

PRAGMATICALLY DETERMINED ASPECTS OF MEANING: EXPLICATURE, IMPLICITURE OR IMPLICATURE.

Rodrigo Agerri & Kepa Korta*
ILCLI
UPV-EHU
Donostia
ybbaggar@sf.ehu.es, ylpkocak@sf.ehu.es

One says things hastily without meaning them,
without having thought, without understanding them
even: One ought to be forgiven for those hasty
things.

Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's dream*.

ABSTRACT

In this paper we present a modest contribution to the debate on the treatment of the pragmatically determined aspects of utterance meaning. Different authors (Bach 1994, Carston 1988 and 1998, Recanati 1989, Sperber and Wilson 1986, Levinson 2000) have defended different notions (explicature, impliciture, and implicature) to account for the phenomena labeled as Generalized Conversational Implicatures (GCI) by Grice (1989). We offer some arguments for treating some of these examples as implicitures, and for a better characterization of the notion of what is said.

0. Introduction

In this paper we will consider examples as these:

- (1) a. He is meeting a woman this evening.
b. He is meeting a woman [who is not his wife, mother, or sister] this evening.
- (2) a. I have had breakfast.
b. I have had breakfast [today].

It is commonly agreed that when someone utters (1a), we usually understand something like (1b). Similarly, it is assumed a speaker uttering (2a) means (2b).

* The work by the second author has been done within a research project funded by the University of the Basque Country (UPV I09.I09-HA010/99). We will like to thank the members of the Semantics and Pragmatics Seminar of the Institute for Logic, Cognition, Language and Information (ILCLI) of the University of the Basque Country, and, particularly, Isabel Gómez Txurruka, for their helpful comments and criticisms.

In *Logic and Conversation* (1967a, 1989) Grice treats (1) as a case of generalized conversational implicature (GCI). Unlike particularized conversational implicatures, GCIs do not depend on a specific context:

“Sometimes one can say that the use of a certain form of words in an utterance would normally (in the absence of special circumstances) carry such-and-such an implicature or type of implicature.” (Grice, 1967a, 1989: 37).

“There are the ones that seem to me to be more controversial and at the same time more valuable for philosophical purposes.” (Grice 1981, 1989: 185)

According to Grice, a speaker uttering (1a) conversationally implicates (1b) (in the absence of particular circumstances).

After Grice, some authors have tried to improve on the Gricean distinction between *what is said* and *what is implicated* and the account of cases like (1) and (2), (Bach 1994, Carston 1988 and 1998, Recanati 1989, Sperber and Wilson 1986, Levinson 2000). Discussing (1) and (2), we will see that different theorists have used at least three different notions to give an account of the same examples. This is not a mere terminological debate, since it could have important consequences for a general theory of communication and, in particular, for related debates such as the explicit/implicit meaning distinction, the literal/non-literal use distinction or the delimitation of semantics and pragmatics.

First, we will briefly recall three important contributions to the debate: Sperber and Wilson’s explicature, Bach’s implicature, and Levinson’s GCI. Second, we will defend our own position, which could be summarized as follows: in contrast with Sperber and Wilson, Carston, Recanati, and Levinson we present some arguments for treating these examples as cases of Bach’s conversational implicature. We end the paper drawing some general conclusions.

1. Saying what is not said

In the Gricean tradition it has been assumed that any pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning apart from disambiguation and reference assignment is an implicature. Sperber and Wilson defend, instead, that

“In fact, recent work has shown that a number of problems with classical implicature analyses are resolved when the ‘implicatures’ are reanalysed as pragmatically determined aspects of explicit content...Generally speaking, we see the explicit side of communication as richer, more inferential, and hence more worthy of pragmatic investigation than do most pragmatists in the Gricean tradition” (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 183).

Many aspects of meaning considered as GCIs by the Gricean picture are considered by Relevance Theory as part of *what is said* or, in their terms, the *explicature*. An assumption is an *explicature* if and only if “it is a development of a logical form encoded by the utterance” (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 182). When an assumption communicated by the utterance is not explicit but implicit, we have an implicature.

According to relevance theory, in the recovery of the explicature there are three pragmatic processes involved: disambiguation, reference assignment (both were taken into account in Grice’s *what is said*), and enrichment. Let us consider again example (1) and (2):

(1) a. He is meeting a woman this evening.

- b. He is meeting a woman [who is not his wife, mother, or sister] this evening.
- (2) a. I have had breakfast.
- b. I have had breakfast [today].

