

**In Defense of Narrow-Mindedness:
Comments on Chierchia's paper**

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The/A Main Agenda/Plot

To argue for Recursive Pragmatics:

- implicatures - *which come about by the normal pragmatic (Gricean) reasoning done by hearers/speakers and which depend on reasoning about speakers intentions, facts about cooperative conversation, etc.* - are computed locally (say, cyclically)
- as a result: they can be visible to the compositional semantics, by operators which act on the “strengthened” meaning of an expression (the meaning + implicatures)
- hence, embedded “implicatures” can ultimately affect truth conditions

The detailed studies in this paper argue for this via trying to establish:

- (1) the existence of operations whose input is the set of alternatives and which affect the truth conditions
- (2) the claim that the particular operations involved are ones derivable by pragmatic (i.e., Gricean) reasoning
- (3) more interestingly: the claim that there is actually one (or two) generalized “implicature freezing” operation(s), and that the particular implicature which is generated (and hence “frozen”) is predictable from the structure of the set of alternatives - combined with Gricean reasoning

A dialogue:

Italics is the defender of Recursive Pragmatics (i.e., C)

plain font: is the defender of the straight and narrow

1. Why we might be resistant to this: Gricean effects require rational beings, reasoning about speakers' intentions, cooperative conversation, and other facts about the speech situation

People are smart - grammars aren't

Preliminary answer in this paper: Yes, but hearers after all have to compositionally compute meanings - so, since each embedded *S* is a “potential utterance”,

hearers are able to compute the implicatures that this would have if it were an actual utterance

But: Why should they? the embedded Ss are not assertions made by a speaker, etc. ... they are not located in the speech situation in the same way

2. Moreover: Assume the semantics works exactly as C claims in this paper - does this really provide evidence for recursive (Gricean) pragmatics?

- After all, operations whose input is the set of alternatives and which affect the truth conditions are perfectly innocent (or at least have been since Rooth, 1984)

we have presumably overt operators (e.g., only) which does this: so one can take C's analyses and take them to show there are silent operators which do just what he says they do

3. *BUT: That misses the point. The point (in part) is that the particular operations are exactly those which we get via pragmatic (Gricean) reasoning. It would be a complete accident to have a semantic operator which does just exactly what Grice does.*

Moreover, which particular operation applies is predictable from pragmatic principles. (Hence just one general operator σ and it is "in the semantics", but what it does is "freeze" (i.e., assert) the implicature which is computed in the pragmatics and which is what takes the set of alternatives as its input

Chierchia talks primarily about three cases of implicature freezing (using two operators, σ and σ which are closely related):

- freezing of scalar implicatures
- freezing of the implicatures of NPIs, which result from the particular kind of domain widening induced by NPIs (and hence from the structure of the alternatives)
- freezing of the implicatures of FCIs, which result from the particular kind of domain widening induced by FCIs (and hence also from the structure of the alternatives)

Answering (3) above

- The cases in (a) are not convincing evidence for freezing of scalar implicatures
- The evidence from NPIs is not convincingly a case of freezing conversational implicatures (which are derived by Gricean reasoning)
- Moreover, to the extent that the NPI case is not a matter of freezing conversational implicatures, the evidence for a single operator σ applying in both of these cases is questioned

A. *C's evidence for the claim that scalar implicatures can be "frozen" - i.e., turned into assertions in the semantics*

- (1) If some of the deans get to vote at the meeting we'll be better off than if all of the deans do.

(based on Levinson, 2000, but with an added twist)

some is in a DE environment. Yet implicature is not "recalibrated". It continues to have - globally - at the top level - the force of "some and not all"

Otherwise the sentence is contradictory

Hence, the implicature

[not all of the deans get to vote at the meeting] - which is computable from the complement of if must get "frozen" - i.e., turned into part of the assertion of the antecedent clause

One can imagine an operator whose semantics is sort of like "only" ("strongest meaning operator") operating at the level of the embedded S to say:

[[SM [some of the deans get to vote at the meeting]]] =

[[some of the deans get to vote at the meeting]] \wedge for all alternatives, the only others which are true are the ones entailed by [[some ...]]

BUT: its an accident then that SM does just what people do when reasoning about main clauses

The response: does this really give evidence for a freezing of a scalar implicature?

