Original Research Article

"He was not interested in beating his wife enthusiastically": A Linguistic Analysis of Implicatures Attached and Detached around the Clause

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Abstract

This paper examines the sentence "He was not interested in beating his wife enthusiastically" (henceforth matrix) to explain the attaching and detaching of implicatures around the clause. The study is immersed in the pragmatics of a clause-structure approach to the use (attachment) and removal (detachment) of implicatures in sentential propositions. The paper hinges on two theoretical frameworks: Grice's (1989) Theory of Conversational Implicature and Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory of Communication. The study concludes that the implicature conveyed in sentential propositions can be deduced via rigorous, pragmatic-probing analysis of the clause constituents, non-verb categories and the extra-linguistic variables (explicatures) that can be worked out (inference-making).

Keywords: implicature, attaching, detaching, clause, sentence, Relevance Theory of Communication

1.INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how speakers can "imply","possibly imply", and "detach what they imply" in using the English sentence to convey message. Propositions of a sentence are essentially events that are either about the present time or spread beyond it. Irrespective of the time frame of sentential propositions, speaker-hearer presuppositions or shared knowledge are among the facilitators of inferencing when implicatures are deployed in texts. The literature of pragmatics acknowledges that speakers are sometimes unable to say what is meant (pragmatic failure). Therefore, a clause-constituent approach to the elucidation of what a sentence says or implies is worthy of scholarly attention. It is a springboard for further research on the thought-provoking complexity of implicature.

2. Implicature

An implicature is any implied meaning in an utterance. In natural human communication, speakers/writers do not say exactly what they intend to say. However, "what is said" can imply "what is not said". Implicatures are generated through choice of words, word-patterning, discourse relationships and context.

Grice (1975) evolves two categories of implicatures: conversational implicature and conventional implicature. A conversational implicature is generated when the Co-operative Principle (of conversation) is violated. It exists in an utterance that means more than what is said. It is like an indirect speech act. On the other hand, a conventional implicature is lexeme-dependent. Scholars hold the view that most contemporary

pragmatic theories are neo-Gricean. For elaborate persoectives on implicature as a concept in pragmatics, see Adegbija (1982, pp. 11 and 159) Adegbija (1999), Levinson (2000) and Mey (2001).

3. Presupposition

Presuppositions are facts taken for granted by participants of discourse. Adegbija (1999) posits that presuppositions can either be semantic or pragmatic. Semantic presuppositions refer to the logical relations that hold between sentences (sentence-meaning). Words in a sentence produce what is semantically presupposed in the sentence. Presuppositions generate hearers' approval of expressions used in a communicative event. Commenting on presupposition, Frege (cited in Levinson (2000), p. 170) submits:

(a) Referring phrases and temporary clauses (for example) carry presuppositions to the effect that they do in fact refer.
(b) A sentence and its negative counterparts share the same set of presuppositions.
(c) In order for an assertion (as put in the Kepler case) or a sentence (as put in the Schleswia-Holtstein case) to be either true or false, its presuppositions must be true or satisfied …

The concept of presupposition is paramount to linguistics. Wodak (2007) asserts that "the analysis of presuppositions within speech act theory which began with John Austin …, makes it possible to make explicit assumptions and intertextual relations that underlie text-production." For tips on the concept of presupposition, see Levinson (2000) and Mey (2001). Theories of speech act and conversational implicatures nurture pragmatic approach to presupposition.

4. The Clause and the Sentence

A clause is a group of words that has a finite verb. Types of clauses include: noun clause (e.g. wh-interrogative clause, yes-no interrogative clause, that-clause, nominal-ing clause and to-infinitive clause). Around the clause, verbs take different forms: main verb, auxiliary verb, modal (auxiliaries).

A sentence is a linguistic stretch that has a subject and predicate. There are different types of sentences: simple sentence, complex sentence, compound sentence and compound-complex sentence. Sentences can also be categorized according to:

- structure (SVO is "subject-verb-object", SVC is "subject-verb-complement" and SVOA is "subject-verb-object-adjunct");
- communicative function (e.g. commands, questions, statements and requests).

See Quirk, R. & Greenbaum, S. (2004) for more insights on the English clause and sentence.

5. Abbreviations and Symbols

The following non-standard abbreviations and symbols are used in this study, and their full meanings are as follows:

prop (proposition);

+]– (inference);

>] (implicature);

]> (explicature);

sp>>>ev (spread of event);

top-rel (topic relevance).

6. Definition of Terms

Crucial terms used in this study are defined below:

addressee (the hearer);

proposition (the message conveyed with a sentence);

event (action or state-of-affair in a predicate);

inference (a meaning-deductive process);

implicature (meaning implied in an expressions or utterance);

explicature (meaning deduced from logical the logical form of an utterance);

spread of event (the time frame of an event/state-of-affair conveyed by an utterance);

context (any variable that underpins the use of language);

topic relevance (the potential for an utterance to invoke societal phenomena in inference-making).

