Explicature

Introduction to Pragmatics
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(Neo-)Gricean Tree of Meaning

Utterance interpretation (what is conveyed)

what is said               what is implicated

TC meaning               conventionally               conversationally

conventional force               generalized               particularized

SEMANTICS               PRAGMATICS
Post-Gricean Tree of Meaning

what is communicated
(consciously accessible)

what is said
(truth-conditional meaning)

sentence meaning

what is implicated

what is explicated
(not consciously accessible)
Motivation for Explicature

Determining “what is said” involves more than “minimal access to context” for reference assignment, disambiguation, and the resolution of indexicals and deixis.

Sentence meaning does not determine the set of possible semantic values; it constrains them.

So, “what is said”, is, in large measure, pragmatically determined.
Example

*John’s book*

What is John’s relation to the book?

- the book John wrote, owns, likes, has near him, etc.
- A speaker intends (and a hearer would presumably understand) a single context-specific relation.
- This can be considered part of “what is said”, i.e. part of the speaker’s (truth-conditional) content.
Explicatures

Pragmatically determined aspects of sentence/propositional meaning

Example:

A: How is Jane feeling after her first year at University?

B: She didn’t get enough units and can’t continue.

• What was uttered: She didn’t get enough units and can’t continue.

• What was ‘said’: a more pragmatically enriched (and complete) proposition.
A: How is Jane feeling after her first year at University?

B: She didn’t get enough units and can't continue.

What was said:

JANE didn’t get enough UNIVERSITY COURSE units AT THE UNIVERSITY SHE IS CURRENTLY ATTENDING TO QUALIFY FOR ADMISSION TO HER SECOND YEAR OF STUDY and AS A RESULT JANE can’t continue WITH HER STUDIES.
What was (also) meant (via implicature)

What was implicated:

• Jane is not feeling at all happy about this.
• Jane is going to lose her fellowship.
• Jane’s parents will be furious.
• I’m delighted that we’ll finally be rid of Jane.
• You’re Jane’s friend so you should go console her.
How to identify explicatures?

(given that they’re not explicitly expressed yet seem to constitute part of “what was said”)

• Reference and anaphora resolution (she) and disambiguation (get, units) constitute part of what was said.

• The implicature (whatever it is) does not constitute part of what was said.

• What about as a result, to qualify, with her studies?
A Classic Problem

If the old king has died of a heart attack and a republic has been declared, then Tom will be quite happy. But if a republic has been declared and the old king has died of a heart attack, then Tom will be quite unhappy.

Strictly speaking, this is a contradiction in terms of logical form, yet intuitively it doesn’t ‘feel’ contradictory, as in:

A: Did you have a good time at the party?
B: I did and I didn’t.
Another Example

Either he became an alcoholic and his partner left him or his partner left him and he became an alcoholic.

Again, in terms of logical form, this utterance should be redundant:

$$(p \land q) \lor (q \land p) \equiv (q \land p) \lor (p \land q)$$
Pragmatic Intrusion

Explicatures not only serve to ‘fill out’ a proposition, but they can also affect the truth conditions of a proposition.

• This phenomenon is known as “pragmatic intrusion”.
• Non-truth-conditional meaning ‘intrudes’ into the truth conditions of a proposition.
A Mighty Fine Paradox

In some cases, implicatures are needed to *establish* propositional content and truth conditions (and thus must be prior to them).

In other cases, implicatures are generated *from* propositional content and truth conditions (and thus must be subsequent to them).
Solution: Two Types of Implicature!

**Explicatures**: those (cancelable) aspects of meaning that constitute part of propositional content (and thus may intrude into the semantics).*

**Implicatures**: those (cancelable) aspects of meaning that do not enter into the determination of “what is said” (and thus may not intrude into the semantics).

* Except for conventional implicatures.
Some likely Explicatures

First, let’s consider some more examples of likely explicatures:

(Horn’s) R-Implicatures
A) Martha gave George her key and he opened the door. [with it]
B) Jones has been insulted and he’s going to resign. [as a result]
Some Likely Explicatures

Additional examples of likely explicatures:

(Horn’s) Q-Implicatures
A) Pat has three children. [not 4]
B) Pat is an adequate linguist. [not brilliant]
C) Some of the students passed. [not all]
The Post-Gricean Position

All of these involve explicatures.

The bracketed material is what the speaker intended to convey and what s/he would be understood as having meant even though it was unexpressed.
Three Important Diagnostics

- MINIMALIST PRINCIPLE
- AVAILABILITY PRINCIPLE
- SCOPE PRINCIPLE
Diagnostics for Explicature

Minimalist Principle:

A pragmatically determined aspect of meaning is part of what is said iff its determination is necessary for the utterance to express a complete proposition (also called “saturation”).
Examples of saturation:

A) He ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped. [from the cliff]
B) She took a hammer, walked into the garden, and broke a statue. [in the garden, with a hammer]
C) John went on vacation in Austria and skied. [in Austria]
D) Can you open tomorrow morning? [the store (vs. the letter)]
More examples of saturation

E) I like to eat. [food]

F) Have you eaten? [the most time-appropriate meal]

Further examples of possible saturation – missing argument?