According to relevance theory, (1b) is the explicature of (1a)¹ and (2b) is the explicature of the utterance of (2a), that is, “the development of the logical form encoded by the utterance” or the result of the processes of reference assignment and enrichment to the logical form or conventional sentence meaning.

There is no GCI in this frame; there is an enriched version of the Gricean notion of *what is said*: the explicature.

2. Implicature and Explicature

Bach invents a new category for explaining cases like (2), the *implicature*:

“In implicature one says and communicates one thing and thereby communicates something else in addition. Implicature, however, is a matter of saying something but communicating something else instead, something closely related to what is said [...]. Rather, part of what is communicated is only implicit in what is explicitly expressed, either because the utterance is semantically underdeterminate and completion is required or because what is being communicated is an expanded version of the proposition expressed” (Bach 1994: 126).

Bach thinks a speaker can communicate something without making it fully explicit in two different ways: *completion* when an utterance is semantically underdeterminate and *expansion* when the utterance expresses a complete proposition but it does not coincide with the proposition meant by the speaker. Thus, the pragmatic material we need to add to (2a) to get (2b) will be considered by Bach as an implicature recovered by a process of expansion. Unlike Grice but like relevance theorists, he does not interpret (2b) as an implicature because it seems to him it has too close a relation with the sentence uttered. The difference with relevant theorists, he does not include that material within what is said (or the explicature) because, as he argues quite convincingly, that would be to blur the difference between what is explicit and what is implicit in utterance meaning.

3. Levinson’s preferred interpretation

Levinson recovers the Gricean notion of GCI:

“An implicature *i* is *generalized* iff utterance *U* implicates *i* *unless* there are unusual specific contextual assumptions that defeat it” (Levinson 2000: 16).

Levinson’s theory of GCIs is not intended to be accommodated within a unique distinction of what is said and what is implicated by an utterance:

“According to the standard line (more often presupposed than justified), there are just two levels to a theory of communication: a level of sentence meaning (to be explicated by the theory of grammar in the large sense) and a level of speaker-meaning (to be explicated by a theory of pragmatics, perhaps centrally employing Grice’s notion of meaning_{sm})” (Levinson 2000: 22).

¹ See Carston (1998: 80-83).

He proposes a third level of communication called utterance-type meaning to take into account properly

“aspects of meaning associated with the general, normal use of expressions” (Levinson 2000: 63).

According to him, his theory of preferred interpretation does not try to be a holistic theory of human linguistic competence but it just try to account general expectations about how language is normally used. Within those ‘expectations’ we would have GCIs.

Following Grice, Levinson treats as a GCI the case of (1), using his Q-heuristic (based on Grice’s first maxim of quantity). Thus, (1b) will be the preferred interpretation of (1a), because

“the speaker has failed to be specific in a way in which he might have been expected to be specific, with the consequence that it is likely to be assumed that he is not in a position to be specific” (Grice 1967a, 1989: 38).

The explanation of (2) could be similar, analyzing it, unlike relevant theorists or Bach, as a case of Gricean I-GCI that is based on Grice’s second maxim of quantity.

4. Our view

We want to defend here a view that treats cases like (1) and (2) as implicatures. This view is incompatible with treating them as cases of pragmatically determined constituents of *what is said* or the explicature as proposed by Sperber and Wilson, Carston and Recanati, as we will see. We are not sure whether our position can be consistent with treating them as Levinson’s GCIs—maybe, we might think of GCIs as a particular subclass of implicatures, even if we see a problem with the putative non-detachability of GCIs. Some arguments in favor of our view are, at least, the following ones:

- i. It keeps a clear criterion for the distinction between what is explicitly said and the remaining aspects of utterance meaning: the linguistic (or grammatical) direction principle.
- ii. This criterion fits well with our pre-theoretic intuitions on what is explicitly said.
- iii. The pragmatically determined aspects of (1) and (2) in brackets are cancelable, like implicatures but unlike –we argue– the elements of what is said.
- iv. The pragmatically determined aspects of (1) and (2) in brackets are detachable, unlike implicatures except those based on the maxim of manner.

Let us present these arguments one by one.

