

Lecture 9: Conventional Implicatures

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In some cases, the conventional meaning of the words used will determine what is implicated, besides helping to determine what is said. If I say (smugly), *He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave*, I have certainly committed myself, by virtue of the meaning of my words, to its being the case that his being brave is a consequence of (follows from) his being an Englishman. But while I have said that he is an Englishman, and said that he is brave, I do not want to say that I have *said* (in the favored sense) that it follows from his being an Englishman that he is brave, though I have certainly indicated, and so implicated, that this is so. I do not want to say that my utterance of this sentence would be, *strictly speaking*, false should the consequence in question fail to hold. So *some* implicatures are conventional, unlike the one with which I introduced this discussion of implicature. [A: How is C getting on in his job? / B: Oh, quite well, and he hasn't been to prison yet.]

1 An expanded taxonomy of meaning types

Kinds of **implications**:

1. **at-issue entailments** ← revised
2. **presuppositions** ← refined
3. **conversational implicatures**
4. **conventional implicatures** ← new!

1. at-issue entailment: an entailment of a sentence that is at-issue.

- **entailment:** A entails B if and only if: Whenever A is true, B is true too.
- **at-issue:** A proposition is at-issue relative to a question under discussion if it helps to resolve the question under discussion (Simons et al. 2010).
- **question under discussion:** the current topic of discourse.

“The notion of at-issueness which we will characterize draws on Roberts’s (1996) concept of a Question Under Discussion (QUD). The QUD is a semantic question (i.e. a set of alternative propositions) which corresponds to the current discourse topic. The QUD may be the value of an actual question that has been asked; more typically, it is implicit in the discourse. Once a question is under discussion, it remains so until it has been answered or determined to be practically unanswerable. We will say that such a question is resolved. Felicitous conversational moves must constitute attempts to resolve the current QUD. We will say that an utterance which constitutes such an attempt, or a speaker who produces an utterance which constitutes such an attempt, addresses the QUD.” (Simons et al. 2010, p. 316)

Example: *John is a violinist* is an at-issue entailment of *John is an Italian violinist*.

2. presupposition: “If *A* presupposes *B*, then *A* not only implies *B* but also implies that the truth of *B* is somehow taken for granted, treated as uncontroversial” (Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet 1990, p. 28). Presuppositions are part of the background against which the conversation takes place. (Something that must be in the “context set”, in Stalnaker’s terms.)

Potts (2005) makes a distinction between **conventional presuppositions** and **conversationally-triggered presuppositions**.

- **conventional presuppositions** arise from the conventional meaning of the words being used, and are entailments. E.g. *Sue stopped smoking* → *Sue used to smoke*.
- **conversationally-triggered presuppositions** are more like conversational implicatures in that they arise via reasoning about the speaker’s intentions, and are not entailments. Example: *Sue cried before she finished her thesis* → *Sue finished her thesis*.

All presuppositions are backgrounded, and therefore not at-issue.

However, some presuppositions are informative.

- (1) We regret to inform you that your application has not been accepted.
- (2) Mary does not realize that it is raining.

Anaphoric presuppositions cannot be accommodated (Beaver and Zeevat 2007)

- (3) Another man came in.
- (4) John is having dinner in New York too.

Presuppositions that are easily accommodated can be informative, so not all presuppositions have to be known to all participants beforehand. Yet there is still a sense in which they are backgrounded, in contrast to other types of content.

3. (conversational) implicature: A conversationally implicates B if and only if a hearer can reason based on the fact that a speaker says A that the speaker must believe B, using the assumption that the speaker is adhering to the Cooperative Principle and the conversational maxims that it comprises (Quantity, Quality, Manner, and Relation).

Some of the students passed conversationally implicates that not all of the students passed.

4. conventional implicature: A conversationally implicates B if and only if:

- B follows from the meanings of the words in A
- A entails B (like at-issue entailments and presuppositions)
- B is **not** part of the at-issue content of A (**like** presuppositions)
- But B is also **not** backgrounded information, nor does A depend in any way on the truth of B for its bivalence, or ability to express a proposition (**unlike** presuppositions).

Lots of examples to come.

