Pragmatic Meaning
(Ch. 4 from Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet)

1. Literal meaning vs. utterance meaning.

(1) U TTERANCE MEANING
What the utterer meant
by saying the sentence in a given occasion

LITERAL MEANING
of the expression
What the utterer
literally said

SPEECH ACTS,
CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES,
REFERENCE IN DISCOURSE,
PRESUPPOSITIONS,
FOCUS,
CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURES,
...

What the utterer implicated

SEMANTICS

PRAGMATICS

(2) Literal meaning linguistic meaning
semantic value/denotation

utterance meaning
speaker’s meaning

Speech acts:

(3) A: Could you pass me the salt?
   B: Yes. ⇔ Infelicitous (#) if the salt is not passed.

Conversational implicatures:

(4) Nirit has four portable chairs.
   a. Utterance 1:
      A: What camping equipment do you guys have?
      B: I have two tents, Rosa has a burner and Nirit has four portable chairs.
   b. Utterance 2:
      A: Oh, no! Four more guests are coming and I don’t have enough chairs.
      B: Why don’t you ask Nirit? She has lots of camping equipment. I’m sure she has
         four portable chairs.

QUESTION 1: Complete sentence (5) as to obtain the "exactly three" reading and the "at least three" reading.

(5) In this university, if a student has three children, ...
Reference in discourse:

(6) Definites vs indefinites:
Last week we celebrated Larissa's fourth birthday with a huge party. The / A little girl asked me how old I was.

(7) Salience and anaphora resolution:
John saw Charles on the other side of the street. He waved at him.

Presupposition:

(8) (Last night) Maribel watched Blade Runner again.
Ø a. "Maribel watched Blade Runner last night"
Ø b. "Maribel watched Blade Runner before that."

(9) Did Maribel watch Blade Runner again?

(10) Maribel didn't watch Blade Runner again.

**QUESTION 2:** What pieces of information do we get in (9) and (10)? In other words, what is (9) questioning, and what is (10) negating?

Focus: (Pitch accent is marked in capitals.)

(11) If Hans had married Bertha, he would have qualified for the inheritance.

(12) If Hans had MARried Bertha, he would have qualified for the inheritance.

(13) If Hans had married BERtha, he would have qualified for the inheritance.

Conventional implicatures:

Conventional implicatures are connotations or side comments that certain words and constructions convey beyond their pure truth-conditional meaning. E.g. but literally means "and" and adds a connotation of surprise: (14). (Parenthetical) evaluative adverbs like unfortunately contribute only a side comment --that is, a conventional implicature--that does not interact with operators in the literal meaning: (15).

(14) John is an Englishman, but he is cowardly.
Ø a. "John is an Englishman, and he is cowardly".
Ø b. "John’s being cowardly is somehow unexpected or surprising in light of his being English."
(15) If, unfortunately, SSV Reulingen loses the game, they will be out of the competition.

\[ \land \quad "If SSV Reutlingen loses, then they'll be out." \\
\land \quad "SSV Reulingen losing would be unfortunate." \\
\land \quad "If SSV Reulingen losing would be unfortunate, then they'll be out." \]

**QUESTION 3:** Analyze the difference between (16) and (17):

(16) John is upset because it is obvious that Mary doesn't love him.

(17) John is upset because, obviously, Mary doesn't love him.

**2. Literal Meaning = Propositional Content + Sentential force.**

- Propositional content (truth conditions) and sentential force.
  - The three sentences in (18) share the same propositional content, roughly given in (19), but each of them has a different sentential force, as spelled out in (20).

(18)
  b. Did Amy kissed John?
  c. Kiss John, Amy.

(19)
  a. \[\text{[Amy kissed John]}\] = 1 iff Amy kissed John in \(w\)
  b. \[\text{[Amy kissed John]}\] = the set of worlds \(w\) where Amy kissed John
  c. \[\text{[Amy kissed John]}\] = the proposition ‘that Amy kissed John’.

