Lecture 8: Non-truth-conditional meaning (semantics)

Reminders:

**Semantics/pragmatics distinction:** linguistically encoded versus inferred on basis of principles concerning rational communicative behaviour.

[This is the RT sem/prag distinction – other frameworks draw it differently.]

**Explicature/implicature distinction:** among the assumptions communicated by a speaker, some are pragmatic developments of the decoded meaning (the logical form of the utterance), i.e. explicatures, and others are entirely pragmatically inferred (implicatures).

**Saturation vs. free pragmatic enrichment:** among the pragmatic processes contributing to the development of an explicature some are obligatory, bottom-up, mandated by the linguistic form, i.e. processes of saturation, such as providing a value for a pronoun, and others are optional [they don’t occur in all contexts of use of an expression], top-down, entirely motivated by pragmatic standards of relevance/informativeness, i.e. processes of free enrichment.

**Contextualists vs. hidden indexicalists:** contextualists (including relevance theorists) advocate free pragmatic enrichment [which may result in linguistically unarticulated constituents of content] while hidden indexicalists claim that the only pragmatic contribution to explicit utterance content [= semantic content, for them] is saturation, so whenever there is a pragmatic contribution to explicature it must be underpinned by a linguistic element (whether overt or covert/unpronounced).

**Overgeneration problems:** both camps seem to face problems of overgeneration. Hidden indexicalists end up with a great proliferation of unpronounced elements in logical form for which there is little evidence (e.g. ALL predicate nominals come with a domain variable, e.g. ‘Every <bottle, f(i)> is empty’, ‘Imelda had no <shoes, f(i)> to wear’. Free enrichment theorists need to explain what prevents certain clearly incorrect instances of unarticulated constituents of content from arising even when they would be relevant [Recall the ‘John likes Sally’ example from last week: what prevents it from being enriched to ‘John likes Sally and his mother’ in a context where this would be relevant?]

1. Truth-conditional meaning versus non-truth-conditional meaning:

What is non-truth-conditional meaning? There are two very different kinds:

a. Within utterance meaning (communicated content):

   Explicature = truth-conditional content of the utterance
   Implicature (conversational) = non-truth-conditional content

   E.g.  A: I’m out of petrol.
   B: There’s a garage round the corner.
Proposition explicitly communicated (= t-c content): THERE IS A GARAGE ROUND CORNER
Implicature (= non-t-c content):
(As far as the speaker knows) THE GARAGE IS OPEN AND HAS PETROL TO SELL

b. Within linguistically encoded meaning (semantics):
Some (most?) encoded meanings contribute to the truth-conditional content:
e.g. ‘squirrel’, ‘eat’, ‘grey’, ‘quickly’, ‘and’, ‘under’, etc.
‘Grey squirrels eat peanuts and red squirrels eat worms’ is true iff both of the following
are the case: grey squirrels eat peanuts, red squirrels eat worms

Compare: ‘Grey squirrels eat peanuts but red squirrels eat worms’
What are its truth conditions? How does the world have to be for an utterance of this
sentence to be true?

General assumption: there are two kinds of linguistically encoded meaning:
- the truth-conditional and the non-truth-conditional

Some non-truth-conditional linguistic expressions and constructions:

2. Mood indicators
   a. John will behave well.
   b. Will John behave well?
   c. Behave well, John!

While (a) has truth conditions, (b) and (c) do not.
However, according to many theorists: all three express one and the same proposition, which
can be handled by truth-conditional semantics in the standard way:
JOHN POTTER WILL BEHAVE WELL AT T_x

Differences between them: speaker attitude to the proposition expressed or speech act (or
‘illocutionary’ act) performed: assertion vs. question vs. request/order
Speech act theorists (e.g. John Searle): every utterance has two elements of meaning:
- a truth-conditional (propositional) element and a speech act element.

3. Discourse adverbials
   a. Seriously, you need to do more work.
   b. Frankly, Fred’s theory is inconsistent.
   c. Fortunately, Bill turned up.
   d. Sadly, Jane failed her semantics exam.

What is the proposition expressed by these utterances?
Do the sentence adverbials contribute to the truth conditions of these utterances?

Many semanticists maintain that: An utterance of (3b) is true iff Fred’s theory is inconsistent.
Suppose Fred’s theory is indeed inconsistent and that the speaker is not being frank,
is (3b) true or false in those circumstances?
So what does ‘frankly’ (or ‘seriously’) contribute to what is communicated?
4. **Discourse particles**
   
a. Leave, please.
b. Can you please leave?
c. *Please,* you’re standing on my foot. (illocutionary particle)
d. You’re leaving, *eh?* (illocutionary)
e. He’s leaving, *alas.* (attitudinal)
f. He’s leaving, *hurrah.* (attitudinal)
g. He’s leaving *tte.* (hearsay/evidential) [*tte* is a Japanese hearsay particle]
h. *Now* I’m not going to tell you what to do. (textual)
i. You’re leaving, *then.* (inferential)

5. **Parentheticals**
   
a. He’s left, *I bet.* (illocutionary)
b. *I warn you,* he’ll hurt you. (illocutionary)
c. He’s left, *I fear,* for America. (attitudinal)
d. He’s left for America, *I believe/think.* (evidential)
e. He’s left, *I hear.* (hearsay)
f. He’s left, *I conclude.* (inferential)

   The parenthetical is taken to not contribute to the proposition expressed (truth-conditional content) but to play some other (more pragmatic) role (e.g. indicating a speech act in (a) and (b), indicating speaker attitude in (c)).

