Assignment 6
Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2021
Distributed Mar 2; due Mar 9

1 Conversational implicature? [3 points]

The goal of this question is to assess the reinforceability and cancellability tests for conversational implicatures. I'm hoping that working through these questions gives you a better sense for how the tests work, and I am planning to aggregate the responses to see how stable the judgments are across everyone in the class.

For each question, there is a sentence and a target meaning. For each test (reinforceability, cancellability), you should provide the following:

- The example that results from applying the test to the sentence to assess the status of the target meaning.

- A judgment as to whether the example supports or challenges the claim that the target meaning, where conveyed, is a conversational implicature. (You get full credit if you provide a judgment; we do not presuppose that any particular judgment is correct.)

Don't worry if the tests give conflicting results; you can treat each as independent of the other.

i. Sentence: Carol happens to own the book.
   Target meaning: Carol owns the book

ii. Sentence: The task is difficult.
    Target meaning: the task is not impossible

iii. Sentence: Carol tricked Jesse into eating a worm.
    Target meaning: Jesse ate a worm
2 RSA implicatures

Here is a simple reference game:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( r_1 )</th>
<th>( r_2 )</th>
<th>( r_3 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘hat’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘glasses’</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘mustache’</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) \( [] \)  
(b) \( P \)  
(c) \( C \)

The basic RSA model can be said to predict that a pragmatic listener will draw a particular conversational implicature given this reference game. Here is the table of conditional probabilities representing that listener (with \( \alpha = 1 \)):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( r_1 )</th>
<th>( r_2 )</th>
<th>( r_3 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘hat’</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘glasses’</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘mustache’</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, say what that implicature is and how it is manifested in this table of conditional probabilities. Second, what is the effect on this implicature of changing the prior to \( P(r_1) = 0.1 \) and \( P(r_2) = P(r_3) = 0.45 \)? Provide the pragmatic listener table of conditional probabilities for this scenario and make use of it in giving your answer.

3 RSA and the division of pragmatic labor

Note: this is not required for people doing a final project. Final projectors should answer the next question instead.

The ‘Introduction to pragmatics’ handout from Feb 16 briefly discusses the ‘division of pragmatic labor’ generalization, which says “Normal events are reported with normal language; unusual events are reported with unusual language”. A simple motivating pair of examples is Kim stopped the car and Kim caused the car to stop. The first uses the normal/unmarked/simple verb stop, and conjures an image of a normal braking event. The second uses the unusual/marked/complex causative construction, and conjures images of unusual stopping events (say, jumping in front of the car).

Can the RSA model, as we defined it on the March 2 handout, simulate this generalization? The core assumptions we need to adhere to: we have two synonymous messages, one of which is more marked (costly) than the other, and two referents, one of which is more probable than the other. For your answer:
i. Present a reference game that implements the core assumptions of this scenario.

ii. Provide the RSA literal listener, pragmatic speaker, and pragmatic listener values for your game.

iii. Either explain how RSA models the division of pragmatic labor, or argue that it doesn't, and develop an argument for why RSA isn't able to capture this generalization in general.

4 Final project task

This problem is required only for people doing a final project. Everyone else should answer question 3 instead.

This question asks you to draft an introduction section for your paper. No matter which type of project you are doing (e.g., paper, corpus, implementation), the introduction to the write-up will need to address at least the following questions:

i. Where are we? That is, what area of semantics and pragmatics are we working in? Answering this question is important for orienting the reader.

ii. What hypothesis is being pursued? It’s a good sign if you have a sentence that starts with a phrase like “The central hypothesis of this paper is . . .”. You don’t need to be this explicit, but, on the other hand, this is a way of ensuring that you don’t end up saying only vague things about what your hypothesis is. Also, being direct about this can expose a lack of clarity in your own thinking that you can then work through.

iii. What concepts does your hypothesis depend on? You can’t require your reader to fill in the gaps. Try to place all the building blocks of your hypothesis in a way that supports the hypothesis itself. Sometimes this material is best given after the hypothesis statement, but very often it needs to be given before, so that the hypothesis itself makes sense.

iv. Why this hypothesis? What broader issues does it address? This will provide further context for your ideas and help motivate your work.

v. What steps are you taking to address your hypothesis? If you’re designing an experiment, implementing a theory, or creating a corpus, then this is probably an easy question to address: just describe your plans. If you’re discussing existing literature, you’ll probably want to summarize what that literature says in relation to your hypothesis – what evidence it offers. In any case, you should be aiming to convince the reader that the information you have to offer will richly inform your hypothesis.

vi. We would expect the introduction to a completed paper to summarize the key findings as well, in the final paragraphs of the section. If you’re discussing existing literature, you can probably do this now, at least in a tentative way. For other kinds of project, you probably don’t have findings yet, and you might not have them at all this quarter if you’re designing an experiment. Thus, for now, the introduction should close with a clear statement for your
expectations: what you think your experiment/implementation/corpus will show, and why you think that.

The paper we read by Levin et al. (on English noun compounds) has an exceptionally good introduction: all of the above questions are addressed clearly in a logical sequence. It's longer than we expect yours to be (as is their whole paper), but it's still a great model.

In writing your introduction (and indeed your whole paper), you should imagine that your reader is a smart, scientifically minded person who hasn't studied semantics and pragmatics. You should *not* imagine that your reader is someone from the teaching team, as that might lead you to presuppose crucial things, which will result in a paper that can't stand on its own as a piece of scholarship.