2 Conventional Implicatures: Examples from Potts

2.1 Supplements

2.1.1 Appositives

Non-restrictive relative clauses:

- (5) I spent part of every summer until I was ten with my grandmother, **who lived in a working-class suburb of Boston**. [Potts 2005, (2.1a)]
- (6) Ed's claim, **which is based on extensive research**, is highly controversial. [Potts 2005 (2.3)]

Nominal appositive

- (7) Ames, **the former spy**, is now behind bars. [Potts 2005 (2.13c)]

2.1.2 Parentheticals

As-parenthetical:

- (8) Ames was, **as the press reported**, a successful spy. [Potts 2005 (2.13a)]

2.1.3 Speaker-oriented adverbs

Speaker-oriented adverbs:

- (9) After first agreeing to lend me a modem to test, Motorola changed its mind and said that, **amazingly**, it had none to spare. [Potts 2005 (2.1b)]
- (10) **Unfortunately/Luckily**, Beck survived the descent. [Potts (2.14b)]

2.2 Expressives

2.2.1 Expressive attributive adjectives

- (11) We bought a new electric clothes dryer, and I thought all there was to it was plugging it in and connecting the vent hose. Nowhere did it say that the **damn** thing didn't come with an electric plug! [Potts (2.2a)]
- (12) My **friggin'** bike tire is flat again!
- (13) Edna is at her friend Chuck's house. Chuck tells her that he thinks all his red vases are ugly. He approves of only the blue ones. He tells Edna that she can take one of his red vases. Edna thinks the red vases are lovely, selects one, and returns home to tell her housemate, 'Chuck said I could have one of his **lovely** vases!' [Potts (2.20)]

2.2.2 Epithets

- (14) Every Democrat advocating a proposal for reform says **the stupid thing** is worthwhile. [Potts 2005 (2.22)]

2.2.3 Honorifics

Subject honorific:

- (15) Yamada sensei-ga **o-warai-ni** nat-ta.
Yamada teacher-NOM HON-laugh-DAT be-PERF
'Professor Yamada laughed.'
(Shibatani 1978: 54)

Performative honorific:

- (16) Ame ga furi-**mashi**-ta.
rain SUBJ fall-HON-PAST
'It rained.'

Anti-honorific (Potts and Kawahara 2004):

- (17) Nesugoshi-**chimat**-ta.
overslept-ANTIION-PAST
'It sucks that I overslept.'

German *Sie*, French *vous*

2.3 Conjunctive Mood?

German Konjunktiv I:

- (18) a. Sheila behauptet, dass sie krank **sei**.
b. #Ich behaupte, dass Sheila krank **sei**.

Frank Sode has argued against the notion that this is a conventional implicature. E.g. it is cancellable.

3 Tests

3.1 Defeasibility/Deniability/Cancellability

An inference from A to B is *cancellable* or *defeasible* if one can assert A, and deny B without contradicting oneself.

Implicatures are defeasible:

- (19) a. Joan likes some of her presents.
b. Joan doesn't like all of her presents. [implicature of (19a)]
c. Joan likes some of her presents, and (in fact) she likes all of her presents.
d. Joan likes some of her presents. I wonder if she likes all of her presents.

Entailments are **not** defeasible:

- (20) a. Mary is an Italian violinist.
b. Some Italian is a violinist. [entailment of (20a)]
c. #Mary is an Italian violinist, but no Italian is a violinist.
d. #Mary is an Italian violinist. I wonder if any Italians are violinists.

The hash-mark symbol (#) indicates that the example is (*pragmatically*) *infelicitous*. In this case, the infelicity comes from the fact that the speaker is contradicting himself, or, in the "I wonder if..." cases, entertaining a contradiction.

Presuppositions are **not** defeasible either:¹

¹Except under negation: *Sue didn't stop smoking – She never smoked!*

- (21) a. Mary stopped smoking.
b. Mary smoked in the past. [presupposition of (21a)]
c. #Mary stopped smoking, but she never smoked in the past.
d. #Mary stopped smoking. I wonder if she smoked in the past.

Conventional Implicatures are **not** defeasible.

- (22) a. Ed's claim, **which is based on extensive research**, is highly controversial.
b. Ed's claim is based on extensive research. [CI of (22a)]
c. Ed's claim, **which is based on extensive research**, is highly controversial.
#Hey, let's be honest: Ed's claim is not based on extensive research. [Potts 2005]

The fact that they are not defeasible shows that CIs are entailments.

Summary:

	cancellable
Implicatures	yes
Entailments	no
Presuppositions	no
CIs	no

3.2 Reinforcement

To *reinforce* an inference is to say it explicitly in subsequent discourse.

Implicatures can be reinforced:

- (23) Joan likes some of her presents, but she doesn't like all of her presents.
[implicature of first clause: Joan doesn't like all of her presents.]

Entailments cannot be:

- (24) #Mary is an Italian violinist, and some Italian is a violinist.
[entailment of first clause: Some Italian is a violinist.]

Presuppositions cannot be either:

- (25) #Mary stopped smoking, and she used to smoke.
[presupposition of first clause: Mary used to smoke.]

Nor can **conventional implicatures**:

(26) #Ames was, as the press reported, a successful spy, and he was reported to be a successful spy.

Summary:

	cancellable	reinforceable
Implicatures	yes	yes
Entailments	no	no
Presuppositions	no	no
CIs	no	no

Reinforceability seems to be a property of entailments.

