

Stephen C. Levinson, Presumptive meanings: the theory of generalized conversational implicature. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. Pp. xxiii+480.

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In this very large book, Levinson argues for what he calls ‘default or preferred interpretation’, which is based on Grice’s concept of generalized conversational implicature (GCI). Levinson starts the first chapter by reviewing the Gricean account of GCI and the original distinction (made by Grice) between GCI and the particularized conversational implicature (PCI) (p. 12-20). In this chapter, Levinson adduces what he dubs as ‘utterance-type meaning’, which gives rise to a presumptive or preferred interpretation of utterances (p. 22-7). In her quite short review of this book, Carston (2004) refers to that level of ‘utterance-type meaning’, which (as she points out) is distinct from, and intermediate between, ‘sentence-type meaning’ and ‘utterance-token meaning’. See her example below:

- (1) (a) Some of the children passed the test. (sentence-type meaning)
- (b) Some but not all of the children passed the test. (utterance-type meaning)

Levinson argues that the concept of GCI makes the right predictions in respect of the utterance interpretation, while RT fails in this respect. Thus, his theory of preferred interpretation can never be superseded by a theory of nonce inference as Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue in their relevance theoretic framework (p.59), nor by the accommodation theory developed by Thomson and Hobbs (63). In short, Levinson argues against the reductionist approach to GCI, which reduces GCI to what the speaker means rather than what the utterance means.

In the second chapter, Levinson presents his theory of default interpretation in much further detail. He goes through the three heuristics that give rise to (species of)

GCI, introduced in the first chapter (pp.35-8), namely Q, M and I heuristics. Levinson points out that these heuristics are based on Grice's maxims of quantity and manner and replace them. That is, his Q heuristic is based on Grice's first submaxim of quantity Q1 (make your contribution as informative as required for the purpose of communication); his I heuristic on Grice's second submaxim Q2 (do not make your contribution more informative than what is required); and his M heuristic on the first and the third submaxims of manner M1 and M4: "avoid obscurity of expression" and "avoid prolixity" respectively. Levinson in this chapter gives so many examples of generalized conversational implicatures derived in accordance with his three heuristics. He makes clear that GCIs in his framework of preferred interpretation are different from Grice's. Grice's implicature in general and GCIs in particular are derived under his four maxims: quantity, quality, relation and manner by flouting and/or exploiting these maxims. But Levinson's GCIs seem to be different in the sense that language structure is used in recovering the implicature. See examples of some I-implicatures on (pp. 117-18), which are GCIs because they are the preferred interpretations across context and indeed across languages. Levinson points out that these I-implicatures share the property of maximizing the informational load by narrowing the interpretation to a specific subcase of what has been said. In such implicatures the Gricean maxims are not exploited and/or flouted. In the Gricean sense, these I-implicatures are GCIs derived through the submaxim of manner, i.e. 'be orderly', while in this book they are put under the second submaxim of quantity Q2. See examples (41-9) on (pp.127-18). Levinson starts with 'scalar implicatures' which are derived under his heuristic (principle) Q. See example (2) (p.76). In this context, Levinson refers to Gazdar's clausal implicatures and his notation of the projection problem of implicatures—that is, clausal implicatures would cancel scalar

implicatures if they are inconsistent with them. Thus clausal implicature takes precedence (p.77). As far as Levinson's three types of inferences are concerned, the projection problem of implicatures would be solved as follows: if there is a potential conflict between these three inferences, the priority will be to Q-inferences, then M-inferences, then I-inferences.

Levinson points out that scalar implicatures are GCIs because they depend on the invariant salient properties from language structure rather than variable contexts (p.104). But this will not make GCIs infeasible as entailments; GCIs are cancellable inferences. See example (3) (p. 81). Levinson uses Harnish's (1991) example in which the past tense is used to implicate that the activity indicated by the verb is no longer in present. But this implicature is also cancellable. See example (14) (p.95). Levinson proposes that, although inferences from conjoined utterances are defeasible, they are crosslinguistically the default interpretations. He refers to Carston's (1995:232) idea that even when our knowledge of the world suggests that 'q' is before 'p', we still attempt to read 'p and q' as 'p' before 'q'. See Levinson's example (56) (p.123).

Levinson ends his second chapter by returning in further detail to 'the projection problem' introduced at the beginning of this chapter. He presents several cases in which Q-implicatures block I and M-implicatures, and I- implicatures block M-implicatures. See examples on (pp. 153-62). Levinson, as we have noted earlier, suggests the following order of priorities when there is a conflict between these three implicatures—Q, M and I implicatures. In my opinion, 'the projection problem' is one of the most interesting and important ideas raised in this book although discussed in few pages. (pp.152-64). This is in fact due to the large number of ideas and arguments presented in this book, as Carston (2004) points out: it is a good job by Levinson to

collect materials discussed over a decade in one volume. To me, Carston (2004), in her review, was unfair to Levinson's great book. She gives just five lines of her eight-page review to talk about chapter 4, which is the longest one, and only two lines about an important idea such as 'the projection problem', and almost ignores another important idea, such as the role that GCI plays in the semantics-pragmatics interface discussed throughout the third chapter.

This does not mean that I do not agree with Carston that chapter 3 in Levinson's great book is the most interesting one. In this chapter, Levinson argues that GCIs play a role in the assignment of the truth-conditional content of what is said. Thus pragmatics affects the semantics of what is said (pragmatic intrusion). What is non-truth-conditional (as implicatures) affects the truth conditions of what is said. This seems to be odd because implicature and truth conditions have been always seen in apposition (p. 167).