(20) (Lyons 1977)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENTENTIAL FORCE</th>
<th>PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy kissed John.</td>
<td>(assertoric/declarative) the prop. ‘that Amy kissed John’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Amy kissed John?</td>
<td>? (interrogative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiss John, Amy.</td>
<td>! (imperative)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Linguistically assigned sentential forces can be modelled as part of the literal meaning of an expression. That is, after computing the propositional content of a sentence, we keep going up the tree and compute its sentential force, e.g. in (21):

(21) \[ S' \]

    ?-Operator \[ S \]

    Amy kissed John

There are different kinds of things that we do with words (Austin):

1. We utter words (within a meaningful linguistic expression). **LOCUTIONARY ACT**
2. We aim to reach a given state of affairs by uttering words. **ILLOCUTIONARY ACT**
3. We achieve a state of affairs by uttering words. **PERLOCUTIONARY ACT**

**LOCUTIONARY ACTS**: we utter words (within a meaningful linguistic expression). E.g., the act of stating or asking or formulating an imperative about the proposition ‘that Amy kiss John’.

**ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS**: We aim to reach a given state of affairs by uttering words. E.g., informing, claiming, guessing, reminding, warning, requesting, ordering, suggesting, threatening, promising, etc.

(22) S: Could you pass me the salt?
   Locutionary act: question
   Illocutionary act: request

(23) S: Now your turn. Give every fish to Loren, Bond.
   Locutionary act: imperative act
   Illocutionary act: order

(24) Context: The speaker knows that Loren adores people who give her fish. The speaker wants to help Bond.
   A: I’d do anything to get Sophia Loren to like me.
   B: Give every fish to Loren, Bond.
   Locutionary act: imperative act
   Illocutionary act: suggestion

**PERLOCUTIONARY ACTS**: We achieve a state of affairs by uttering words. E.g., persuading, deterring; charging, firing, bidding, etc.

(25) We find the defendant guilty. (uttered by the jury)
   Locutionary act: statement
   Illocutionary act: informing
   Perlocutionary act: charging the defendant guilty

(26) You’re fired. (uttered by your boss)
   Locutionary act: statement
   Illocutionary act: informing
   Perlocutionary act: firing

- Terminology: logical entailment ≠ implicature
  (27) entails (28). It does not entail (29).
  (27) ⇒ (28)  (27) /⇒ (29)
  (27) often implicates (29).

(27) Nirit has four portable chairs.
(28) Nirit has chairs.
(29) Nirit has exactly four chairs.

- Conversational implicatures: besides its truth-conditional meaning, a sentence may invite or suggest a stronger claim in a given context.

(30) Nirit has four portable chairs.
  ➩➢ Nirit has exactly four portable chairs.

(31) Other professors wear a suit when they teach.
  a. Utterance 1:
     A: What do you think of Maribel’s style?
     B: Well, you know, other professors wear a suit when they teach.
     ➩➢ It is not the case that Maribel wears a suit when she teaches.

  b. Utterance 2:
     A: How does Maribel dress when she teaches?
     B: Actually, I’m not sure about her, but other professors wear a suit when they teach.

- Grice’s maxims of conversational cooperation:
  Grice proposes that both the speaker and the hearer adhere to the following conversation maxims, and that they assume their interlocutor adheres to them too.

(32) Gricean Maxims:
  a. Relation: Be relevant.
  b. Quantity: Be as informative as required for the purpose of the conversation (be neither over-informative nor under-informative).
  c. Quality: Say only what you believe to be true and adequately supported.
  d. Manner: Be perspicuous: be brief and orderly and avoid obscurity and ambiguity.

Taking the literal meaning of a sentence and adding the maxims in (32), further inferences can be made that lead to its stronger, implicated meaning.
Scales:

Some semantically related lexical items can be ordered in a scale of strength:

(33)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weakest</th>
<th>Strongest</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. &lt;some, several, many, most, every/all&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. &lt;possibly, probably, necessarily&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. &lt;a, two, three, four, five, six, …&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. &lt;or, and&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scalar implicatures: scale <some,…,all>

(34)  

A: How did the students do in the quiz?  
B: Some students passed.  

(34B)  

It is not the case that all the students passed.