3.3 Projection

Projection: An implication **projects** if and only if it survives as an utterance implication when the expression that triggers the implication occurs under the scope of an entailment-cancelling operator. (Simons et al. 2010)

Some entailment-cancelling environments:

- Negation
- Possibility modals (like *might*)
- Yes-no questions
- Antecedent of a conditional

Presuppositions project.

- (27) a. All Mary’s lovers are French. [Unembedded]
 → Mary has several lovers.
- b. It isn’t the case that all Mary’s lovers are French. [Negation]
- c. All of Mary’s lovers might be French. [Possibility modal]
- d. Are all Mary’s lovers French? [Yes-no question]
- e. If all Mary’s lovers are French, she should study the language. [Antecedent]

All imply that Mary has several lovers.

Entailments do not project:

- (28) a. Mary is an Italian violinist. [Unembedded]
 → Some Italian is a violinist.

- b. Mary is not an Italian violinist. [Negation]
- c. Mary might be an Italian violinist. [Possibility modal]
- d. Is Mary an Italian violinist? [Yes-no question]
- e. If Mary is an Italian violinist, then... [Antecedent]

Only (a) implies that some Italian is a violinist. The others do not.

Implicatures... It’s complicated and unresolved (Roberts et al. 2009; Chierchia et al. 2008).

- (29) a. Joan likes some of her presents.
 → Joan doesn’t like all of her presents.
- b. It is not true that Joan likes some of her presents.
- c. John might like some of her presents.
- d. Does Joan like some of her presents?
- e. If Joan likes some of her presents, then...

CIs do project:

- (30) a. I am looking after Sheila’s damn dog while she is on holiday.
 → The speaker feels displeasure over looking after Sheila’s dog.
- b. I am not looking after Sheila’s damn dog while she is on holiday.
- c. Am I looking after Sheila’s damn dog while she is on holiday?
- d. I might look after Sheila’s damn dog while she is on holiday.
- e. If I look after Sheila’s damn dog while she is on holiday, then I expect to get paid.
 [Potts 2005 (2.37)]

Displeasure at looking after Sheila’s dog follows from all of these.

- (31) a. Bill, a big drinker, is here.
 → Bill is a big drinker.
- b. It is not the case that Bill, a big drinker, is here.
- c. Bill, a big drinker, might be here.
- d. (?)Is Bill, a big drinker, here?
- e. If Bill, a big drinker, is here, we’ll have fun. [Simons et al. 2010 (6)]

All imply that Bill is a big drinker.

- (32) a. Sie sind hungrig.
 → The speaker is in a deferential position wrt the addressee.

- b. Sie sind nicht hungrig.
- c. Sie könnten hungrig sein.
- d. Sind Sie hungrig?
- e. Falls Sie hungrig sind, wird mein Sohn das Essen servieren.
[Simons et al. 2010 (5)]

All imply deference by the speaker.

Summary:

	cancellable	reinforceable	projection
Implicatures	yes	yes	?
Entailments	no	no	no
Presuppositions	no	no	yes
CIs	no	no	yes

According to Simons et al. (2010); Roberts et al. (2009), the unifying feature of the inferences that project is that they are all *not at-issue*. What is not at issue projects.

3.4 because

The expression *because* only targets at-issue content.

- (33) a. Sue stopped smoking.
(Presupposition: (34a); At-issue entailment: (34b))
- b. Sue, who used to smoke, does not smoke now.
(Conventional implicature: (34a); At-issue entailment: (34b))
- c. Sue used to smoke, although she doesn't smoke now.
(At-issue entailment: (34a); At-issue(?) entailment: (34b))
- d. Sue doesn't smoke these days.
(Conversational implicature: (34a); At-issue entailment: (34b))
- (34) a. Sue used to smoke.
- b. Sue does not currently smoke.
- (35) a. Fred stopped smoking because Sue stopped smoking.
- b. Fred stopped smoking because Sue, who used to smoke, does not smoke now.
- c. #Fred stopped smoking because Sue used to smoke, although she doesn't smoke now.
- d. Fred stopped smoking because Sue doesn't smoke these days.

- (36) a. #Fred started smoking because Sue stopped smoking.
- b. #Fred started smoking because Sue, who used to smoke, does not smoke now.
- c. Fred started smoking because Sue used to smoke, although she doesn't smoke now.
- d. #Fred started smoking because Sue doesn't smoke these days.

3.5 Emotive factives

Emotive factive predicates (including adjectives like *glad* and verbs like *regret*) only target at-issue content.

Assume Fred is allergic to smoke and wants to serve burgers at his garden party.