A) Everybody did well on the exam. [everybody in the class]
B) I’ve been to Tibet. [in my life]
C) I’ve had breakfast. [today]
D) I didn’t turn off the stove. [during the last time I was home]
E) The park is some distance from here. [further than expected, rather far]
How Explicatures Work

The bracketed material identifies a semantic argument (or domain of quantification) needed to be ‘filled in’ or ‘instantiated’ contextually in order for the utterance in question to convey a complete proposition.

So we need adequate theories of lexical semantics, argument structure, tense, and quantification.
Consider again . . .

The park is some distance from here.
[the distance in question is far, greater than expected, etc.]

• This could be analyzed as involving quantification over distances (it says that there is a distance ‘d’ such that the park is ‘d’ from us).

• The explicature ‘fills in’ the slot corresponding to the domain of quantification.

• Restricted only to certain domains?
  • That will cost some money, take some time/effort/thought/room/space.
  • I need some sleep/food/sex/air.
Availability Principle

We should rely on our intuitions in deciding what is said.

The idea is that a prospective explicature should be readily identifiable, intuitive, accessible. We'll see that that is not always the case.
Scope Principle

A pragmatically determined aspect of meaning is part of what is said (and, therefore, not a conversational implicature) if – and, perhaps, only if – it falls within the scope of logical operators such as negation and conditionals.

That is, if explicatures count as “what is said”, then they should fall within the scope of logical operators (since it’s as though the explicature had been uttered).
Conditionals

Consider:

a) If the old king has died of a heart attack and a republic has been declared, then Tom will be quite happy, but if a republic has been declared and the old king has died of a heart attack, then Tom will be quite unhappy.

b) If it takes us some time to get there, John will be angry.

c) If everybody did well on the exam, I will be happy.

d) If John has two kittens for sale, I’ll buy them.

e) If you leave the door open and the cat gets out, I’ll punish you.
Negation

Consider:

a) A: It will take us some time to get there.
   B: False.

b) A: Mary has had breakfast.
   B: False.

c) A: Bill has been to Tibet.
   B: False.

d) A: Everybody did well on the exam.
   B: False.
So we seem to have a working set of diagnostics

BUT...

When a broader range of data is considered, we see that applying these principles is not always a straightforward matter...
Example: The Scope Principle

• Which explicatures fall within the scope of negation?

• Which aspects of utterance meaning fall within the scope of a subsequent “no” or “false” – if the unexpressed meaning is negated then it counts as an explicature.
Example (a clear one):

A: Oh no, it’s 6:00!
   [implicating “I have to leave”]

B: No/False.
   [does not mean “You don’t have to leave”]
A: I haven’t had breakfast. / I didn’t turn off the stove.

B: #False/#No. [You did in 1994.]

A: Everybody did well on the first assignment.

B: #False/#No. [President Obama didn’t.]

A: The park is some distance from here.

B: #True/#Yes. [It's right across the street.]
“False” is too strong, but “no” is possible; possibly explicatures

A: The Smiths have three children.
B: ?False/No. [They have four.]

A: Pat is happy.
B: #False/No. [She's ecstatic.]

A: Mathew left the door open and the cat got out.
B: #False/No. [The cat got out on its own.]

A: John went on vacation in Austria and did some skiing.
B: #False/No. [He skied in Italy.]

A: John was with an older woman last night.
B: #False/?No. [It was his mother.]
Neither “false” nor “no” works; evidence of non-intrusion, and therefore non-explicatures.

A: Smith doesn’t seem to be seeing anybody lately.
B: He’s been going to New York every weekend.
A: #False/#No.
[He’s been going to NY but not to “see anybody”.

A: Does Pat like Lee and Sean?
B: She likes Lee.
C: #False/#No.
[She likes Sean (too).]
Still more...

A: Do you speak Ladino?
B: I speak Spanish.
C: #False/#No. [You speak Catalan (too).]

A: Smith doesn’t seem to be seeing anybody lately.
B: He’s been staying out pretty late lately.
A: #False/?No. [He’s been working on his dissertation in the library.]
The Problem

“False” seems too strong; “no” seems too weak so serve as a clear diagnostic for explicature.

A: I need a ride to the airport.

B: No./#False. [cf. I can’t.]

**Problem:** scalar implicature does not behave as a unified class with respect to negation.

**Conclusion:** Minimalist principle is a more promising diagnostic for explicature than the scope principle.
A More Serious Problem

Cardinals and other scalars do not behave as a unified class:

A: Do you have two children?
B1: No – I have three. [metalinguistic interpretation]
B2: #Yes, in fact I have three.

vs.

A: Are many of your friends linguists?
B1: #No, all of them are.
B2: Yes, in fact all of them are.

So, of the non-slot-fillers, cardinals are the best candidates for explicatures.
Coming Full-circle

**Pre-Gricean view:** scalars are lexically ambiguous.

**Neo-Gricean view:** scalars are unambiguous at the level of what is said (inherent “at least” reading): implicature supplies the other (“at most”) reading.

**Post-Gricean view:** scalars are now vague – an inherent “exactly” nor an “at least” reading; unspecified until enriched by explicature. This same analysis could be extended to asymmetric *and* – it has neither an inherent temporal nor symmetric sense; it must be ‘filled in’ by explicature via saturation.
Final Word of Warning

The post-Gricean reach has exceeded its grasp

• The notion of explicature, however useful it may be, must be scaled back.

• It is not the case that the entire class of generalized conversational implicatures can be recategorized as explicatures.

• Each construction is going to have to analyzed individually in order to determine its proper place in the tree of meaning.