

Taxonomy of Conversational Implicature

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Abstract

The present paper ventures to spotlight Conversational Implicature as one of the significant notions in Pragmatics. It is the crucial phenomena in pragmatics which has attracted attention of various linguists and pragmatists. It is used to elucidate how speakers mean more than they literally say in conversation. It facilitates understanding of unsaid meaning which the hearer is supposed to infer. Apart from Grice, the concept of Conversational Implicature has been formulated by various linguists and philosophers. The paper deals with defining the procedures and taxonomy of the concept, as suggested by language philosophers.

Key words: Pragmatics, Conversational Implicature, Taxonomy, Procedures, Particularized Implicature, Generalized Implicature

Introduction

Grice's notion of conversational implicature refers to the communicational content that is implicated non-conventionally. According to Yule (1996:36), 'implicature is an additional conveyed meaning.' It is something more than just what the words mean. Levinson (1983) characterizes implicature with reference to its significant contribution in the field of pragmatics. He states:

- (1) "Implicature stands as a paradigmatic example of the nature and power of pragmatic explanations of linguistic phenomenon.
- (2) "It provides some explicit account of how it is possible to mean (in some general sense) more than what is actually said.
- (3) "The notion of implicature seems likely to effect substantial simplifications in both the structure and the content of semantic descriptions.
- (4) "Implicature ... seems to be simply essential if various basic facts about language are to be accounted for properly.

- (5) “The principles that generate implicatures have a very general explanatory power: a few basic principles provide explanations for a large array of apparently unrelated fact” (1983:97-100).

Here, Levinson claims that implicature is a kind of pragmatic inference related to some general principles of cooperative conversation. It goes beyond what is expressed literally, in the process of interpretation.

Procedures

Implicature has been defined / described by various linguists and pragmatists in different ways. Some of them are given below.

Herbert Paul Grice

Grice focuses on the observance of the conversational maxims and the beliefs of the interlocutors while working out conversational implicature. He characterizes conversational implicature as:

A man who, by (in, when) saying (or making as if to say) that p has implicated that q , may be said to have conversationally implicated that q , PROVIDED THAT (1) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the cooperative principle; (2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, q is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say p (or doing so in THOSE terms) consistent with this presumption; and (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (2) IS required (1975:49-50).

John Meibauer

Meibauer is of the opinion that a conversational implicature should be calculable as well as cancellable and it should have truth value. He defines conversational implicature as:

A conversationally implicated at t that q , iff

- (a) A asserted at t that p ,
- (b) A presented q as true
- (c) q is calculable from the assertion of p ,
 q is cancelable (2005:1378).

Barbara Partee

Barbara Partee follows Grice while defining conversational implicature, by giving due significance to the conversational maxims and the context. She defines conversational implicature as:

An utterance A in context c conversationally implicates proposition P iff use of A in the given context pragmatically implies B by virtue of conversational maxims (2009:1).

Annabelle Mooney

Mooney is of the approach that implicatures facilitate the conversation to be more fruitful by rendering clarity and truthfulness to the information. She characterizes conversational implicature as:

... Implicatures that one provides to make a contributor's contribution clear, true and so on, or if not, why not (2004:90).

Taxonomy

Grice has given three groups of implicature based on the CP and its maxims. These three groups are: (i) implicatures arising out of observance, (ii) violation, and (iii) flouting of the maxims. Moreover, various pragmatists have proposed various distinct views regarding the typology. According to Levinson (1983:126), there are two types of conversational implicature: implicatures derived from an assumption that the speaker is observing the maxims, and those derived on the basis of the speaker flouting a maxim.

Particularized Conversational Implicatures

Particularized conversational implicatures are analyzed with reference to special background knowledge. As Yule (1996:42) states, most of the inferences are assumed in very specific context in which conversation takes place. The analysis of conveyed meaning requires such inferences that give rise to particularized conversational implicatures. Most of the times, some responses as illustrated below, may seemingly deviate from relevance.

Jessie : Are you coming to the party tonight?

Margaret : My son is not feeling well.

Yes or No would have been a relevant response to the question asked by Jessie. However, Margaret's reply cannot be taken as totally irrelevant. Jessie, being a woman, is supposed to consider some background knowledge that would be mutually assumed. Margaret's reply could be interpreted as implicating the following:

She will have to look after her son, so she could not attend the party tonight.

Levinson characterizes particularized conversational implicature as:

All implicatures that arise from observing the maxim of Relevance are particularized, since utterances are relevant only with respect to the particular topic or issue at hand (1983:127).

Peter Gundy (1995:45) is of the opinion that particularized implicatures are derived, not from the utterance alone, but from the utterance in context. They vary with the context. Levinson defines particularized conversational implicature as:

“An implicature *i* from utterance *U* is *particularized* if *U* implicates *i* only by virtue of specific contextual assumptions that would not invariably or even normally obtain” (2000:16).

According to Grice, particularized conversational implicatures are:

Cases in which an implicature is carried by saying that *p* on a particular occasion in virtue of special features of the context, cases in which there is no room for the idea that an implicature of this sort is normally carried by saying that *p* (1989:37).

Generalized Conversational Implicature

Introduction

Generalized conversational implicature is sometimes called as standard conversational implicature. Yule defines it as:

When no special knowledge is required in the context to calculate the additional conveyed meaning, it is called a generalized conversational implicature (1996:41).

Structures with definite article mostly give rise to generalized conversational implicature. The following is an example with indefinite articles:

I entered a house and a dog came running towards me.