- (37) a. Fred is glad that Sue stopped smoking.
- b. Fred is glad that Sue, who used to smoke, does not smoke now.
- c. #Fred is glad that Sue used to smoke, although she doesn't smoke now.
- d. Fred is glad that Sue doesn't smoke these days.
- (38) a. #Fred is disappointed that Sue stopped smoking.
- b. #Fred is disappointed that Sue, who used to smoke, does not smoke now.
- c. Fred is disappointed that Sue used to smoke, although she doesn't smoke now.
- d. #Fred is disappointed that Sue doesn't smoke these days.

Summary:

	cancellable	reinforceable	projection	targeted
Implicatures	yes	yes	?	no
Entailments	no	no	no	yes
Presuppositions	no	no	yes	no
CIs	no	no	yes	no

3.6 Plugs

Although presuppositions project, they are “plugged” by plugs like *say*:

- (39) a. Sue realized that it was raining.
(Presupposes it was raining.)
- b. Ed said that Sue realized that it was raining. (Later, we found out that Ed's report was wrong. Sue can't have realized it was raining, because it wasn't.) [Potts 2005 (2.45)]

CIs are not:

- (40) a. Ed said that, as Sue reported, it is raining. [Potts 2005 (2.46)]
 (Conventional implicature: Sue reported that it is raining.)
 b. Ed said that, as Sue predicted, it is raining. #But in fact Sue didn't predict rain. [Potts 2005 (2.47)]

Also, compare:

- (41) Sue believes that Ed realizes that ultraviolet rays invigorate the mind. But obviously, they do not.
 (42) Sue believes that that bastard Kresge should be fired. #I think he's a good guy.

CIs are not filterable either, whereas presuppositions can be filtered out when they occur in the consequent of a conditional whose antecedent entails the presupposition in question:

- (43) If it was raining, then Sue realized that it was raining.
 (44) #If Sue reported that it was raining, then, as Sue reported, it was raining.

Summary:

	cancellable	reinforceable	projection	targeted	pluggable
Implicatures	yes	yes	?	no	n/a
Entailments	no	no	no	yes	n/a
Presuppositions	no	no	yes	no	yes
CIs	no	no	yes	no	no

3.7 Anti-backgrounding

Conventional implicatures typically contribute new information:

- (45) Sweden may export synthetic wolf urine – sprayed along roads to keep elk away – to Kuwait for use against camels. [Beaver 2001]

But of course, presuppositions may contribute new information as well, as long as the hearer is willing to accommodate it.

However, there is a real contrast between conventional implicatures and presuppositions. When the information has just been introduced, it is weird to express it in a conventional implicature, but not in a presupposition.

- (46) Lance Armstrong survived cancer.
 a. #When reporters interview Lance, a cancer survivor, he often talks about the disease.

- b. And most riders know that Lance Armstrong is a cancer survivor.

[Potts 2005 (2.41)]

Entailments cannot be backgrounded.

- (47) Lance Armstrong survived cancer. #Lance is a cancer survivor, and he often talks about the disease.

Implicatures can be backgrounded (it seems):

- (48) Lance Armstrong survived cancer. Lance almost didn't survive cancer, and he often talks about the disease.

Summary:

	cancellable	reinforceable	projection	targeted	pluggable	anti-bg
Implicatures	yes	yes	?	no	n/a	no
Entailments	no	no	no	yes	n/a	yes
Presuppositions	no	no	yes	no	yes	no
CIs	no	no	yes	no	no	yes

3.8 Denial

Presuppositions survive denials:

- (49) A: Gore almost won the election.
 (Presupposes he didn't, entails it was close.)
 B: No, that's not true.

B is committed to the proposition that Bill didn't win the election.

The at-issue entailment, that it was close, is denied.

- (50) A: Only Lucy came to the party.
 (Presupposes she came, entails nobody else came.)
 B: No, that's not true.

B is committed to the proposition that Lucy came to the party.

Not conventional implicatures:

- (51) A: Jill, who lost something on the flight, likes to travel by train.
 B: No, that's false.

B is **not** committed to the proposition that Jill lost something on the flight.

3.9 Cancellation?

Presuppositions, even the “conventionally triggered” type, sometimes fail to survive under negation.

(52) Ali’s brother isn’t bold: Ali doesn’t have a brother! [Potts 2005, (2.42)]

Some regard this as a type of “cancellation,” although that term is rather misleading. According to Potts (2005), “cancellation typically arises in situation in which presuppositions conflict with the demands of the context” (p. 34). But “CIs are never subject to manipulation in this way” (p. 35).

(53) The press said nothing about Ames. #But if, as the press reported, Ames is a spy, then the FBI is in deep trouble.

But let us create a minimal pair with a presupposition:

(54) The press said nothing about Ames. #But if the president knows that the press reported that Ames is a spy, then the FBI is in deep trouble.

So this does not seem like a real difference between CIs and presuppositions.

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