

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

Conversational and conventional implicatures

Radek Šimík



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

MAXIMS OF CONVERSATION

Maxims of conversation:

- Quality (truth)
- Quantity (informativeness)
- Relevance
- Manner

Also to be discussed:

- Maxims and indirect speech acts
- Non-functional maxim violations
- Conventional implicatures

MAXIM OF MANNER

Maxim of manner

Be perspicuous (= “easily understood; clearly expressed; lucid” (*Oxford English Dictionary*)).

- 1 Avoid obscurity of expression.
- 2 Avoid ambiguity.
- 3 Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- 4 Be orderly.

INTERACTION BETWEEN MAXIMS: MANNER AND RELEVANCE

(1) *Situation*: A is Mark's mother, B is a committee member in Mark's job interview.

A How did Mark do in the interview?

B He obviously invested a lot of time in the preparation. And he was really well-dressed.

'He didn't do very well.'

IMPLICATURE

- A knows that B knows that A is Mark's mother (pragmatic presupposition).
- A knows that B is polite and does not like to say negative things about close relatives of his conversation partner.
- A concludes that B's utterance – not completely relevant one (in violation of relevance) – is motivated by respecting the maxim of manner.
- A knows that if there were relevant things that are also positive, then B would have said them.
- A concludes that there are no such things, deriving the implicature that Mark did not do that well.

IMPLICATURES AND INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS

Indirect speech acts (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) can be analyzed in terms of implicatures arising from maxim violations.

(2) A	Can you pass me the salt?	INDIRECT SPEECH ACT
	'I want you to pass me the salt.'	IMPLICATURE/ILLOCUTION
B	Here it is (handing the salt to A).	PERLOCUTION

- A asks something that is obviously trivial: of course B is able to pass the salt to A!
- B assumes that A is cooperative and polite and takes her trivial question as a way of avoiding the violation of the maxim of manner.
- Therefore, B derives the implicature that A wants B to pass her the salt.
- B behaves cooperatively, too, and complies with A's wishes (passes her the salt).

NON-FUNCTIONAL MAXIM VIOLATIONS

Not all violations of maxims can be functionally EXPLOITED, i.e., they do not always give rise to implicatures. If this is so, it often gives rise to annoyance or frustration.

(3) A Do you know the time?

B Yes.

QUANTITY FLOUTED

(4) A What are you up to?

B I'm going to the toilet to do the big job.

QUANTITY/MANNER FLOUTED

The main conclusion that A can draw based on B's responses is that B is a non-cooperative person. Among close friends, such violations can, to some limited cases, be exploited for humorous effects.

CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURES

- (5) a. Mark is young and smart.
b. Mark is young **but** smart.

Conventional implicatures:

- predictable from form, conventional (vs. conversational)
- no effect on the core truth-conditions (vs. assertion)
- immune to negation/operators (vs. assertion)
- new information (vs. semantic presuppositions)
- possible reiteration (vs. semantic presuppositions)
- often: speaker-dependent (expressive)

Grice 1975; Potts 2005; Gutzmann 2012

CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURES

Appositions:

Potts 2005

- (6) a. Sue thinks that Dave, **a great tennis player**, can't play tennis.
b. #Sue thinks that someone who is a great tennis player can't play tennis.

Expressive adjectives like *fucking*:

Potts 2012

- (7) A I saw your **fucking** dog in the park.
B No, you didn't (see my ~~fucking~~ dog). You couldn't have (seen my ~~fucking~~ dog). The poor thing passed away last week.

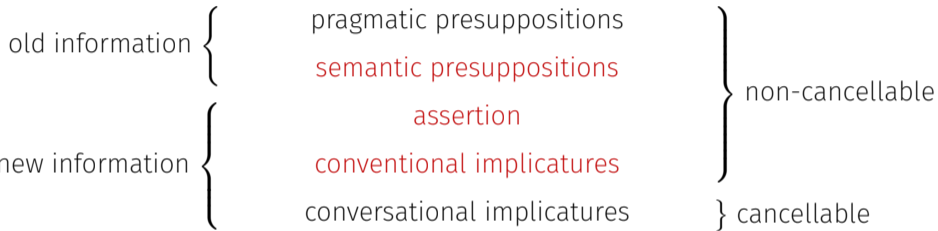
Epistemic indefinites in Czech:

Šimík 2015

- (8) Mirek tvrdil, že kdosi přišel. Nevím, kdo.
Mirek claimed that who.SI came NEG.know who
'Mirek claimed that somebody [I don't know who] came. I don't know who.'

SUMMARY

TIME



red = conventional

READING AND WATCHING TIPS

Potts, Christopher. 2012. Conventional implicature and expressive content. In Klaus von Heusinger, Claudia Maienborn, and Paul Portner (eds.), *Semantics: An international handbook of natural language meaning*, Vol. 3, 2516–2535. Berlin: de Gruyter.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110253382.2516>

YouTube video:

- Wireless Philosophy: Conversational vs. conventional implicatures
https://youtu.be/YD82l_bUhLc

REFERENCES

- Austin, John L. 1962. *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Grice, H. Paul. 1975. Logic and conversation. In Peter Cole & J. L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and semantics, Vol 3: Speech acts*, 41–58. New York: Seminar Press.
- Gutzmann, Daniel. 2012. *Use-conditional meaning: Studies in multidimensional semantics*: University of Frankfurt dissertation.
- Potts, Christopher. 2005. *The logic of conventional implicatures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Potts, Christopher. 2012. Conventional implicature and expressive content. In Klaus von Heusinger, Claudia Maienborn & Paul Portner (eds.), *Semantics: An international handbook of natural language meaning*, vol. 3, 2516–2535. Berlin: de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110253382.2516>.
- Searle, John R. 1969. *Speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Šimík, Radek. 2015. Epistemic indefinites under epistemic modals in Czech. In Gerhild Zybatow, Petr Biskup, Marcel Guhl, Claudia Hurtig, Olav Mueller-Reichau & Maria Yastrebova (eds.), *Slavic grammar from a formal perspective: The 10th Anniversary FDSL Conference, 425–442*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.