In fact, Levinson in this chapter is rethinking the semantics-pragmatics interface. In the summary he gives about GCIs (pp. 169-70), he mentions in point 5 that GCIs play a role in fundamental linguistic processes, such as reference resolution, generality narrowing and scope assignment. Levinson rejects the received view "semantics as input into pragmatics", and argues that GCI plays a role in establishing what is said (p. 172). Levinson provides a wealth of examples on how implicatures (GCIs) affect the truth conditions of what is said. See example (4) (p. 175), in which GCI participates in the disambiguation of lexical ambiguity, and examples (8), (9) and (10) (p.178) where GCI plays a role in indexical resolution. Given that, Levinson challenges the assumption that indexical assignment requires no pragmatic solution, and that the indexical resolution has not to do with GCIs.

Levinson also argues that GCIs, especially I and M- implicatures play a role in anaphoric reference determination as in example (12) (p.181), ellipsis unpacking (14) (p.183) and generality narrowing (pragmatic narrowing of semantically general concepts) (15) (p. 184).

Levinson points out that the RT's explicature-implicature distinction is very problematic, in the sense that there is no reliable criterion for distinguishing explicatures from implicatures. Levinson's view of this distinction comes on (p.198) in the paragraph begins with *my own view is that.....* See also the paragraph (begins with *the position adopted...*) (p.240) in which Levinson points out that his GCIs might or might not be explicatures.

Levinson goes on in his argument: the pragmatic intrusion into semantics, which covers almost the whole chapter. He uses Wilson's example (17) (p.199) to illustrate pragmatic intrusion into what is said. He points out that the truth-conditional content of the whole utterance depends on the implicature of some parts of that utterance. The implicature in this example is I-implicature in accordance with Levinson's standards and manner implicature according to Grice. Levinson gives other examples of how Q, I and M-implicatures can contribute to the semantic content of what is said. See examples (18), (19) and (20) (p. 200-1).

It seems Levinson wants to convey that linguistic semantics alone is incapable of determining the proposition expressed. Pragmatic contribution should be taken into consideration as shown in example (23: a-d) (p. 204), where depending on the linguistic/semantic content alone will give the wrong prediction and thus the utterance will be false although it is intuitively and unequivocally true. According to Levinson, the pragmatic intrusion is a kind of implicature strengthening of Q, I and M inferences as noted in most of his examples (in this chapter). See examples (24-24a) (p.205-6)

and (25-26-27a-e) (pp.206-7), which reflect the fact that the truth-conditional content of the whole utterance is not determined only by semantics but by the implicatural content of some of its parts. This is the role that pragmatic strengthening plays in semantic interpretation.

It becomes very clear, through following Levinson's argument that he wants to champion the pre-semantic over the post-semantic pragmatics supported by what he calls the 'Obstinate Theorist', who wants to preserve the pragmatics-free semantics. This is crystallized in his examples which reflect that doing semantics (the semantic content) before taking the implicatural pragmatic contribution into account will result in absurdity and falsity (pp.216-9, 232).

Levinson's chapter 4 investigates the relationship between grammar and pragmatics (implicatures) (p.261) through highlighting that implicated meanings constitute a major source in the grammatical change, and that the interaction between syntax and pragmatics generates different types of interpretations (p.359). Levinson in this chapter, studies the pragmatics of anaphora and points out that anaphora have the properties of semantic generality (p.269). He studies anaphora as a pragmatic phenomenon —that is, he considers anaphoric potential as a property of the use of anaphoric expressions rather than the expressions themselves (p.270). He points out that pragmatic principles involved in picking out antecedents for anaphoric expressions are controversial, but he suggests a solution for this by looking at the encyclopaedic entries of linguistic expressions. See example (10) (p.271). He also shows that GCIs provide many factors in determining the choice of particular antecedents for an anaphor (p.272).

Levinson gives a pragmatic account of anaphoric expressions in inferring disjoint references. In the (alleged) scale <*himself-him*>, He claims that the use of the

weak, less specific *him* Q-implicates disjoint reference, while the use of the strong, more specific *himself* encodes coreference (p.289). Levinson shows that some languages, such as Australians, Austronesians and Creoles in addition to Old English lack encoded reflexives (anaphors). Old English, for instance, does not have the expression *self* as a reflexive, instead pronouns are used reflexively (pp.340-1). His conclusion is that opposition between coreference and disjoint reference in such languages can be pragmatically achieved —that is, it can be pragmatically achieved by the choice of a specific referring expression (p.343). What Levinson wants to convey is that there is a pragmatic account in the interpretation of anaphora, i.e. through generalized conversational implicature

In the epilogue Levinson tries, in few pages, to summarize what he has presented throughout the whole book, reiterating his goals in championing the idea of presumptive meanings (default interpretation), which is, according to him, the inference from structure and meaning towards further presumptive meaning and not as a nonce-inference —as many might think (p.368). Levinson, in the end of this epilogue, makes a very interesting distinction —that inferences in his account are different from those in the Grice's. For Grice, the speaker implicates, while in Levinson's account the utterance-type meaning carries the generalized implicature (p.373). Levinson ends his book by very impressive lines on his theory:

There could be other ways to think about this model. One could equally view it in the following way: GCI pragmatics is a theory that inter alia maps (coded) semantic representations onto (enriched) semantic representations. Semantics is now understood to do two things: map syntactic structures onto (coded) semantic representations, and (enriched) semantic representation onto propositions. Pragmatics likewise not only maps initial semantic representations into enriched

ones, but (if one likes) propositions into additional propositions. And the two processes, each masters of their own (indefeasible or defeasible) mode of inference, interleave. Thus the general picture is simple enough, although we cannot rule out additional interactions—for example, the role of pragmatics in extracting disambiguated (coded) semantic representations out of syntactic structures in the first place.

References:

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