## The operationality of Grice's tests for implicature

In less than a decade after its first publication in 1975, Herbert Paul Grice's paper *Logic and conversation* becomes one of the classic treatises of the linguistic subdiscipline now standardly referred to as pragmatics. There are at least two reasons for the paper's success: (i) it can be regarded as the first truly serious attempt to clarify the intuitive difference between what is expressed literally in a sentence and what is merely suggested by an utterance of the same string of words, (ii) the notional/inferential framework that Grice sets up to characterize various kinds of utterance content is intuitively appealing (*cf*. Haberland & Mey 2002).

To distinguish the literal part of utterance content from those aspects of utterance meaning that are only hinted at, Grice (1975=1989a and 1978=1989b) uses the neologisms *implicate* and *implicature*, while he refers to the linguistically coded part of utterance content as WHAT IS SAID. The sum of what is said in a sentence and what is implicated in an utterance of the same sentence is called the TOTAL SIGNIFICATION OF AN UTTERANCE (Grice 1978=1989b: 41). Implicature itself is meant to cover a number of ways in which literally unsaid information can be conveyed. The relationships between these can be represented schematically as follows:

(1)
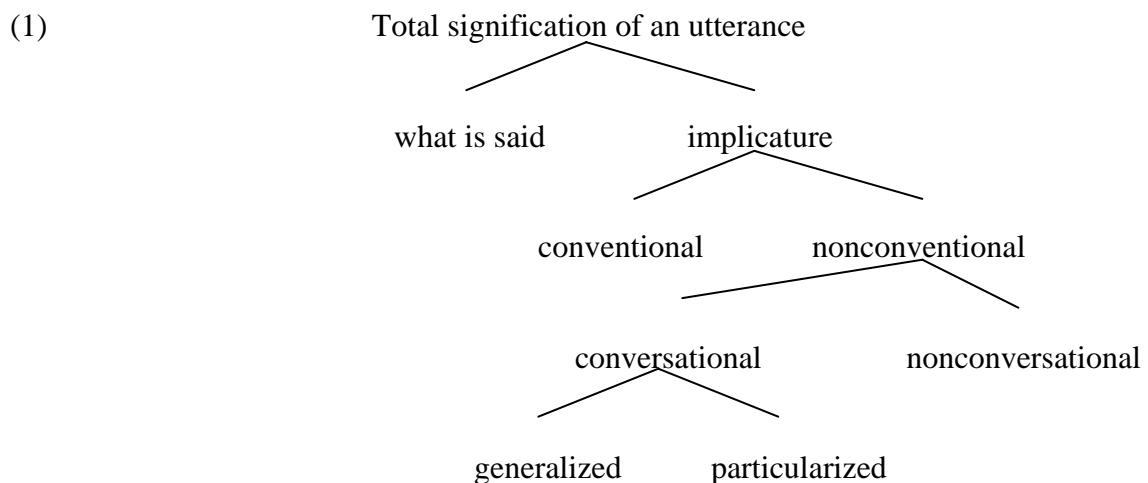
Of the implicature types in (1), we will only be concerned with GENERALIZED CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE, and investigate whether the properties that Grice (1975=1989a and 1978=1989b) attributes to this construct can be regarded as defining criteria. The properties to be discussed are the following (*cf*. Grice 1975=1989a: 31 & 39-40):

(2) (a) Conversational implicature is CALCULABLE, that is, capable of being worked out on the basis of (i) the linguistically coded content of the utterance, (ii) the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, (iii) the linguistic and non-linguistic context of the utterance, (iv) background knowledge, (v) the assumption that (i)-(iv) are available to both participants of the exchange and they are both aware of this;
(b) Conversational implicature is NONDETACHABLE from the utterance by a replacement of the words used with synonyms, that is, expressions with the same linguistically coded content generate identical conversational implicatures when produced in the same context;

(c) Conversational implicature is CANCELLABLE, that is, it can be annulled by certain contexts without this giving rise to a contradiction;
(d) Conversational implicature is NONCONVENTIONAL;
(e) Conversational implicature is not carried by what is said, but by the saying of it.
(f) Conversational implicature may be INDETERMINATE[1].

Grice (1978=1989b: 42) himself is unsure whether "it is possible, in terms of some or all of these features, to devise a decisive test to settle the question whether a conversational implicature is present", yet he thinks that "at least some of them are useful as providing a more or less prima facie case in favor of the presence of a conversational implicature" (Grice 1978=1989b: 43).

The present paper, which takes Sadock's (1991) close scrutiny of the above features as a starting point, shows that of the six characteristics listed by Grice, only cancellability can be considered a practical criterion. Since cancellability itself cannot be regarded as a sufficient condition of the presence of a conversational implicature, additional criteria have to be proposed.

References

Chierchia, Gennaro and Sally McConnell-Ginet (2000). Conversational implicature. In *Meaning and grammar: An introduction to semantics* (239-255). 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Grice, Herbert Paul (1989a). Logic and conversation. In *Studies in the way of words* (22-40). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [Originally published in Cole, Peter and Jerry L. Morgan (eds.) (1975), *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech acts* (41-58). New York: Academic Press.]

Grice, Herbert Paul (1989b). Further notes on logic and conversation. In *Studies in the way of words* (41-57). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [Originally published in Cole, Peter (ed.) (1978), *Syntax and semantics 9: Pragmatics* (113-128). New York: Academic Press.]

Haberland, Hartmut and Jacob L. Mey (2002). Editorial: Linguistics and pragmatics, 25 years after. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *34*, 1671-1682.

Levinson, Stephen C. (1983). Conversational implicature. In *Pragmatics* (97-166). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Posner, Roland (1980). Semantics and pragmatics of sentence connectives in natural language. In Searle, John R., Ferenc Kiefer and Manfred Bierwisch (eds.), *Speech act theory and pragmatics* (169-203). Dordrecht: Reidel.

Sadock, Jerrold M. (1991). On testing for conversational implicature. In Davis, Steven (ed.), *Pragmatics: A reader* (365-376). Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Originally published in Cole, Peter (ed.) (1978), *Syntax and semantics 9: Pragmatics* (281-297). New York: Academic Press.]

---

[1] I have borrowed the term *calculable* and the abbreviation of Grice's (1975=1989a: 39-40) characteristic (f) from Sadock (1978=1991: 367). When formulating characteristic (b), I made use of Levinson's (1983: 116) and Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet's (2000: 244) abbreviations, while the way characteristic (c) is rendered resembles Posner's (1980: 181) formulation.