Conventional Implicature

Informationswissenschaft und Sprachtechnologie im Diskurs

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Introduction

„Conventional Implicature“

- Authors: Lauri Karttunen and Stanley Peters
- Published in “Syntax and Semantics” Volume 11 in 1979

Responsible for the “transformation” of many former called presuppositions into conventional implicatures.
Presuppositions

- Lexical items or syntactic constructions, that convey implicit assumptions about the world or background belief relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted

- Propositions, which the sentences are not primarily about

- Have to be established prior to the utterance to ensure successful communication

- Aspect of meaning distinct from ordinary truth-conditional semantics

**Example:**  
*Jane no longer writes fiction.*

Presupposition: *Jane once wrote fiction.*
Presupposition Vs. Entailment

**Presupposition:** Something the speaker assumes to be the case before making an utterance (Speaker oriented)

**Entailment:** something that logically follows from what is asserted in the utterance (Sentence oriented)

**Example analysis:** *Mary's brother bought three horses.*

**Presuppositions:** *Mary exists, Mary has a brother, Mary has only one brother, Mary's brother is rich*

→ Speaker's subjective presuppositions, all can be wrong

**Entailments:** *Mary's brother bought something, bought three animals, two horses, one horse etc.*

→ Entailments follow from the sentence regardless of whether the speaker's beliefs are right or wrong
### Conversational Implicature
- **Particularized**
- **Generalized**

- Generated by general rules of conversation, as applied to a particular conversational circumstance
- A speaker’s presumed adherence to the Cooperative Principle (Grice)
- Pragmatic Phenomenon

### Presuppositions

### Conventional Implicature
- Generated by meanings of words used
- Semantic phenomenon

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**Pragmatics**

**Semantics**
Subjunctive Conditional Construction

(1) If it were raining outside, the drumming on the roof would drown out our voices

→ Antecedent is false, Conditional is true, consequent clause is false

(2) If Mary were allergic to penicillin, she would have exactly the symptoms she is showing

→ Antecedent is true, conditional is true, consequent clause is true

Speaker concludes the truth condition of the antecedent from the truth condition of the consequent and vice versa

→ Similarity to conversational implicatures and the Gricean Maxims (Speak the truth!)
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Subjunctive Conditional Construction

(3) If Shakespeare were the author of Macbeth, there would be proof in the Globe Theater's records for the year 1605

- Particularized subjunctive conditionals are highly context dependent (Shakespeare the author of Macbeth?)

→ Come and go by working alternations in the context surrounding the utterance

(4) If Mary were allergic to penicillin, she would have exactly the symptoms she is showing. But we know that she is not allergic to penicillin

→ Doctor is not willing to approve the „Truth“ of the former consequent clause of (2)
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Presuppositions Vs. Conversational Implicature

Special case: Verbs of judging

(5) John criticized Harry for writing the letter.

→ Harry is responsible for writing the letter

(6) John criticized Harry for writing the letter. Since the letter was actually written by Mary, it was unfair of John.

Presupposition bares the feature of cancelability

→ Generalized conversational implicature
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Definition:

“[…] in uttering a sentence $S$, a speaker implies that $p$ is the case if, by having been uttered, $S$ suggests as its conclusion $p$, without $p$ having been literally said. If the conclusion rests exclusively on the conventional meaning of the words and grammatical constructions that occur in $S$, then the conclusion is called a ‘conventional implicature.’ Since Karttunen and Peters (1979) most presuppositions are interpreted as conventional implicatures“ (Bussmann, 2006, p. 221)
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Large set of presuppositions are actually conventional implicatures:

- Presuppositions associated with particles like *too, either, also, even, only*…
- Presuppositions of certain factive verbs like *forget, realize, take into account*…
- Presuppositions of implicative verbs like *manage* and *fail*
- Presuppositions of cleft and pseudo-cleft constructions

Examples share the feature that there is a rule of the language that associates a presupposition with a morpheme or grammatical construction.
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An example of a word that explicitly demonstrates the difference between what is said and what is conventionally implicated is *even*:

(7) *Even Bill likes Mary.*

(8) *Bill likes Mary.*

- Both have the same proposition
- *even* plays no role in the truth conditions of the sentence. (7) is true if (8) is true
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But the word *even* adds something to the ordinary meaning:

(9)a) *Other people besides Bill like Mary.*

b) *Of the people under consideration, Bill is the least likely to like Mary.*

(10) *I just noticed that even Bill likes Mary*

(11) *If even Bill likes Mary, then all is well*

- (9) a or b (consequent) could be false, while (8) (antecedent) is still true
- If (8) is false, 9 a or b can still be true

→ *even bares a meaning but has no effect on the truth conditions*
How to… Describe The Attached Aspects of Meaning

Montague’s version of model theory

- Each syntactic category consists of phrases that are either listed in the lexicon (basic phrase) or generated by syntactic rules (derives phrases)

- Principle of compositionality: meaning of complex phrases are determined by the meanings of their parts and the particular syntactic rule

- Meaning represented by logical expression (intensional logic); Reference to objects

Extension of Montague’s system to describe the twin aspects of meaning:

1. Meaning EXPRESSED by the phrase

2. What the phrase conventionally IMPLICATES

Example:

Bill managed to catch a fish

\[ \text{\textit{manage-to}}^1 = \lambda P \neg \text{\textit{easy}}(\neg P \{x\}) \]
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Analysis of Particles

- Particle dependent on FOCUS and SCOPE
- Comparing the truth conditions
- Analyzing the implicature brought in by a particle by regarding the derivation and the translation

Example:

- **Bill likes even MARY.**
  - Focus of even: Mary
  - Scope of even: Bill likes x
  - Existential implicature: There are other x under consideration besides Mary such that Bill likes x.
  - Scalar implicature: For all x under consideration besides Mary, the likelihood that Bill likes x is greater than the likelihood that Bill likes Mary.

- Example:
  
  a. `even Bill likes Mary, Even, 3`
     
     - `Bill`
     - `he3 likes Mary, 4`
       - `hσa`
       - `like Mary, 5`
         - `like`
         - `Mary`

  b. `even Bill likes Mary° = Bill°(h3 he3 likes Mary°) = like°(b, m)`
  
  c. `even Bill likes Mary¹ = (Bill¹(h3 he3 likes Mary¹) & Bill¹(h3 he3 likes Mary¹) & even¹(Bill¹, h3 he3 likes Mary°))`
References
