(A) Theory Dynamics

Let us recall for the moment that the **Pragmatics/Semantics Interface** is a hot topic in ongoing research on pragmatics and semantics. The specific design of the Interface essentially depends on how one designs the pragmatic/semantic theory one is ready to expound. As a general procedure in solving scientific puzzles, one has some basic options of how to solve the pragmatics/semantics boundary debates. Have a look at Figure (1).

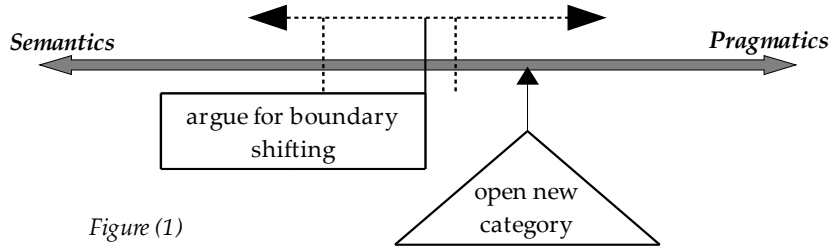

Figure (1)

You can either argue in favour of a particular shift in the semantics/pragmatics boundary, or you can pose a new category. Recall that with the notion of **impliciture**, Kent Bach somewhat chose this way. It goes without saying that all the theoretical moves should be supplied by and founded on sound **empirical and conceptual argument**. I will not go into the nature of empirical and conceptual arguments, but it is safe to say adherence to linguistically coded output – **sensually perceivable data** – belongs to the realm of the empirical on the one side. On the other side, notions such as **Ockam's Razor** are situated within the conceptual realm.

(B) Stephen Levinson (2000) and Robyn Carston (2004): Debating Implicatures plus some Rehearsal

As Huang's argumentations largely follow Levinsonian lines, one particular strand of arguments is left without some consideration. Let me shed some light on the debates about mainly **Generalized Conversational Implicatures (GCI)** as endorsed by Levinson and criticized by Carston.

The classical position on conversational implicatures is that these are **engendered by the speaker's conformity to some rational principle of conversational exchange**. We know now that Grice called this principle the **Cooperative Principle (CP)**.

Another important point is that of the by now familiar S**emantic Underdeterminacy Thesis**. A nice example is certainly the following (taken from Carston 2004: 67):

(1) Minimal Context: *Uttered by a mother to small child over a scratched elbow.*
You're not going to die.

Just observing the strict semantics of the utterance would clearly result in the absurd statement of a human being not going to die. What gets actually interpreted is an enriched version of (1). Enrichment here is used non-technically.

(2) [$_{\text{actual utterance}}$ You're not going to die] + [$_{\text{added material}}$ *from that scratch*]

The thing about this is that **hardly ever any sentence is fully propositional**; this means that many sentences have to undergo some process of addition or enrichment. Carston writes:

> "The linguistic meaning of a phrase or lexical item is obviously not propositional, and the linguistic meaning of a sentence is also not generally, if ever, fully propositional. What it [i.e. the

meaning of a sentence] provides is a template or schema, that is, clues to, or constraints on, the process of recovering the proposition the speaker intended to express. It is, plausibly, the output of an encapsulated language processor, hence free from the modifications that come with access to extra-linguistic context and speaker intentions" (Carston 2004: 69).

Robyn Carston is here inherently influenced by the work of **Noam Chomsky** and **Jerry Fodor**. The former believes that a (narrow) semantic description can be given **independent of considerations taking communicational purposes into account**; the latter has become famous for his **Modularity of Mind Hypothesis**, which basically says that the mind consists of differentiated modules and each module serves a dedicated purpose. I tried to summarize the relevant distinctions between Levinson and Carston in Figure (2).