4.1. The linguistic direction principle.

It is a commonplace in contemporary pragmatics to reject the idea that sentences express by themselves complete propositions. It is acknowledged as the rule, not as the exception, that we need context in a broad sense, that is, pragmatic processes to

determine the proposition expressed, what is said, by the utterance of a sentence. Now, which are these elements? A good candidate as a clear criterion is just Carston's "linguistic (or grammatical) direction principle", stated by Recanati as follows:

"A pragmatically determined aspect of meaning is part of what is said if and only if its contextual determination is triggered by the grammar, that is, if the sentence itself sets up a slot to be contextually filled." Recanati (1993: 255)

With this at hand, we have a clear criterion, as clear as our grammar, about what counts as a pragmatically determined constituent of what is said (the explicature) and what not. Moreover, this criterion fits well with the intuition

"that the constituents of what is said must correspond to the constituents of the utterance" (Bach 1994: 137)."

However, relevance theory is forced to abandon this principle, because it dictates that (1b) and (2b), contrary to what they intend to defend, are *not* explicatures. The price they must pay is to abandon the linguistic principle for a principle based on our 'pre-theoretic intuitions'. This leads us to our second argument:

4.2. Our intuitions.

In the search for clear criteria for distinguishing pragmatically determined aspects of what is said from implicatures, Recanati arrives to the "availability principle":

In deciding whether a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning is part of what is said, that is, in making a decision concerning what is said, we should always preserve our pre-theoretic intuitions on the matter. Recanati (1989: 310)

Allegedly, this principle tells us that (1b) and (2b) must be considered what is said by an utterance of (1a) and (2a), because speaker's (pre-theoretic) intuitions are that she has said (1b) and (2b). But is this so? Would the speaker accept that uttering (1a) "He is meeting a woman this evening", she has said (1b) "He is meeting a woman who is not his wife, mother, or sister this evening"? Clearly not.

Concerning, (2), if we ask the speaker whether uttering (2a) "I have had breakfast" she has said (2b) "I have had breakfast [today]", she might answer, as Recanati claims, "Yes". But what about if we query her whether she has said it explicitly or implicitly? It seems to us, that, despite his intentions, Recanati's availability principle does not make justice to our pre-theoretic intuitions on the distinction between implicit and explicit meaning, something that the linguistic direction principle apparently does. If this is so, relevance theory has no criterion whatsoever for distinguishing explicatures and implicatures.

4.3. Cancelability.

Our view is consistent with the fact that GCIs and implicatures, but not explicatures, are cancelable (when non-based upon the maxim of manner) (see Bach 1994, and Korta 1997, 2000):

"A putative conversational implicature that *p* is explicitly cancelable if, to the form of words the utterance of which putatively implicates that *p*, it is admissible to add *but not p*, or *I do not mean to imply that p*, and it is contextually cancelable if one can find situations in which the utterance of the form of words would simply not carry the implicature. Now I think that all conversational implicatures are cancelable". (Grice 1967b, 1989, p. 44.)

It seems just self-contradictory to consider, as we should do according to the arguments by relevance theorists, that something can be at the same time part of what is (explicitly) said and (explicitly or contextually) cancelable.

4.4. Non-detachability.

Concerning non-detachability things are not so clear. According to Grice, conversational implicatures (except those based on the maxims of manner) are non-detachable:

“Insofar as the calculation that a particular conversational implicature is present requires, besides contextual and background information, only a knowledge of what has been said (or of the conventional commitment of the utterance), and insofar as the manner of expression plays no role in the calculation, it will not be possible to find another way of saying the same thing, which simply lacks the implicature in question, except where some special feature of the substituted version is itself relevant to the determination of an implicature (in virtue of one of the maxims of Manner).” (Grice 1967a, 1989, p. 39.)

Take again our example (2):

- (2) a. I have had breakfast.
- b. I have had breakfast [today].

If we find another way of saying the same thing that simply doesn't produce (2b), then it is a case of detachability. Well, according to our idea of *what is said* tied to the 'linguistic direction principle', (2a) is equivalent at the level of *what is said* with:

- (3). I have had breakfast before.

And we think that clearly an utterance of (3) does not carry anything like (2b). So, (2) is detachable and then, we should not consider it a GCI.

The same conclusion can be drawn on (1) with respect to (4):

- (1) a. He is meeting a woman this evening.
- b. He is meeting a woman [who is not his wife, mother, or sister] this evening.
- (3) A female person is going to be met by him.

It is our impression that an utterance of (3) does not “implicate” (1b). If (1) and (3) are just two different ways of saying the same thing, then it seems that this is again a case of detachability. Therefore, either Grice (and Levinson) are wrong when they attribute non-detachability to all conversational implicatures (except those based on the maxims of manner) or they are wrong when they treat these cases as GCIs based on the maxim of quantity.

