

by Katrina Geske

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The topic of our last session was the pragmatics-semantics interface. We talked about what connects and what distinguishes the two disciplines from each other.

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- Two main theoretical positions:

**Reductionism** claims that there should be no distinction between pragmatics and semantics.

There are two types of reductionism:

**Semantic Reductionism:** pragmatics should be entirely reduced to semantics

**Pragmatic Reductionism:** semantics is wholly included in pragmatics

- How to distinguish between semantics and pragmatics

Three most decisive approaches (according to Bach):

1) *Truth conditional vs. non-truth conditional meaning*

Claims that semantics is concerned with truth conditional meaning, while pragmatics is concerned with non-truth-conditional meaning

2) *Conversational vs. non-conversational meaning*

Claims that semantics studies the conversational aspects of meaning, while pragmatics studies the non-conversational aspects

3) *Context independence vs. context-dependence*

Claims that semantics is concerned with linguistic phenomena that are insensitive to context, while pragmatics is concerned with those that are sensitive to it.

- Pragmatic intrusion into what is said and the semantics-pragmatics interface

Intrusion of "what is implicated" into "what is said"

➔ What is said should give us information about what is implicated, but a pragmatic inference is still necessary to understand the meaning

Three approaches to solve these boundary problems:

1) Sperber and Wilson – Relevance theorists' view<sup>1</sup>

- Pragmatics are part of "what is said"

- Notion of "explicature" parallel to "implicature"

Example: Bill passed the port in the evening

Port = Harbour/ Port = Wine

Explicature: Bill passed the harbour in the evening

2) Francois Recanati – the pragmatically enriched said

Some effects of context on "what is said" result from pragmatic processes that take place because the content of the utterance is not wholly or faithfully included in the uttered sentence.

Three types of primary pragmatic processes to bridge the gap between "what is said" and the meaning of the utterance:

a) Saturation:

"I enjoyed reading John's book" -> "I enjoyed reading the book written by John"

b) Free Enrichment:

"The Buddhist temples are some distance away" -> "The Buddhist temples are a considerable distance away"

c) Semantic transfer:

"I am parked out back" -> "My car is parked out back"

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1 See also Supplement 6 for a discussion of Relevance Theory in distinction to Levinson's approach.

### 3) Bach – conversational implicature

There is no pragmatic intrusion into what is said, but there is a crucial intermediate level between “what is said” and “what is conversationally implicated”

→ Conversational implicature

*by Sabrina Stehwien*

Last session we dealt with the **semantics-pragmatics interface**. In the first part of the presentation we discussed the vast outline of this topic and several approaches to distinguish between pragmatics and semantics. Both are concerned with the study of meaning, but how exactly would one define the two and where can they be separated?

There are two main theories on this problem: The first is called **reductionism** (also: „pragmantics“). According to this theory, there is no distinction between semantics and pragmatics, although even here there are two perspectives: 1. that pragmatics is entirely reduced to semantics, i.e. semantic reductionism, 2. that semantics is included in pragmatics, i.e. pragmatic reductionism. The second theory mentioned was **complementarism**, according to which the distinction should be retained. Again, two different positions attribute the study of meaning to either radical semantics or radical pragmatics.

Bach presents three approaches to separate pragmatics and semantics. **It is to be noted that the main problem to all approaches is that however dealt with, the borders remain fuzzy.**<sup>2</sup>

One approach, called the Carnapian approach, considers semantics to be the study of truth-conditional meaning and pragmatics as the study of non-truth-conditional meaning, which means that **pragmatics = meaning – truth conditions**. One problem here is that several linguistic forms don't have truth conditions, such as speech acts. As an example, we took the utterance „Welcome everybody!“ in the context of a university seminar or exam and discussed its characteristics: its direction of fit is word-to-world, its type is a greeting, and its felicity condition (this is a pragmatic phenomenon) is *iff people are in the room* the time the sentence is uttered. **The truth condition here would be iff the speaker welcomes everybody, which means that the utterance is true if it is uttered!**<sup>3</sup> **Clearly, the truth condition does not hold in this case, and if it did, every utterance in a pragmatic sense would make itself true.** We came to the conclusion that a correlation between truth conditions and felicity conditions is necessary. In addition, pragmatics can contribute to the truth conditions of a sentence. Some theories in truth-conditional pragmatics even form a movement to include truth conditions into pragmatics.<sup>4</sup>

