

Properties Of Conversational Implicature

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ABSTRACT

Concepts like implicature in pragmatics untiringly aim at explaining speaker's capability to construe given utterances in given context and thereby to draw inferences. In general, what is conveyed by a given message may be far richer than what is said. The concepts in pragmatics such as implicature aim at bridging up such gap. Herbert Paul Grice coined the term 'Implicature' in the series of William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1969. These lectures were partly published in 1975, entitled as "Logic and Conversation." Grice's theories have never been published in their entirety. In fact, two portions of his lectures have been appeared in the form of articles and, as Taylor and Cameron (1987:82) state, monograph copies of his lectures have been circulated widely. Grice's basic purpose behind devising the concept of implicature was to explain how speakers mean more than what they actually say in a conversational exchange. Thus, an implicature is something meant, implied, hinted or suggested which is different from 'what is said.' Nevertheless, it is distinct from concepts like entailment and logical implication. In fact, such inferences arise out of logical or semantic content of an utterance.

Key words: Pragmatics, Conversational Implicature, Cooperative Principle, Property, Grice

Introduction

Grice suggests characteristics of conversational implicature which distinguish it from the conventional one. These characteristics are known as properties of conversational implicature. Sadock briefly states these properties as follows:

- (a) *Conversational implicatures are capable of being "worked out" on the basis, inter alia, of the Cooperative Principle. That is, they are CALCULABLE.*
- (b) *Conversational implicatures are CANCELLABLE.*
- (c) *Conversational implicatures are NONDETACHABLE.*

- (d) *Conversational implicatures are not part of the meaning of the uttered forms. They are NONCONVENTIONAL.*
 - (e) *Conversational implicatures are not carried by what is said, but by the saying of it.*
 - (f) *Conversational implicatures may be INDETERMINATE*
- (1978:284).

Following is a detailed discussion on the properties of conversational implicature:

Calculability

Calculability refers to the phenomenon, as Jenny Thomas (1995:82) notes, that in different contexts the same words may convey very distinct implicatures. Levinson is of the opinion that for every supposed implicature, it should be possible to construct the following argument:

- i) S has said that *p*.
 - ii) There's no reason to think, S is not observing the maxims, or at least the co-operative principle.
 - iii) In order for S to say that *p* and be indeed observing the maxims or the co-operative principle, S must think that *q*.
 - iv) S must know that it is mutual knowledge that *q* must be supposed if S is to be taken to be co-operating.
 - v) S has done nothing to stop me, the addressee, thinking that *q*.
 - vi) Therefore S intends me to think that *q*, and in saying that *p* has implicated *q*
- (1983:114).

Here, Levinson explains the steps that are supposed to be followed by the interlocutors to calculate implicatures in specific circumstances. The hearer makes inferences to preserve the assumption of co-operation based on the CP and the maxims, in addition to the literal meaning of the utterance. Jenny Thomas has suggested some steps a hearer goes through in order to calculate implicature. Let's make it clear with her example:

*Late on Christmas Eve 1993 an ambulance is sent to pick up a man who has collapsed in Newcastle city centre. The man is drunk and vomits all over the ambulanceman who goes to help him. The ambulanceman says:
'Great, that's really great! That's made my Christmas!'*

(1995:55).

To calculate the implicatures in the above utterance, one has to follow the deductive process suggested by Thomas:

- (i) The ambulanceman has expressed pleasure at having someone vomit over him.
- (ii) There is no example in recorded history of people being delighted at having someone vomit over them.
- (iii) I have no reason to believe that the ambulanceman is trying to deceive us any way.
- (iv) Unless the ambulanceman's utterance is entirely pointless, he must be trying to put across some other proposition.
- (v) This must be some obviously related proposition.
- (vi) The most obviously related proposition is the exact opposite of the one he has expressed.
- (vii) The ambulanceman is extremely annoyed at having the drunk vomit over him.

(1995:55)

It is after such process that an implicature is calculated by a hearer and then the proper interpretation is possible.

Defeasibility

This property denotes that an implicature can be cancelled. An implicature is cancelled when a speaker implies something and then he denies that implicature. Following are examples that illustrate how implicatures are cancelled for various reasons:

Son: Let me go to play hide 'n seek.

Mother: You have not completed your homework yet.

Son takes mother's utterance to implicate that:

+>>>You can go to play hide 'n seek after you have completed your homework.

So, the son completes his homework within one hour and then takes place the following exchange:

Son: Let me go to play hide 'n seek, I have completed my homework.

Mother: I didn't say that you could go to play hide in seek after you complete your homework. I only said that you couldn't go before.

In the above conversation, the mother cancelled the implicature raised in the initial exchange. Levinson (1983:115) mentions that implicatures can be directly and overtly denied without a sense of contradiction. He further states that they can disappear when context of utterance makes it clear that the utterance's communicative content could not contain such an inference. According to Yule (1996:44), for the reason that implicatures arise out of what is communicated and not said, speakers can deny that they did not intend to communicate such meanings.

Non-detachability

Grice claims that conversational implicatures are not detachable. Sadock explains this characteristic as:

If X is an expression with meaning M and C_k is a conversational implicature based on an utterance of X in context K , then it should not be possible to find an expression X' that shares meaning M with X but is not associated with the conversational implicature C_k

(1978:287).