7. Theoretical Framework

This study relies on two theoretical underpinnings: Sperber and Wilson's (1985) Relevance Theory of Communication; and Grice (1989) Theory of Conversational Implicature.

7.1 Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory of Communication

The Relevance Theory of Communication explains communication as an activity that involves inferring the topic relevance

of an utterance or sentence. See Xinyue Yao (2013, pp. 993-1018) for insights on the theory. They acknowledge that sentences have speaker-meanings that should be understood by the addressee. They hold the view that speakers should make their utterances easy to process by addressees to arrive at speaker-hearer meaning.

7.2 Grice's (1989) Theory of Conversational Implicature

Grice (1989) is an improvement on his predating perspectives on the concept of implicature. According to Grice (1989), "conversational implicatures have the following characteristics:

a) They are cancellable e.g. when one finds situations in which the utterance of the form of words could not carry the implicature.

b) They are non-detachable: It will not be possible to find another way of saying the same thing, which lacks the implicature in question, except where some special feature of the substituted version is itself relevant to the determination of an implication (in virtue of one of the maxims of Manner).

c) They are calculable: The presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out; for even if it can in fact be intuitively grasped, unless the intuition is replaceable by an argument (the implicature if present at all) it will not count as a conversational implicature.

8. Analysis

The following sentences can be generated from the matrix:
(1) Although he was not interested in beating his wife enthusiastically, he did so.
(2) When it came to the issue of beating his wife enthusiastically, he was not interested.
(3) He had no interest in beating his wife enthusiastically.
(4) He beats his wife enthusiastically, but not at will.

(1)

The propositional content in (1) can be interpreted with a relational context (an antecedent that has to do with the reason for the present action). The focus of the sentence is "how the wife was beaten" (adverbial clause). The argument of the sentence is that "the wife-beating" was not done willingly. The proposition does not spread into the future; that is, it is not habitual. From (1), we generate (1a):

(1a) He may be interested in beating his wife enthusiastically.

The modal auxiliary "will" conveys "probability". Therefore, this sentence does not accuse the referent "he" of wife-beating. No logically significant implicature can be deduced from the words "interested" and "enthusiastically". In processing an utterance for implicature (>]), the addressee infers a state-of-affair, event or world-spoken-of as conveyed by verbal categories and other linguistic units in the stretch. The interpretation of an utterance is based on the tense that conveys its proposition and the in-built meanings that operate in the deep structure level of interpretation. Implicatures can be attached or detached in clauses irrespective of the tense of the verb.

(2)

Given the meaning of "when it came …" we infer that there is an underlying adverbial element ("as at then") in (2). Gramarians acknowledge that verbs have implied meanings in their underlying (deep) structure. For example, to "kill" implies "to take life out of the object (sufferer) of the verb". Indeed, (2) is about wife-beating of the past. To alter this meaning, consider (2a):

When it comes to the issue of beating his wife enthusiastically, he is not interested.
In (2a), prop spreads into the future (prop is plus sp>>>ev) because it is conveyed with an existential verb. The implicatures attached to this utterance are:
- He never beats his wife enthusiastically"; and
- He beats his wife".

(3)

The propositional content in (3) is "He was not (in the past) interested in beating his wife enthusiastically". The proposition is neither about the present nor the future. This means that the implicature attached around the clause is that "wife-beating by him is possible thereafter" as in (3a) below:

(3a) He had no interest in beating his wife enthusiastically, but he does so now.
The use of the adverb "enthusiastically" in the matrix limits the prop to the "manner" of wife-beating. The imlicature attached to (3a) is accusation. The referent "he" is guilty of wife-beating. Mustafa Shazali Mustafa (2010, pp. 35-43) submits that "analysis of implicature has proved its importance in discourse analysis theories and the new English syllabi since it caters for what is said and what is understood in the process of communication. The attaching and detaching of implicatures around the clause is less problematic in the inferential process due to speaker-hearer shared knowledge. Latif Amrullah (2015, pp. 57-63) notes that "conversational implicature is regarded as an important issue and the most fundamental aspect in the study of pragmatics. It happens because the presence of implicature is actually needed to connect the communication and explain the language facts which are not covered by the theories of structural linguistics. In addition, an indication of success in conversation is the ability to grasp and understand the implications of that utterance.

The existence of different types of implicature shows how intricate and complex an utterance is. Sentence linguistics which has been used in many school classes since 1850 has been challenged by this pragmatic inference. That is, traditional grammar concentrated mainly on the structures of sentences and their internal systems. Implicature, however, employs the whole situation and it uses all the circumstances surrounding the utterance in order to really conceive the intended meaning of the producer of the utterance …"

In patterning non-verbs around the clause, the speaker attempts to make the proposition "easy to mean"; this is a process of disambiguation. By so doing, the sentence is given optimal relevance. Relevance is a gradable term. For example, an utterance is optimally relevant if its relevance is adequate for the processing effort of the addressee.

