Diagnosing different kinds of meaning
Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2020
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1 Diagnostic chart

Is the meaning cancellable or at least suspendible?

No

Entailed

Conversational implicature
Our theory leads us to expect it to be reinforceable and calculable as well.\(^1\)

Yes

Is the meaning a speaker commitment of the negated version of the sentence (Hypothesis N; ‘Presupposition’, §5.1)?

No

At-issue entailment

Yes

Not at-issue
Our theory leads us to expect it to be a speaker commitment of the interrogative version of the sentence (Hypothesis Q; ‘Presupposition’, §5.2) and of the conditional version where the sentence is the antecedent clause (Hypothesis C; ‘Presupposition’, §5.3).

Can the meaning be backgrounded without creating a redundancy (‘Presupposition’ §4.1)?

No

Conventional implicature

Yes

Presupposition

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\(^1\)Connotations are likely to fall into this category, but that might be inappropriate. In his 2014 Stanford thesis *Pragmatics and the Social Meaning of Determiners*, Eric Acton argues for an expanded Gricean framework with associative meanings that would cover connotations.
2 How to apply the tests

- **Cancellation**: encoding semantically the negation of the target meaning.
- **Suspension**: encoding semantically a lack of knowledge about the truth of the target meaning.
- **Re-enforcement**: encoding semantically the target meaning itself.
- **Presupposition tests**: the question is whether the speaker remains committed to the supposed presupposition if the original sentence is (i) negated; (ii) turned into a question; (iii) used as the antecedent of a conditional sentence. If the resulting sentences require that the speaker is committed to the supposed presupposition, that's evidence that the supposed presupposition is indeed a presupposition. For the conditional-antecedent test, the content of the consequent shouldn't matter.

3 Examples

(1) Some cyclists wore spandex.
Meaning of interest: *not all cyclists wore spandex*.
   a. Some, in fact all, cyclists wore spandex. (cancellable ⇒ Conversational implicature)

(2) Kim managed to finish the exam.
Meaning of interest: *Kim finished the exam*
   a. # Kim managed to finish the exam, but she didn’t finish it. (not cancellable ⇒ Entailed)
   b. Kim didn’t manage to finish the exam. (not a speaker commitment of the negated version ⇒ At-issue)

(3) Sandy stopped smoking.
Meaning of interest: *Sandy smoked in the past*
   a. # Sandy stopped smoking — in fact, she never smoked. (not cancellable ⇒ Entailed)
   b. Sandy didn’t stop smoking. (speaker commitment of the negated version ⇒ Not at-issue)
   c. Sandy smoked in the past, but she stopped smoking. (can be backgrounded ⇒ Presupposition)

(4) Richard met Barbara, who is a linguist.
Meaning of interest: *Barbara is a linguist*
   a. # Richard met Barbara, who is a linguist, but Barbara is not a linguist. (not cancellable ⇒ Entailed)
   b. Richard didn’t meet Barbara, who is a linguist. (speaker commitment of the negated version ⇒ Not at-issue)
   c. # Barbara is a linguist and David is a philosopher. Richard met Barbara, who is a linguist. (redundant when backgrounded ⇒ Conventional implicature)