absolute facts about logic and the nature of inference.

(11) Outside the narrowly linguistic realm



8 Universality

Because the inferences are derived ultimately from fundamental considerations of rationality, we expect a strong tendency to universality (unlike coded meanings, of course); conversational implicatures are motivated, not arbitrary.

- Keenan (1979) challenges this claim.
- It is a difficult issue, because it is difficult to distinguish a need for a new ranking of the maxims from situations in which contextual pressures conspire to favor (via the usual maxim set-up) an utterance that might seem disfavored in another (class of) contexts.

References

- Keenan, Elinor Ochs. 1979. The universality of conversational postulates. *Language and Society* 5(1):67–80.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 2000. *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Context: Bart and Lisa want to go to the movies.
A ticket costs \$10.



I have \$5.



Question: Does Bart's utterance conversationally implicate that he has **exactly** \$5.

Requirement 1: Cooperation

All parties involved in the conversation agree that Bart is obeying the maxims.



Bart is (basically) trustworthy and cooperative

Requirement 2: Implicature necessary for assumption 1

In order to maintain her assumption, Lisa must assume that Bart intends to convey that he has **at most** \$5.



If Bart had more money, he would say so: it would be **relevant** in this context, and it would be a greater **quantity** of information.

Requirement 3: Mutual understanding



I intend to convey that I have exactly \$5.



I know Bart intends to convey that.



I know Lisa knows I intend to convey that.

[and so on, ad infinitum]