From the above utterance, it can be inferred that the house and the dog do not belong to the speaker. Such inferences are termed as generalized conversational implicatures. Otherwise, the speaker would have been more specific saying ‘my house’ and ‘our dog’. Peter Grundy (1995:45) states that generalized conversational implicatures have a little to do with the most relevant understanding of an utterance. On the other hand, it derives entirely from the guidelines for talk, and most often from the maxim of quality. Therefore, Levinson states that:

An implicature *i* is *generalized* iff *U* implicates *i* *unless* there are unusual specific contextual assumptions that defeat it (2000:16).

Further, Grice states that generalized conversational implicatures occur:

When one can say that the use of a certain form in an utterance would normally (in the absence of special circumstances) carry such and such an implicature or type of implicature (1987:37).

In such type of implicature, inferences are made without taking into consideration the special background knowledge of the context of the utterance. The following are the two types of generalized conversational implicature:

Scalar Implicature

Scalar implicatures arise from certain words that are used to communicate information by expressing a scale of values. Levinson has enlisted the linguistic items that express scales from the highest to the lowest value:

- < all, most, many, some, few >
- < and, or >
- < n,...5,4,3,2,1 >
- < excellent, good >
- < hot, warm >
- < always, often, sometimes >
- < succeed in *V*ing, try to *V*, want to *V* >
- < necessarily *P*, *P*, possibly *P* >
- < certain that *P*, probable that *P*, possible that *P* >
- < must, should, may >
- < cold, cool >
- < love, like >
- < none, not all >

(1983:134)

Speakers choose contextually appropriate one from the above scales judging it on the tests of informativity and truthfulness. For instance:

Amartya Sen is of Indian origin and he often visits India.

In the above utterance, by using the word 'often', the speaker implicates:

Amartya Sen is of Indian origin and he does not always visit India.

Moreover, as Yule (1996:41) states, all the negative forms of the scale are implicated when a particular form of the scale is used:

It's possible that Mary abused Smith.

+>> It is not certain that Mary abused Smith.

The cotton dresses should be washed using warm water.

+>> The cotton dresses should not be washed using hot water.

Scalar implicatures are defeasible. As Yule (1996:42) states, they may be cancelled, 'when speakers correct themselves on some detail':

I got some of these books at Ramesh Mohan Library - actually I think I got most of them there.

In the above utterance, by saying 'some...' the speaker implicates:

I didn't get all of these books at Ramesh Mohan Library.

But, suddenly the speaker corrects himself by replaying 'some' with 'most', which could be taken to implicate that:

I got many of these books at Ramesh Mohan Library.

Levinson has devised a general rule for scalar implicatures:

Scalar implicatures: Given any scale of the form $\langle e_1, e_2, e_3, \dots, e_n \rangle$, if a speaker asserts $A(e_2)$, then he implicates $\sim A(e_1)$, if he asserts $A(e_3)$, then he implicates $\sim A(e_2)$ and $\sim A(e_1)$, and in general, if he asserts $A(e_n)$, then he implicates $\sim A(e_{n-1})$, $\sim A(e_{n-2})$ and so on, up to $\sim A(e_1)$ (1983:153).

Verstraete (2005:1407) states that permission and obligation form the weaker degrees of the denotic domain and gives the following scales:

\langle obliged, allowed \rangle

For instance, there is a difference of degrees of strength between the following utterances expressing permission and obligation:

Students are allowed to sit in the reading room.

Students are obliged to sit in the reading room.

Clausal Implicature

Clausal implicatures arise from the use of stronger and weaker construction by the interlocutors in conversational activities. Levinson has given some pairs of stronger and weaker forms with resulting implicatures:

(a) stronger form	(b) weaker form	(c) implicatures of (b)
'p and q'	'p or q'	{Pp, P, P~ p, Pq, P~ q}
'since p, q'	'if p then q'	{ Pp, P~ p, Pq, P~ q}
'a knows p'	'a believes p'	{Pp, P~ p}
'a realized p'	'a thought p'	{Pp, P~ p}
'a revealed p'	'a said p'	{ Pp, P~ p}
'necessarily p'	'possibly p'	{ Pp, P~ p}

Note: From Levinson (1983:137).

At the time a speaker uses weaker expression, it may be taken to implicate that he is not in a state to use stronger construction. When someone says (1) instead of saying (2), then he implicates (3):

1. I believe Adam is the first male on the Earth.
2. I know Adam is the first male on the earth.
3. It is possible only up to my knowledge that Adam is the first Male on the earth.

Moreover, structures with alternatives are considered as weaker and give rise to clausal implicatures:

India finalized nuclear deal with Russia or America.

–|| India finalized nuclear deal either with Russia or with America.

Whereas it implicates:

It is with America that India finalized nuclear deal, and it is possible that it is not with America, but with Russia, that India finalized nuclear deal.

It happens due to speaker's preference to weaker expression instead of a stronger one. In such circumstances, if the speaker is aware that India has finalized nuclear deal with both the countries, he can use the stronger expression such as.

India finalized nuclear deal with America and then with Russia also.

Gazdar formulates clausal implicature as follows:

Clausal implicatures: If S asserts some complex expression p which (i) contains an embedded sentence q , and (ii) p neither entails nor presupposes q , and (iii) there's an alternative expression r of roughly equal brevity which contains q ; then, by asserting p rather than r , S implicates that he doesn't know whether q is true or false, i.e. he implicates $Pq \& P \sim q$

(Gazdar 1979, as cited in Levinson, 1983:136).

Conclusion

Hence, Conversational Implicature has been a widely studied topic in pragmatics. A number of scholars have contributed to the expansion and establishment of the concept in the field of study of language from point of view of meaning. The procedures of the concept prove that it can contribute to the meaning of language that is not conveyed otherwise. The hidden import and the speaker's intentions play a great role in communication. However, the interlocutors should be capable of decoding the hidden agenda.

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