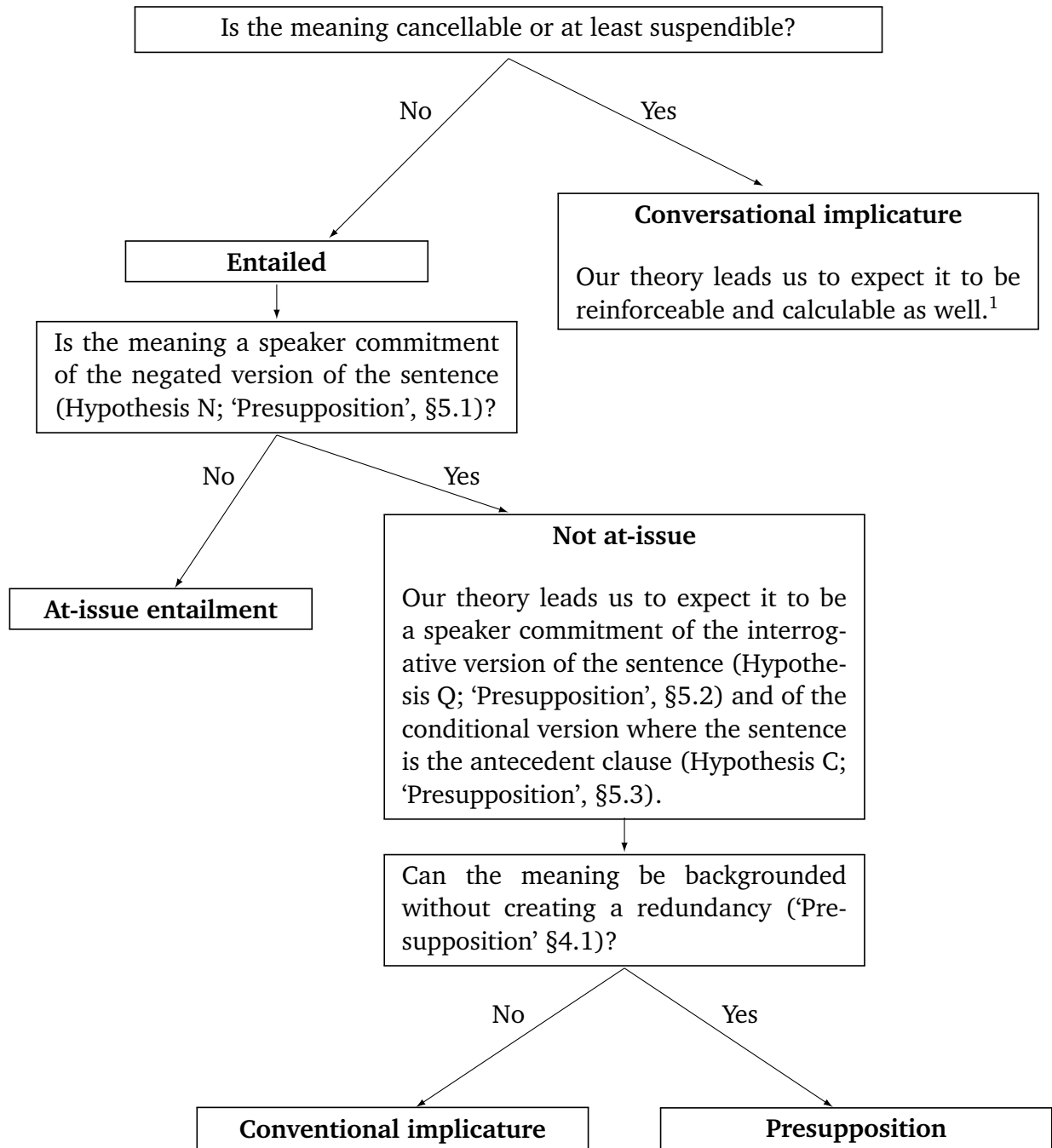# Diagnosing different kinds of meaning

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2022

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1 Diagnostic chart

Is the meaning cancellable or at least suspendible?

No → **Entailed**

Yes → **Conversational implicature**

Our theory leads us to expect it to be reinforceable and calculable as well.[1]

Entailed →

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)