5. Concluding remarks

We have presented some arguments for treating some pragmatically determined aspects of utterance meaning as conversational implicatures (Bach) and not as part of what is said or the explicature (Sperber and Wilson, Carston, Recanati) nor as GCI (Grice, Levinson). Of course, these arguments are not conclusive. On the one hand, we have considered just a couple of examples. A thorough study should take into account at least all the cases of completion, expansion and GCI considered by these authors. This is

relevant for a great number of examples, extensively discussed in the pragmatic literature such as:

Scalar implicatures

- Some students came to the party
- Some [but not all] students came to the party

Numerals

- John has three children
- John has [exactly] three children

Conjunction (and disjunction)

- He ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped
- He ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped [over]

Domain of quantification

- Everybody came to the party
- Everybody [in my class] came to the party

Negation

- The King of France is not bald
- [It is not the case that] the King of France is bald

Genitive locutions

- He has bought John's book
- He has bought [the] book [written by] John

Referential/Attributive

- Smith's murderer is insane
- Smith's murderer [Jones] is insane

All these cases, and a lot more, should be explained as pragmatically determined aspects of utterance meaning. It remains to be seen whether the best explanation is in terms of explicature, implicature or implicature, or even whether we need some other category.

On the other hand, we consider that the classification used in this debate for the different aspects of utterance meaning is by all means too simplistic. The Gricean picture of *what is said* and *what is implicated* as the two components of utterance meaning, even when enriched by the category of *implicature*, is not sufficient. We surely need a richer classification with further categories as well as a better definition of each category (to this respect, the notion of conversational implicature is in clear disadvantage with respect to Levinson's GCI). For instance, Perry (1994) distinguishes three types of truth-conditional content (*Content-M*, *Content-C*, and *Content-D*) of utterance meaning. Perry identifies this notion with *content-c* or the *official content* of utterance meaning, but he argues quite convincingly that we also need *content-M* and *content-D*, to explain the cognitive motivation of the speaker for her utterance and the cognitive

impact on the addressee. In other words, we need a finer-grained notion of *what is said* for a better explanation of communicative acts.

It seems clear that this debate has a crucial impact on some foundational distinctions of semantics and pragmatics such as literal/non-literal meaning, explicit/implicit meaning and the very delimitation of semantics and pragmatics, and general considerations on these matters could favor one solution or the other to these particular phenomena. Anyhow, these limitations to our arguments show at the same time the importance of a minute examination of all these matters.

6. REFERENCES

- Bach, K. (1994). Conversational Implicature. *Mind and Language* 9, 124-162.
- Carston, R. (1988). Implicature, Explicature, and Truth-Theoretic Semantics. In R. Kempson (ed.), *Mental Representations: The interface between language and reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 155-81.
- Carston, R. (1998), *Pragmatics and the Explicit/Implicit Distinction*. Ph.D. Thesis. University of London.
- Grice, H. P. (1967a), Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, vol. 3: Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press, 1975, pp. 41-58. Reprinted in H. P. Grice 1989, pp. 22-40.
- Grice, H. P. (1967b), Further Notes on Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press, 1978, pp. 113-27. (Reprinted in Grice (1989), pp. 41-57.)
- Grice, H. P. (1981), Presupposition and Conversational Implicature. In P. Cole (ed.), *Radical Pragmatics*, New York: Academic Press, 1981, pp. 183-97. (Reprinted in Grice (1989), pp. 269-82.)
- Grice, H.P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Korta, K. (1997). Implicatures: Cancelability and Non-detachability. Report No. ILCLI-97-LIC-6. Donostia: ILCLI publications.
- Korta, K. (2000), De *lo dicho* y otros aspectos de la comunicación. In K. Korta & F. García Murga (comps.) *Palabras. Víctor Sánchez de Zavala in memoriam*, Leioa: Servicio Editorial UPV-EHU, pp. 201-218.
- Levinson, S.C. (2000). *Presumptive Meanings. The theory of the generalized conversational implicature*. Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press.
- Perry, J. (1994), Indexicals and Demonstratives. In R. Hale and C. Wright (eds.), *Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
- Recanati, F. (1989). The pragmatics of what is said. *Mind and Language* 4, 97-120.
- Recanati, F. (1993), *Direct Reference: From language to thought*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sperber, D. and D. Wilson (1986), *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Vicente, B.(2000). La demarcación de lo explícito y lo implícito. In K. Korta & F. García Murga (comps.) *Palabras. Víctor Sánchez de Zavala in memoriam*, Leioa: Servicio Editorial UPV-EHU, pp. 183-200.