1 Background

It is common, in investigations of linguistic meaning, to need to determine whether a given meaning is a semantic entailment of some kind or has the more tentative status of a conversational implicature. Section 3 of the ‘Conversational implicature’ handout discusses a number of important properties of conversational implicatures. The following are especially useful for identifying conversational implicatures in the wild:

- **Cancellation**: encoding semantically the negation of the target meaning. If the result seems consistent, then the target meaning is likely an implicature.

- **Suspension**: encoding semantically a lack of knowledge about the truth of the target meaning. If the result seems consistent, then the target meaning is likely an implicature.

- **Reinforcement**: encoding semantically the target meaning itself. If the result seems non-redundant, then the target meaning is likely an implicature.

For reinforcement, it is vital that one states exactly the target meaning. If one states something that entails the target meaning — something more informative than the target meaning — then the result will not seem redundant even for semantic entailments, because of the additional information.

2 Examples

(1) **Example**: Some of the puppies escaped.

   a. **Target meaning**: not all of the puppies escaped
   b. **Cancellation**: Some — in fact all! — of the puppies escaped.
   c. **Suspension**: Some, maybe even all, of the puppies escaped.
   d. **Reinforcement**: Some, but not all, of the puppies escaped.

(2) **Example**: The play was good.

   a. **Target meaning**: the play was not excellent
   b. **Cancellation**: The play was good — in fact, it was excellent.
   c. **Suspension**: The play was good, maybe even excellent.
   d. **Reinforcement**: The play was good, but not excellent.
Example: Sue got into bed, then brushed her teeth.

a. **Target meaning:** Getting into bed happened before teeth brushing
b. **Cancellation:** ?Sue got into bed, then brushed her teeth – but not in that order.
c. **Suspension:** ?Sue got into bed, then brushed her teeth – but not necessarily in that order.
d. **Reinforcement:** ?Sue got into bed, then brushed her teeth – in that order.

### 2.1 Target meanings that seem to be conversational implicatures

Example: The food was palatable.

a. **Target meaning:** the food was not delicious

b. **Cancellation:**

c. **Suspension:**

d. **Reinforcement:**

Example: Carol tried to win the race.

a. **Target meaning:** Carol did not win the race

b. **Cancellation:**

c. **Suspension:**

d. **Reinforcement:**
2.2 Target meanings that seem not to be conversational implicatures

(6) Example: Carol failed to win the race.
   a. Target meaning: Carol did not win the race
   
   b. Cancellation:
   
   c. Suspension:
   
   d. Reinforcement:

(7) Example: Carol managed to win the race
   a. Target meaning: Carol won the race
   
   b. Cancellation:
   
   c. Suspension:
   
   d. Reinforcement:
2.3 Unclear case

(8) Example: Carol wishes that she could juggle

   a. **Target meaning:** *Carol cannot juggle*

   b. **Cancellation:**

   c. **Suspension:**

   d. **Reinforcement:**