A second approach deals with semantics as the study of conventional aspects of meaning and **pragmatics as the study of non-conventional meaning** (maybe even meta-conventionality, feeding on conventional meaning). The difference here is that semantic interpretations cannot be cancelled, unlike pragmatic interpretations. One problem to this approach is that deictic expressions require pragmatics to study their semantics. Another problem is that the three types of implicature form a *semantic-pragmatic continuum*, the **most semantic being conventional implicatures**, since they are not context dependant (their meaning is closely connected to the lexical item in question) and they are not defeasable. **The most pragmatic implicatures are the particularized conversational implicatures**; they require a context. Generalized conversational implicatures are in between the two stated above and are a debated topic: The fact that they are cancellable makes them more pragmatic, whereas their context independence brings them closer to semantics. However, pragmatics always makes use of semantic, conventionalized linguistic phenomena.

<sup>2</sup> Very true.

<sup>3</sup> Right. I remember this point. I totally forgot about this discussion. If every utterance were true just by virtue of its being uttered, how absurd could it get!

<sup>4</sup> These are called Truth Conditional Pragmatics (TCP).

Context dependency and context independence is also the third of Bach's approaches. He distinguished two types of context: **narrow context (semantic)** and **broad context (pragmatic)**.

According to Recanati, the 3 **hermeneutic features of pragmatic interpretation** are *charity*, *non-monotonicity* and *holism*. We considered the following to explain non-monotonicity: In semantics, in a monotonic concatenation of propositions such as  $a+b+c+d$ , but  $\sim c$  is not possible. In pragmatics, an interpretation cancellation of this sort is allowed. Holism is a difficult topic. Recanati states that any piece of information can influence the outcome of pragmatic interpretation. Since this could be called a „theory of everything and nothing“, it would be smart to be critical towards this position and consider other (modular) theories as well.<sup>5</sup>

With respect to the division of labour between semantics of pragmatics, one important discussion is that of **pragmatic intrusion** from *what is implicated* into Grice's concept of *what is said*. To clarify to what extent this takes place, what is said needs to be determined according to its context, namely by identifying reference, fixing deixis and resolving ambiguities. Pragmatic-semantic and pragmatic-syntactic issues participate here, e.g. binding phenomena are resolved by syntactic means and clarified through semantics. One could state that *what is said* is determined by means of semantics, and deriving *what is implicated from what is said* happens by means of pragmatics.

The relevance theorists Sperber and Wilson stated that there is intrusion of pragmatically inferred content into what is said. They refer to this as explicit content or **explicature**. An explicature is derived from the development of a logical form, i.e. the narrow linguistic meaning that fully determines the meaning of the sentence: An utterance U is defunct (p-) and has a certain logical form, which is, according to relevance theorists, expanded in order to obtain the explicit content (p+). In other words, **explicatures could be defined as completed propositions**. (Anything beyond this is called implicature.) This process happens in the form of e.g. *disambiguation*, *saturation* (when a lexical item is not specified, a conceptual constituent must be added) and *free enrichment* (output proposition entails input proposition). The oldest, most traditional notion is called *semantic transfer* and occurs mostly in metonymy and is added by Recanati to the types of pragmatic processes involved with what he calls the **pragmatically enriched said**.

According to Bach, Grice's distinction between semantics and pragmatics is correct, but there is also an intermediate level called **conversational implicature**, into which he puts so-called *propositional radicals* (incomplete propositions that can't be clearly categorised as part of what is said or what is implicated).

Clearly there is a lot of overlapping of theories here. Huang finally concludes that explicature, the pragmatically enriched said and implicature can't be distinguished from implicature.

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<sup>5</sup> Yes, *holism* is problematic from time to time. I remember the example of the green lawn when talking about a piece of chalk.