Assignment 6

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2025

Distributed Feb 25; due Mar 4

1 Conversational implicature? [2 points]

The goal of this question is to assess the **reinforceability** and **cancellability** tests for conversational implicatures. 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. However, insights about why the tests behave the way they do are always welcome.

i. *Sentence*: I haven't seen *Evil Dead II* yet.

   Target meaning: I will see *Evil Dead II* in the future

ii. *Sentence*: Jesse had the nerve to ask for a day off.

   Target meaning: Jesse asked for a day off

2 Presupposition? [2 points]

Use the **negation** test and the **interrogative** test to help determine whether (A) presupposes that Jesse won the race.

(R) Joan remembered that Jesse won the race.

For each test, provide:

- The example that results from applying the test to (R).
- A judgment as to whether the example supports or challenges the claim that (R) presupposes that Jesse won the race, along with your reason for reaching this judgment.

Don't worry if the tests give conflicting results; you can treat them each as independent of the others. However, insights about why the tests behave the way they do are always welcome.

3 High-stakes conversational implicature [2 points]

Suppose that the following dialogue takes place in the context of a Senate confirmation hearing. A is a powerful senator, and B is a candidate for the important position.[1]

A: Have you ever ingested Pop Rocks Candy and Coca-Cola at the same time?

B: I have not ingested Pop Rocks Candy and Coca-Cola at the same time in over ten years.

B's response generates a conversational implicature. Identify that implicature and explain how it arises from interactions among the maxims and the information we can glean from the context.

4 The Reid interrogation technique [4 points]

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

The Reid technique is a police interrogation method developed in the 1950s (and, shockingly, still in wide use today in the U.S.). Wikipedia provides a summary of the nine steps involved in the technique:[2]

i. Positive confrontation. Advise the suspect that the evidence has led the police to the individual as a suspect. Offer the person an early opportunity to explain why the offense took place.

ii. Try to shift the blame away from the suspect to some other person or set of circumstances that prompted the suspect to commit the crime. That is, develop themes containing reasons that will psychologically justify or excuse the crime. Themes may be developed or changed to find one to which the accused is most responsive.

iii. Try to minimize the frequency of suspect denials.

iv. At this point, the accused will often give a reason why he or she or they did not or could not commit the crime. Try to use this to move towards the acknowledgement of what they did.

v. Reinforce sincerity to ensure that the suspect is receptive.

vi. The suspect will become quieter and listen. Move the theme of the discussion toward offering alternatives. If the suspect cries at this point, infer guilt.

vii. Pose the "alternative question", giving two choices for what happened; one more socially acceptable than the other. The suspect is expected to choose the easier option but whichever alternative the suspect chooses, guilt is admitted. There is always a third option which is to maintain that they did not commit the crime.

[1] When I was growing up, simultaneously ingesting Pop Rocks and Coca-Cola was reputed to be very dangerous: `http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pop_Rocks`

[2] `https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reid_technique`

viii. Lead the suspect to repeat the admission of guilt in front of witnesses and develop corroborating information to establish the validity of the confession.

ix. Document the suspect's admission or confession and have him or her prepare a recorded statement (audio, video or written).

This text is a dizzying array of unsupported and unsupportable presuppositions about interrogation and human behavior.

Task 1 [3 points] Identify **two** statements in the above that presuppose that the suspect is guilty. For each, identify the word or phrase in the statement that triggers this presupposition, and build an argument for this presupposition analysis using the negation test for presuppositions.

Task 2 [1 point] Identify a statement in the above that presupposes that a specific event or piece of information is evidence of guilt, and provide a plausible reason to doubt that this is the case.

To help illustrate the kind of response we are looking for (without taking any of the potential responses away), imagine that we were starting with an (only marginally worse) interrogation technique that said, "Tell the subject that you understand why they did it, ask the subject whether they feel regret that they did it, and require them to sing the answer, where bad singing is evidence of guilt." Here, one could identify *understand why* and *feel regret that* as the triggers (and run the negation test on sentences using those phrases), and one could note that it is absurd to presuppose that singing poorly is evidence of guilt, as many people, both guilty and innocent, are terrible singers.

Final project task [4 points]

This problem is required only for people doing a final project. Everyone else should answer question 4 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.