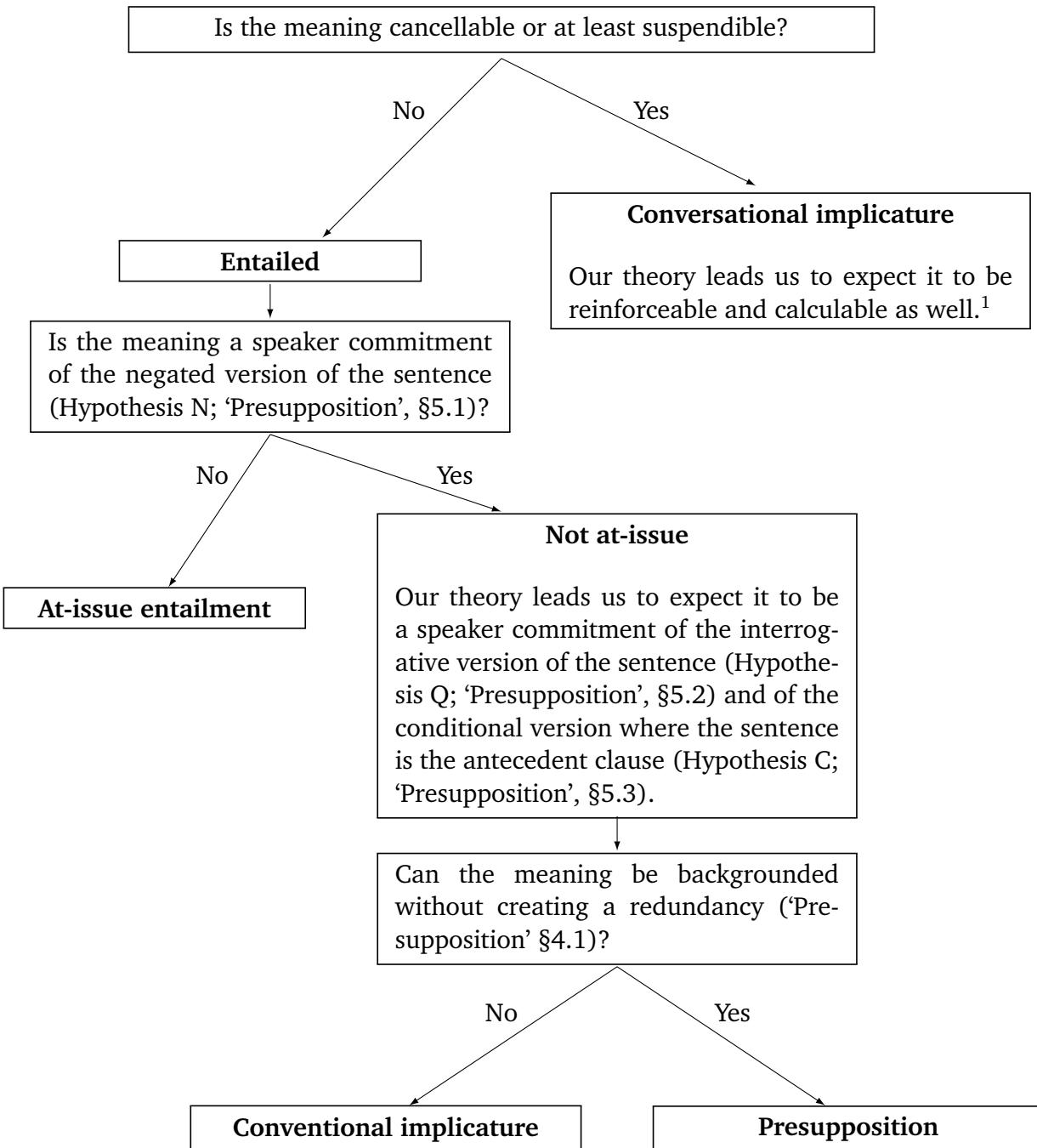


Diagnosing different kinds of meaning

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

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1 Diagnostic chart



¹Connotations 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 \Rightarrow 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 \Rightarrow Entailed)
- b. Kim didn't manage to finish the exam. (not a speaker commitment of the negated version \Rightarrow 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 \Rightarrow Entailed)
- b. Sandy didn't stop smoking. (speaker commitment of the negated version \Rightarrow Not at-issue)
- c. Sandy smoked in the past, but she stopped smoking. (can be backgrounded \Rightarrow 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 \Rightarrow Entailed)
- b. Richard didn't meet Barbara, who is a linguist. (speaker commitment of the negated version \Rightarrow Not at-issue)
- c. # Barbara is a linguist and David is a philosopher. Richard met Barbara, who is a linguist. (redundant when backgrounded \Rightarrow Conventional implicature)