Assignment 4

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2019

Distributed Feb 5; due Feb 12

1   In the south of France   [2 points]

From page 49-50 of 'Logic and conversation':

> A is planning with B an itinerary for a holiday in France. Both know that A wants to
> see his friend C, if to do so would not involve too great a prologation of his journey.

> (1)   A: Where does C live?
>   B: Somewhere in the South of France (Gloss: There is no reason to suppose
>   B is opting out; his answer is, as he well knows, less informative than is
>   required to meet A's needs. This infringement of the first maxim of Quantity
>   can be explained only by the supposition that B is aware that to be more
>   informative would be to say something that infringed the maxim of Quality,
>   'Don't say what you lack evidence for', so B implicates that he does not know
>   in which town C lives.)

Describe two other reasons, distinct from B "does not know in which town C lives", for why B might
have spoken the way he did. Provide supporting contexts for each, and make connections with the
maxims where possible. (Grice's own explanation in (1) is a good example of what we are after.)

2   The pragmatics of modification   [2 points]

Consider the following pragmatic observations:

- A speaker who uses the phrase *my biological father* is likely to invite the inference that they
  have multiple father figures in their life, or at least signal awareness that there are different
  notions of fatherhood.

- In Sedivy 2007,[1] experimental participants wearing eyetrackers were shown a visual scene
  containing only a tall cup, a short cup, and a tall pitcher. Participants who heard the phrase
  Give me the tall . . . looked to the tall cup even before the utterance was complete.

- In a police procedural, a suspect is taken to have slipped up when she refers to her "first call"
  to the victim when she previously stated that she had called the victim only once.

First, state the generalization concerning attributive modifiers that unites all of these examples,
and connect this generalization with each of the examples (4–5 sentences). Second, describe the
role of the maxim of manner in explaining this generalization (2–3 sentences).

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[1]Sedivy, Julie. 2007. Implicatures in real-time conversation: A view from language processing research. *Philosophy Compass* 2/3: 475–496.

3   Crash blossoms   [2 points]

A *crash blossom* is a comically ambiguous headline. Language Log now has a huge collection of them.[2] Some examples:

- Dr. Ruth Discusses Sex with Reporters
- McDonald's Fries Holy Grail for Potato Farmers
- Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant
- Missing Woman Remains Found
- Gator Attacks Puzzle Experts
- Violinist linked to JAL Crash Blossoms

John McIntyre identified the origins of the term, I believe.[3] The headline that inspired it is the last one given above, which makes you wonder how a violinist could cause a crash blossom (whatever *that* is). First, articulate the nature of the *clash* (in the sense of that word from 'Logic and conversation') that these examples manifest, with references to specific (sub)maxims (1–2 sentences). Second, comment on why it is surprising, from a Gricean perspective, that we perceive these ambiguities at all (3–5 sentences).

4   The pragmatics of universal quantification   [2 points]

On the theory of determiners we've developed so far, sentences involving the universal quantifier *every* (e.g., *every student danced*) do not entail the corresponding *some* statements (e.g., *some student danced*). First, articulate why this entailment fails to hold in general, using our semantics for *every* and *some*. Second, use the Gricean maxim of quantity to explain why saying a sentence like *every A B* would be disfavored where *some A B* was known to be false.

5   Quantifiers, entailments, and implicatures   [2 points]

A classic Gricean argument is that *few* is semantically consistent with *no* but tends to exclude it pragmatically because of a quality–quantity interaction. (If the speaker of *few* knew that the corresponding *no* statement was true [quality], they would have said so, because it is more informative [quantity].) This argument depends on the semantic claim that *no* entails *few*. Your task is to support this claim, assuming the following set-theoretic meanings (your argument will carry over immediately to the functional view):

- $[\![\mathit{few}]\!] = \{\langle A, B\rangle : |A \cap B| \leqslant k \cdot |A|\}$ (where $0 < k < 1$; k is a pragmatic free variable)

- $[\![\mathit{no}]\!] = \{\langle A, B\rangle : A \cap B = \emptyset\}$

In this context, a determiner meaning D_1 entails another determiner D_2 if and only if $[\![D_1]\!] \subseteq [\![D_2]\!]$. Thus, your task is simply to show that $[\![\mathit{no}]\!] \subseteq [\![\mathit{few}]\!]$.