This formulation is based on the fact that conversational implicatures are calculated on the basis of meaning. Grice is of the opinion that implicature is attributed to the semantic import of what is said. In other words, it is not attached to the linguistic form. Consequently, by substituting some words in an utterance with their synonyms, implicature cannot be detached. On the contrary, presuppositions are detachable as they are attached to certain lexical items:

Bill managed to fulfill his parents' expectations.

The above utterance seems to presuppose:

→ Bill tried to fulfill his parents' expectations.

The same utterance has an implicature that:

+>> Bill fulfilled his parent's expectation.

However, the presupposition of the utterance does not implicate that Bill fulfilled his parents' expectations. In other words, same implicature cannot be detached from relexicalization or paraphrase of the utterance. In figurative use of language, especially irony, an implicature cannot

be worked out by replacing synonymous expression. For instance, (following Levinson 1983:116-17), being aware of Smith's nonsensical behavior, Bill says:

Smith is a genius.

Here Bill implicates:

+>> Smith is a mannerless nonsense.

However, the following utterance, having the same meaning but different lexical items synonymous with those in Bill's utterance, do not have the implicature intended by Bill:

Smith is a mental prodigy.

Smith is an exceptionally clever human being.

Smith is an enormous intellect.

Smith is a big brain.

The above utterances are not ironically potential and hence do not intend to implicate the opposite. Except those implicatures arising under the maxim of manner are non-detachable because such implicatures are attributed to the structure of the utterance.

Non-conventionality

As stated earlier, conversational implicatures are not part of conventional content of an utterance; rather, they are non-conventional in nature and even by definition. In other words, the hearer has to comprehend the literal meaning of the utterance, as Levinson (1983:117) states, before he interprets the implicatures in a context. So implicatures are not part of literal meaning. Levinson points out that an utterance can be true when its implicature fails to be. He illustrates the phenomenon with the following example:

Herb hit Sally.

+>> Herb didn't kill Sally by hitting her.

(1983:117).

The above implicature comes into existence by extending the quantity. The speaker would be taken to be uncooperative by providing inadequate information if Herb had killed Sally. However, the speaker might say that Herb hit Sally to confuse the hearer in a context where it is true. Consequently, the implicature is false.

Potential Indeterminacy

Indeterminacy or multiplicity of meaning refers to the fact that an utterance with a particular meaning can produce distinct implicatures on different occasions. In other words, a set of implicatures attributed to a single expression on any instance, may be indeterminable. As pointed out by Levinson (1983:118n), Sperber and Wilson claim that implicatures arising out of exploitation of the maxims are indeterminate:

Sam is really a lion.

The above utterance might have the following implicatures in various contexts:

- +>> Sam is brave.
- +>> Sam is strong.
- +>> Sam is active.
- +>> Sam is horrible.
- +>> Sam is merciless.
- +>> Sam is powerful.

The utterance may suggest one or all of these meanings appropriate to the situation in which it is made.

Reinforceability

Reinforceability refers to the phenomenon that strengthens the implicature with addition by making the implicature explicit. According to Sadock (1978:294), conversational implicatures are reinforceable while conventional implicatures are not. Moreover, this test is based on the fact that conversational implicatures are not part of the conventional import. For instance, in the following utterance, conversational implicature is made explicit by addition of a clause:

Jill lost some of the diamonds but not all.

Though it seems like repetition of the facts, it is different from redundancy. Levinson (1983:120) also is of the opinion that implicatures can be combined with an overt statement of their content avoiding 'anomalous redundancy'. For instance, the second clause in the following utterance restates what is conventionally implicated by the first clause:

It's funny that John behaves like fool and he does.

Compared with cancellability, as Sadock (1978:294) states, reinforceability is a more sensitive test for implicature in decisive cases. He further states that generalized conversational implicatures associated with ‘almost’ are easily reinforceable:

We almost, but didn’t quite, reach the summit.

In the above utterance, however, it is not so easy to cancel the implicature triggered by the word ‘almost.’

Universality

Universality is a prominent property attributed to generalized conversational implicatures. According to Levinson (2000:15) the inferences derive ultimately from the fundamental consideration of rationality. As a result, a strong tendency to universality of implicatures may be expected. For instance, in all worlds in which (1) is directly expressible, the every utterance identical to (1) should have the standard implicature (2):

1. The cricket team consists of eleven players.
2. The cricket team consists of no more than eleven players.

Levinson formulates a theory from which the universality of implicatures follows:

“If the maxims are derivable from considerations of rational co-operation, we should expect them to be universal in application, at least in co-operative kinds of interaction”

(1983:121).

Levinson is of the opinion that universality may turn out to be one of the important tests which will provide refined view of the presence of a conversational implicature.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, implicature has achieved the status of a central notion in pragmatics. It has been an area of research in recent past with various linguists probing the concept. The properties of Conversational Implicature render it as different from conventional implicature. Grice is one of the most noteworthy forerunners of Conversational Implicature who established it as pivotal notion in Pragmatics.

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