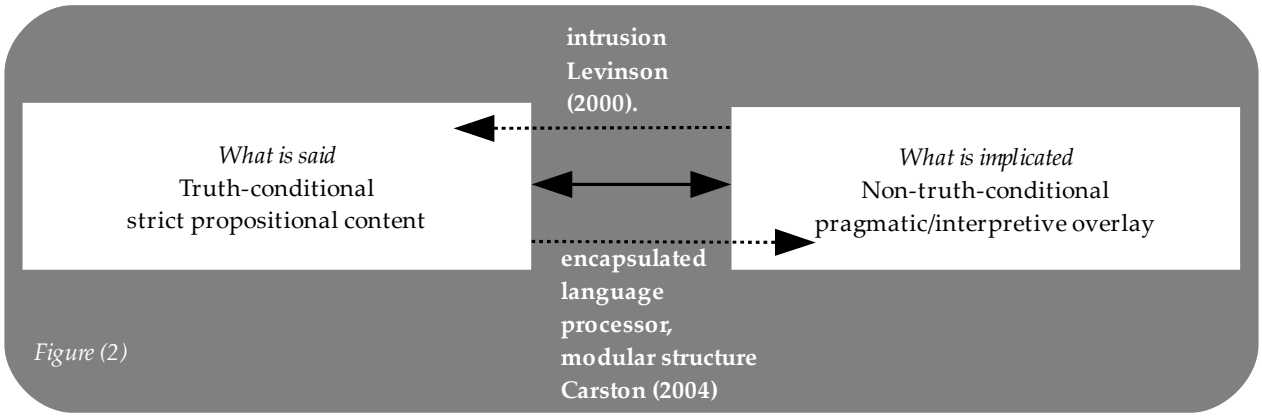

Figure (2)

This is roughly what we would like to have as the outcome of a linguistic enquiry. So, then, why does Carston think that there is no Levinsonian pragmatic intrusion into "what is said"? What are her arguments (clearly, I can only use a limited range of examples)?

The first counterargument comes from the **Valid Argument** argument. This might sound odd, but it essentially has the form *Premise 1 > Premise 2 > Conclusion*. First let us highlight an implicature and then insert this construction into an argument in the technical sense here (taken from Carston 2004: 93-94).

(3) X: Does Sam like John and Mary?
Y: He likes Mary.
Implicature: Sam doesn't like John.

Insertion into argument construction yields (4):

(4) Premise 1: If Sam doesn't like $John_i$, he won't invite him_i to his party.
Premise 2: Sam likes Mary.
* Conclusion: Sam won't invite John to his party.

We intuitively find it not to be a valid argument. One more in the field of valid argument constructions; take a look at (5) and (6).

(5) Some of the students will pass the exam.
Implicature: Not all of the students will pass the exam. (<u>possible context:</u> This would make the teacher upset.)

Argument construction:

(6) Premise 1: If not all the students pass the exam the teacher will be upset.

Premise 2: Some of the students will pass the exam.
* Conclusion: The teacher will be upset.

And since I could not put it more aptly than Carston:

> "As a line of reasoning, this is quite bizarre; the 'conclusion' seems to be virtually the opposite of the one that we would be inclined to draw from these two premises" (Carston 2004: 95).

Now, one may object that these are half-formalized arguments and that they do not really count as pieces of ordinary language. Yes, granted; not only are there **Valid Argument** arguments but also **Coherent Conversation** arguments, exemplified and commented in (7).

(7) A: Does Bill have a girlfriend these days?
B: He visits New York every weekend.
Implicature possibly by Relevance Maxim: +> It is possible that he has a girlfriend there.
? C: No, he doesn't. He goes there to see his ill mother.

C obviously does not want to deny **what B has said**, but the **implicature it engendered**. Put crudely it doesn't work. The **negation denies only the propositional content and not the implicature**. The same is true in (4) and (6). **The conclusions conclude from propositional content and not on the basis of implicatures.** Valid Arguments and Coherent Conversation, as put forward by Carston, can thus **tease apart the "what is said" (propositional content) from "what is implicated" (pragmatic overlay)**. If Levinson was unconditionally right in that GCIs intruded upon "what is said" (4), (6) and (7) should work. This is a strong indication that **certain linguistic constructions may unravel "what is said" from "what is implicated"** and so a sharp distinction between the proposition and the implicatures may be drawn.