

Implicature Questions (read Birner, Ch. 2)

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1 Questions about Birner

1. Explain the difference in implicatures in the following two utterances (Be sure to state what maxim is involved):
 - a. I ate some sushi and I got sick.
 - b. I got sick and I ate some sushi.

By the **maxim of Manner (Be orderly)**, (a) implicates that **the sushi was eaten first**, and perhaps that **eating the sushi caused the sickness**. Example (b) implicates that getting sick happened first; since it is a little hard to imagine getting sick causes one to eat sushi (Every time I get the flu, I get in the mood for maguro), (b) probably doesn't implicate causality.

How do the implicatures of both examples differ from the following?

- c. I put salt and pepper on my eggs.

Example (c) does not seem to implicate that the salt was put on first. Perhaps because this is because it is hard to imagine a situation in which the order **is relevant information**. Perhaps it is also because the expression "salt and pepper" is conventionalized or frozen. The expression "salt and pepper" is just much more common than "pepper and salt", so saying "salt and pepper" when order doesn't matter (for instance, when you can't remember the order) would be perfectly consistent with the Maxim of Manner.

2. Here's an example from the text, some drama from a court case:

Q: Do you have any bank accounts in Swiss banks, Mr. Bronston?

A: No, sir.

Q: Have you ever?

A: The company had an account there for about six months, in Zurich.

What's implicated by A's last response? What maxim is involved? Is it a generalized or particular implicature? Re-read the facts about the case, and the Supreme Court decision on the case. Does the Supreme Court basically agree that this is an implicature (despite the fact that no one on the court may have read Grice)? Explain.

On the face of it, here is the Gricean account:

A's answer implicates that he has never had any Swiss bank accounts. The implicature arises by Relevance and or Quantity. A's answer seems irrelevant to the question just asked, but if we assume that he is being cooperative, then **he must have no accounts that would be directly relevant to answering the question**, and he is simply bring up the next most relevant thing in context, company accounts in Zurich. An alternative explanation of this implicature is that the fact that he did not provide the most informative answer implicates that most informative statement (yes, he has a bank account) must be false. In either case, it is a conversational implicature, which arises only in this specific context.

Of course A doesn't **say** that he has no accounts, His omission of any such statement implicates that there are no accounts. It's an implicature, easily cancellable. (He could go on to say: "That's how I developed the contacts I used to open my own personal accounts.")

The court found that this was not perjury. What we are told is: "The US Supreme Court overturned the conviction, on the grounds that Mr. Bronston had spoken **the literal truth** and that it was the lawyer's responsibility to ensure that he provided the information specifically asked for (i.e., whether he himself had ever had a Swiss bank account)."

The attorney had concluded that there are no Swiss accounts belonging to the defendant. There are two view on whether the court agrees that this is an implicature of what the defendant said. First view: The answer is yes, the court thinks that this is an implicature, because they draw attention to the literal meaning of what he said. He did not perjure himself because he did not **say** (in the favored sense) anything that was a lie (He spoke the literal truth). Now may have implicated a lie, but to implicate a lie is not to perjure oneself. The second view is no, the court did not agree that this was an implicature. This is court testimony and the person on the stand is the defendant. The relationship between the witness and the attorney was adversarial. To imagine that the rules of conversational cooperation were in effect in such a situation was a serious error on the part of the attorney. In fact no implicatures are generated in such situations, because there is no cooperation. In either case, the court is effectively saying it was the attorney's own fault for not asking a follow-up question which compelled the witness to give a direct on the record answer.

3. For each of the following, “ $\Rightarrow$ ” means “con conversationally implicates”. For purposes of this exercise, it means “possibly conversationally implicates”. We’ll call the first sentence an utterance and the second an *implicatum* (something suggested or implied by the utterance. Your job in each case is to decide whether the implicatum really is a conversational implicature of the first. The idea is to support your claim by applying one of the tests for conversational implicature in each case (implicatures are **cancellable**, **reinforceable**, and **detachable**). By the time you’re done with the problems below you should have used each test at least once. If your test indicates that the implicatum is **not** a conversational implicature of the first, state whether there is **alternative** semantic relation that does hold (for example, one sentence entails the other, or presupposes it, or conventionally implicates it, or they are contraries or contradictories). You do not need to perform a test to support these alternatives.

- (a) Therefore, in each of the answers below, there is a test provided

which requires a judgment. The judgment involves imagining that the example sentence is uttered, and then is immediately followed by the sentence that begins with 3 dots (...).

- (b) For example, the first expression with ... in the answer to problem (a.) is

? ... but he doesn't have a Buick.

And so the sentence you have to judge is:

? John's car is a Buick but he doesn't have a Buick.

The expression with ... after example (a.) has a question mark in front of it. This indicates that directly cancelling John's having the Buick fails (sounds strange or contradictory, indicating it is an entailment).

- a. John's car is a Buick. $\Rightarrow$ John has a Buick.
 ? ...but he doesn't have a Buick.

Since cancelling the implicatum sounds strange or contradictory, this indicates the implicatum is an entailment, not an implicature.

- b. I ate some sushi and I got sick $\Rightarrow$ I got sick because I ate some sushi.
 ...I got sick because I ate the sushi. (reinforcing)
 ...but not in that order (cancelling)
- c. Rita is a linguistics student; therefore she is smart. $\Rightarrow$ Linguistics students are smart.
 ...? but nothing I know suggests that linguistics students tend to be smart. (failed cancellation)
- d. Alice is a tall taxi driver. $\Rightarrow$ Alice is tall.
 ...but studies have shown that taxi drivers are an unusually short set of people; in fact Alice is short.
- e. Morgan has little money. $\Rightarrow$ Morgan has money.
 ...in fact, he has no money. (cancels successfully)
- f. Frank owns a compact or mid-sized Honda. $\Rightarrow$ Frank owns a Honda.
 (assume the reading that means he owns either a compact Honda or a mid-sized Honda)
 ...? but he doesn't actually own a Honda. (failed cancel)
- g. Frank owns a compact or mid-sized Honda. $\Rightarrow$ Frank does not own both a compact Honda and a mid-sized Honda.
 ...if not both. (cancels successfully)
- h. Some questions on the pragmatics assignment were hard. $\Rightarrow$ Not all the questions on the pragmatics assignment were hard.
 ...In fact, all were hard. (cancel)

2 Presuppositions

Below are answers (defensible claims about the presuppositions of the examples in the text). without the original sentences. In every case, a **defense** consists of showing the original example sentence (**and its negation**) have the sentence in the first column as an entailment. So for (a) the original sentence and its negation are

- (1) a. Mandy didn't finish her dinner. (original)
 b. Many finished her dinner. (the negation of a.)

There are many answers, so this is hard to do. The first column gives the most straightforward top level answer, the second gives additional answers.

Any definite NP gives an existence presupposition, so I added some of those in the second column. Note that a sentence in the second column is often a presupposition.

There was some spirited discussion in class about whether (b) was really an entailment of *Clive enjoyed the party immensely*. Can you enjoy a party from next door (the sweet-smelling marijuana smoke comes wafting over the hedges ...).

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| a. Mandy started dinner. | There was a dinner. |
| | There was a Mandy. |
| b. Clive attended the party. | There was a party |
| | There was a Clive. |
| c. Edward knew Sally. | There was an Edward |
| | There was a Sally. |
| d. Latoya got her license. | Latoya had a license |
| | There was a Latoya. |
| e. Mandy is scheduled to take a trip. | |
| f. John started laughing. | John laughed. |
| | There is a John. |
| g. they're lovers. | They exist. |