- First, one is garden pathed here; would seem to be a matter of going back and reinterpreting (related point: why is the implicature freezing not allowed *in general* but only here when forced by the global semantics?)
- Second, this is much more general than just in the case of scalar implicatures

- (2) If John gets to vote at the meeting, then we'll be a lot better off than if both John and Tom get to vote at the meeting.

(same garden path feeling)

If SM is just a matter of freezing a normal implicature, this would extent to (2) only if (3) implicates (4), but of course (even with stress on JOHN) it doesn't (in general):

- (3) John gets to vote at the meeting

- (4) It is not the case that John and Tom both get to vote at the meeting

(Note crucially: even when *John* is focused and alternatives are explicitly set up, Gricean reasoning at the "top" does not lead to the conclusion that the ordinary assertion in (3) is the strongest possible assertion of the alternatives

(B) *Chierchia's implicature freezing analysis of NPIs*

- *two crucial ingredients in lexical meaning and category of NPI:*
 - (a) *induces alternatives where there is existential quantification over narrower domains*
 - (b) *comes with a bit of information that higher on up, there must be a semantic operator which freezes the "implicatures" generated by an S containing the NPI*
- *the particular implicature is derived via Gricean reasoning in combination with the structure of the set of alternatives:*
 - *in particular - the alternatives are not strictly ordered by strength (in the sense of entailment) as in the case of scalar terms*
 - *hence the reasoning is: the speaker would have said the "strongest" (in a broader sense) statement possible, hence the statement that they made must be the least likely among the alternatives*
- *then, since NPIs also say "find σ higher up" - this implicature is promoted to part of the truth conditions*
(NOTE: C calls this the "even" implicature; it is as if the conventional implicature of "even" is promoted to part of the truth conditions)

→ *when not in the scope of a DE operator, we arrive at a contradiction*

Hence: the fact that NPIs not under a DE are just plain bad (i.e., no way to cancel any "implicature") follows

The response: Suppose parts of this are exactly correct:

- NPIs introduce alternatives with narrower domains
- NPIs come with an extra bit of semantic information - which makes itself known higher up, and which adds the "likelihood" part to the truth conditions (lots of possible implementations)

(NOTE: this says that the alternatives are operated on by something like "even" (for relationship between "even" and NPIs see, among many others, Lee & Horn, Lahiri, ...) - but claims that the effect of the "silent operator" is not to introduce a conventional implicature as *even* does, but to add the "likelihood" information to the truth conditions)

Claim: even if the above is correct - this does not give evidence for recursive pragmatics in the sense of conversational implicatures (i.e., implicatures derived by Gricean reasoning) being promoted to truth conditions

The reason: There is no evidence that the following is ever a (conversational) implicature: **for all alternatives to P, p is the least likely**

(NOTE: This is a “conventional implicature” in the case of “even” - but the use of the term “implicature” for both of these is unfortunate. Aside from the textbook differences (non-cancellability, non deducability via Gricean reasoning), note that conversational implicatures add information for the hearer; conventional implicatures are facts already agreed upon by speaker and hearer (modulo accommodation)

C's possible answer: We never see this just coming out as a top-level conversational implicature, because all items that induce the appropriate set of alternatives happen to have the σ -requiring property

Hence its difficult to find evidence one way or the other here

But: note that when we have a normal set of partially ordered alternatives, we *do not* derive the likelihood implicature:

(5) Domain = John, Bill, Tom. JOHN left.

{John left, Bill left, Tom left, John and Tom left, John, Bill, and Tom left}

many functions of stress/focus when it does not get grabbed up by some operator, but it does *not* give rise to an implicature that John's leaving is the least likely of the alternatives

But: We see that there is a nice Gricean story which says we should derive this implicature - namely the story: given these alternatives, speaker must have said the “strongest” (in broad sense) thing they could have, hence this must be the least likely

But: reasoning unclear here: since p being less likely than q does not mean that $p \rightarrow q$, its not clear what “strongest” (in the broad sense) means or could mean

Local Conclusion: no evidence that any kind of normal pragmatic reasoning is involved in the case of NPIs, and so whole thing can be done in the recursive, compositional semantics (if the basic story is right)

Full evaluation: I've ignored the FCI story ...

Interim Conclusion: Recursive pragmatics supported only if there are clearcut (local) “implicature freezing” operations (or other operations with truth conditional consequences) which are really acting on *implicatures* (derivable by Gricean reasoning) - skepticism remains

Hence: hopefully: people are smart, grammars are not