Conversational implicature derivations and tests

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2024

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1   Derivations

(1)   A: How was Sue's work this quarter.

        B: Sue's work was good.

            Conversational implicature: Sue's work was not excellent this quarter.

        Contextual assumptions and calculation:

What happens if we drop assumption (**??**), say, because B doesn't have the grade sheet handy and remembers only that everyone did fine?

(2)   A: Do you have any dogs?

   B: I have three dogs.

   Conversational implicature: the speaker does not have more than three dogs.

Assumed semantics:

- $[\![\textit{four dogs}]\!] = \lambda Y(\top \text{ if } |[\![\textit{dog}]\!] \cap Y| \geqslant 4, \text{ else } \mathsf{F})$
- $[\![\textit{three dogs}]\!] = \lambda Y(\top \text{ if } |[\![\textit{dog}]\!] \cap Y| \geqslant 3, \text{ else } \mathsf{F})$
- Thus, $[\![\textit{four dogs}]\!]$ entails $[\![\textit{three dogs}]\!]$

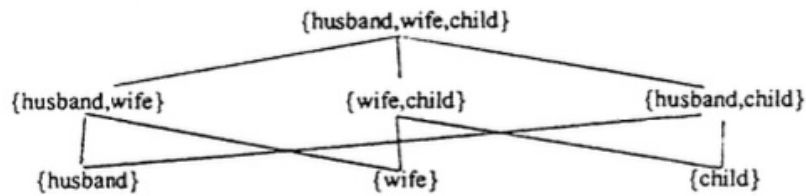*Contextual assumptions and calculation*:

What happens if we drop assumption (**??**), say, because B's building allows a maximum of three dogs and B doesn't want to get in trouble.

(3)   A: Do you speak: Portuguese?

     B: My husband does.

       Conversational implicature: no one in the speaker's family except their husband speaker Portuguese

This example is from Hirschberg's (1985) corpus, and Hirschberg offers the following ordering as a framework for thinking about informativity/relevance in this context:

```
                        {husband,wife,child}

    {husband,wife}          {wife,child}          {husband,child}

        {husband}             {wife}                  {child}
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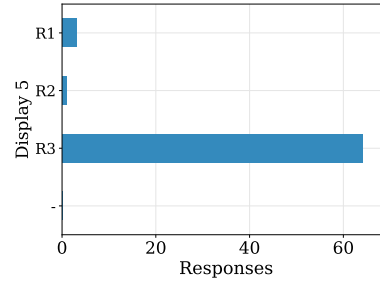*Contextual assumptions and calculation*:

(4)

R1   R2   R3
"glasses"

Conversational implicature: in the listener condition, the speaker is referring to R3.

Contextual assumptions and calculation:

2 Testing

(5)   **Example:** The food was palatable.

    a.   **Target meaning**: *the food was not delicious*

    b.   **Cancellation:**

    c.   **Suspension:**

    d.   **Reinforcement:**

(6)   **Example:** Most students attended the review session.

    a.   **Target meaning**: *Not all students attended the review session.*

    b.   **Cancellation:**

    c.   **Suspension:**

    d.   **Reinforcement:**

(7)   **Example:** Carol managed to win the race

   a.   **Target meaning**: *Carol won the race*

   b.   **Cancellation:**

   c.   **Suspension:**

   d.   **Reinforcement:**

(8)   **Example:** Sam refuted the hypothesis that Jesse stole the cookies.

   a.   **Target meaning**: *Jesse didn't steal the cookies*

   b.   **Cancellation:**

   c.   **Suspension:**

   d.   **Reinforcement:**