Explanation: It is assumed that B follows Grice’s principles and hence that he is being relevant (Relation), maximally informative (Quantity) and true to his beliefs (Quality). The following two utterances would have been relevant:

**All the students passed.**

**Some students passed.**

Of these two, **All the students passed** expresses a stronger proposition than **Some students passed** (since the first one entails the second one) and, hence, the first sentence is more informative than the second. Given that the speaker did not utter **All the students passed** even though it would have been relevant and more informative, it must be that the speaker does not think that **All the students passed** is true. Hence, uttering the weaker sentence in this context yields as an implicature the negation of the stronger sentence:

(34B)  

It is not the case that [ all the students passed ].

Scalar implicatures: scale <a, two, three, four, five, …>

Devising the “exactly n” reading of numerals as an implicature.

**QUESTION 4**: Why does (35) but not (36) yield the indicated scalar implicature?

(35)  

A: What camping equipment do you guys have?  
B: I have two tents, Rosa has a burner and Nirit has four portable chairs.  

(35B)  

Nirit has exactly four portable chairs.

(36)  

A: Oh, no! Four more guests are coming and I don’t have enough chairs.  
B: Why don’t you ask Nirit? She has lots of camping equipment. I’m sure she has four portable chairs.  

(36B)  

Nirit has exactly four portable chairs.
Non-scalar conversational implicatures:

(37) A: Have you read E.O. Wilson’s *Sociobiology*?
B: I don’t read science fiction.

(37B) ➸ I have not read *Sociobiology*.
(37B) ➸ I consider *Sociobiology* science fiction (and thus as bad science).

Explanation: It is assumed that B follows the maxims and thus that his utterance is relevant (Relation) to the current conversation. (Unless other cues are provided,) the only way to construct B’s utterance as a relevant answer to A’s question is if B considers that *Sociobiology* is science fiction. For, if B thought *Sociobiology* was not science fiction, stating that he doesn’t read science fiction would not help decide whether he read *Sociobiology* or not. Hence:

(37B) ➸ The speaker considers *Sociobiology* science fiction.

Conversational implicatures are defeasible. Entailments, of course, are not.

(38) Nirit has four portable chairs.
    ➸ Nirit has exactly four chairs.
    ⇒ Nirit has chairs.

(39) Of course Nirit has four portable chairs! In fact, she has six.
(40) Of course Nirit has four portable chairs! # In fact, she doesn’t have chairs.

Conversational implicatures are reinforcing. Entailments are not, as reinforcing them sounds redundant.

(41) Nirit has four portable chairs and no more than that.
(42) Nirit has four portable chairs # and (some) portable chairs.

Some circumstances (e.g., cultural behavior) may overrule or flout some maxim in some aspect. Still, it is assumed that the other maxims are obeyed.

(43) In a letter of recommendation for a position in Linguistics, the recommender only writes the following:
    Lee has a nice smile and writes beautiful phrase-structure trees.
    ➸ It is not the case that Lee is a good linguist.

Explanation: In principle, it is expected that the speaker will as informative as required (Quantity) and, if he thinks that Lee is not a good linguist, he’ll say so. But it is also culturally assumed that people refrain from saying nasty things in recommendation letters. Thus, in the recommendation letter setting, politeness overrules Quantity and Quantity is flouted. But, except for that, the maxims are at work: if the speaker could have given some higher praise, he would have. But he didn’t. Thus, the content of the higher praise is not true. Hence:

(43) ➸ It is not the case that Lee is a good linguist.

Some circumstances (e.g., cultural behavior) may overrule or flout some maxim in some aspect. Still, it is assumed that the other maxims are obeyed.
Conversational implicatures are calculated so fast that it is not surprising that, before we started thinking about them scientifically, it seemed that they were part of the literal meaning of the expression. (In fact, the American legal system holds speakers (e.g., advertisers) responsible not just for what it is said but also for the implicatures that any rational person would draw from what was said.)

Conversational implicatures and Cognitive Science:
If literal meaning (direct from the lexicon) and conversational implicatures (through Gricean maxims and inferencing) are two separate components of the utterance meaning, we would expect for there to be cognitive differences between them.

- How do young children compute implicatures? Do they learn the purely linguistic meaning and the implicated content at the same time?
- Do individuals with autism or other impairments treat the two types of meaning alike?