6. **Interjections, etc.**
   
e.g. Aha!, Oops, Wow!, Huh!, Yuk!, Oh!, Ah!

   Are these even words of the language?
   They make some contribution to the interpretation of utterances in which they occur. What?

7. **Discourse or ‘pragmatic’ connectives** [our main focus]
   
a. Grey squirrels eat peanuts and red squirrels eat worms.
b. Grey squirrels eat peanuts but red squirrels eat worms.

   **Grice:** These are identical in truth-conditional content, i.e. they both ‘say’ the same thing, express the same proposition.
   However, they clearly differ in meaning and the difference is due to the different encoded meanings of ‘but’ and ‘and’.

8. **Kinds of connectives**
   
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   These are truth-functional and non-truth-functional connectives. The former are truth-conditional, the latter are not. The truth-functional connectives are logical, the non-truth-functional ones are not.
Subcategories of discourse (non-truth-conditional) connectives:

*Contrastive*: but, whereas, however, nevertheless
*Additive*: moreover, furthermore, too, also, as well
*Confirmatory*: after all, indeed, you see
*Inferential*: so, therefore, hence, thus

9. Grice’s general category of ‘implicature’ and his subcategory of ‘conventional implicature’

Grice’s overall picture:

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what is communicated (speaker-meant)
what is said                       what is implicated
(truth-conditional content)       (non-truth-conditional)

conventional                          non-conventional
(semantic but non-truth-conditional) (inferred)

conversational                          other
(via CP and conversational maxims) (via other maxims, e.g. politeness)
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Conversational implicatures: beliefs that have to be attributed to the speaker in order to preserve the assumption that she is obeying the Co-operative principle and conversational maxims in saying what she said. *An entirely pragmatic phenomenon*. Worked out (inferred) on the basis of what was said and rational principles of communicative/social behaviour.

Conventional implicatures: part of encoded linguistic meaning (conventional), so arbitrarily stipulated in the grammar or lexicon.

For Grice, what distinguishes them from other types of ‘conventional meaning’ (i.e. linguistically encoded meaning) is that they do not contribute to ‘what is said’ (so they are implicatures).

10. What does ‘but’ mean (encode), according to Grice?
    (a) the same truth-conditional content as ‘and’ [see truth tables above]
    (b) plus a conventional implicature to the effect that the two states of affairs described (“Grey squirrels eat peanuts”, “Red squirrels eat worms”) are being contrasted in some way.

His is essentially a speech act account:
There are two lower-level speech acts (assertions):
1. Grey squirrels eat peanuts
2. Red squirrels eat worms
And a higher-level speech act of ‘commenting in a certain way on the lower-order speech acts. he [the speaker] is contrasting in some way the performance of one of these lower-order speech
acts with the other, …’  (Grice 1989: p. 362. Note that he was, in fact, discussing here the
expression ‘on the other hand’, but the point seems to carry over to ‘but’.)

So it seems that, for Grice, conventional implicatures are indicators of the type of speech act
the speaker is performing.

11. Recall the embedding test for whether or not some element of meaning contributes to
truth-conditionality (explicature) or not:

a. Sue left but Bob didn’t.

Are the truth conditions just (b)-(c) or (b)-(d):

b. Sue left.
c. Bob didn’t leave.
d. There is a contrast between the fact that Sue left and the fact that Bob didn’t.

Try embedding the original sentence in a conditional:

e. If Sue left but Bob didn’t we can have a party.

Question: Under what circumstances is the speaker of (11a) saying we can have a party?
Is it provided that (b)-(c) are true or provided that (b)-(d) are true?
Answer: It seems that (d) remains outside the scope of ‘if … then’; that is, it does not
contribute to the truth conditions of the conditional.

12. Other discourse connectives discussed by Grice include ‘moreover’, ‘so’ and
‘therefore’.
Consider what he says about ‘therefore’ when discussing the following example:

a. He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave.

The proposition(s) expressed by (a) are as in (b):

b. X is an Englishman. X is brave.

‘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 favoured
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 …’  (Grice 1975: 44-5; = 1989: 25-6)

13. Next week:
Criticism of the speech act theorists account (Searle and Grice).
Comparison of sentence adverbials, e.g. ‘frankly’, ‘seriously’, and discourse
connectives, e.g. ‘but’, ‘moreover’. They may both be non-truth-conditional, but
there seem to be important differences in the kind of meaning they encode.
An alternative approach (more cognitively-oriented) in terms of the conceptual/
procedural distinction developed within relevance theory.
References:


Homework:

Reading:

[Full reference above]

Questions to consider:

1. Which of the underlined words do you think have truth-conditional meaning, and which do not? On what basis do you make your decision?

   (a) The earth is not flat.
   (b) Mary is tall. However, Bill is not.
   (c) John left although Susan told him to.
   (d) I am tall.
   (e) Jane left or Susan left.
   (f) Jane left. Susan also left.
   (g) John is unhappy. Nevertheless, he's working hard.
   (h) Susan is probably leaving.
   (i) Confidentially, Mary has resigned.
   (j) Allegedly, Bill stole cash from the till.
   (k) The Prime Minister has, it seems, resigned.
   (l) That bastard John has gone off with my car again.

2. Do you think Grice was right to treat ‘therefore’ as encoding a conventional implicature rather than as contributing to the proposition expressed (what is said) by a speaker? Try to justify your answer with some evidence (in addition to your intuitions).