Diagnosing different kinds of meaning

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2015
Mar 3

1 Diagnostic chart

- Is the meaning cancellable?
  - No
    - Entailed
      - Is the meaning a speaker commitment of the negated version of the sentence (Hypothesis N; ‘Presupposition’, §6.1)?
        - No
          - At-issue entailment
        - Yes
          - Conversational implicature
            - Our theory leads us to expect it to be reinforceable and calculable as well.
  - 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’, §6.2) and of the conditional version where the sentence is the antecedent clause (Hypothesis C; ‘Presupposition’, §6.3).
      - Can the meaning be backgrounded without creating a redundancy (‘Presupposition’ §4.1)?
        - No
          - Conventional implicature
        - Yes
          - Presupposition

1 Lose sleep over the existence of uncancellable conversational implicatures.
2 How to apply the tests

- **Cancellability test**: include negation of supposed implicature and see if the resulting sentence sounds contradictory. If so, that's evidence that it's not an implicature.
- **Reinforceability test**: state the supposed implicature explicitly and see if the addition to the sentence sounds redundant/uninformative. If so, that's evidence that it's not an implicature.
- **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)