(4)

In uttering (4), the speaker expects the addressee to work out top-rel by correctly discovering the deep structure omitted expression of the utterance ("not at will") and relate it to cause-effect phenomenon (world knowledge) so as to possibly justify the action (nominalized as "wife-beating"); justifying the action is individualistic, even if it is not done willingly. Priests for example, may never justify wife-beating. In a sentence or utterance such as the matrix, linguistic units are supposed to convey the topic relevance. If there is no linguistic unit that reveals top-rel, then it can be inferred from extra-linguistic elements (]>) of the situational context such as the real world's practice of wife-beating. Without the larger context, a sentence can be understood as an explanation of, or comment on any discourse topic imaginable (cf. Xinyue Yau (2013, pp. 993-1018). Papafragou A. and Musolino J. (2001) rightly notes that "one of the properties of pragmatic inference is its universality: since implicaures are motivated, not arbitrary, we expect them to arise cross-linguistically in much the same way." When the matrix is uttered, the addressee infers that "other men can be interested in beating their wives enthusiastically, but not the 'he' in the sentence". Consider (4a):

(4a) He is interested in beating other women enthusiastically, but not beating his wife.

In (4a), it is clear that deixis (e.g. "other") are logically part of the deep structure interpretation of utterances. The expression "other" accentuate the illocutionary act potentials of non-performatives (non-verb categories). In attaching or detaching implicatures around the clause, modifiers/qualifiers are potent. Ogidi-Andrew C. (2018) submits that "deixis includes types of expressions that are especially handy, things and events whose interpretations are relative to objects, persons, things …" Deixis are instrumental in the disambiguation of sentential propositions. The use of the expression "interested" in the matrix makes it more implicature-laden. As a crucial element of speaker-meaning,]> is covert; the addressee relies on pragmatic +]– to process its meaning. Implicatures attached in an utterance is not finite. For example, there is a sense in which the matrix also implies that "there could be enthusiastic wife-beating done with or without interest" as in: He was beating his wife enthusiastically; He was interested in beating his wife enthusiastically; and He was not interested in beating his wife enthusiastically. In the matrix, the expressions "interested" and "enthusiastically" impinge on the resultant implicatures.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

To understand the meanings attached or detached when particular verbs and non-verbal categories are used to convey sentential propositions, C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards' The Meaning of Meaning (cited in Leech G. and Short M. H (1981, p. 3) is instructive1:

- an intrinsic property;
- the other words annexed to a word in the dictionary;
- the connotation of a word;
- the place of anything in a system;
- the practical consequences of a thing in our future experience;
- that to which the user of a symbol actually refers;
- that to which the user of a symbol ought to be referring;
- that to which the user of a symbol believes himself to be referring;
- that to which the interpreter of a symbol:

(a) refers;
(b) believes himself to be referring;
(c) believes the user to be referring.

Xinyue Yau (ibid.) ponders on the spread of the event or state described by the verb and its argument in the use of the English past perfect. He notes that the past perfect is viewed as having a single meaning, but its perfect sense (construction) interacts with sentential elements and structure. In this regard, the different lexical and auxiliary verbs as well as non-verb categories in a sentence interact to produce the proposition of a sentence when implicatures are either attached or detached from the sentence.

Verbs around the clause are varied in the process of attaching implicature to a sentence. Variation of verbal categories also occurs in the process of detaching implicature from a clause2. The analyses reveal that arguably, variation can be derived through word-class shift, change of tense, linguistic patterning, negation, etc. For example, "interested" can become "uninterested"; "enthusiastically" can become "without enthusiasm/non-enthusiastically"; "beating" can take the forms: "will be beating", "can beat", "may beat" etc. These forms relocate implicatures attached or detached around the

clause. The task of the analyst is to identify and elucidate the sentences that:

- attach "wife-beating" to the proposition via implicature;
- attach "wife-beating" to the proposition without the use of implicature;
- detach "wife-beating" from the proposition via implicature;
- detach "wife-beating" from the proposition without the use of implicature.

The illocutionary-act potential of non-verbal categories in attaching or detaching implicatures around the clause is obvious when we consider the sentence: Black lives matter. A linguistic analysis of this sentence produces the meaning "Their lives are black". Arguably, their lives are not black, although their skin is black. Considering the negative connotations of the word "black", "Black lives matter" does not present a good image or personality about those who belong to the black race, yet the caption is used by the Black in America to fight against racial discrimination. Implicature can be detached from this unacceptable caption by re-expressing it as "Lives of Black matter". The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby (1984), New 9th Edition) gives some of the denotative and connotative meanings of the word "black":

- belonging to a race of people who have black skin;
- connected with black people;
- dirty;
- angry;
- depressing;
- evil (black deeds).

The above negative connotations explain why expressions such as "black sheep" (… black sheep of the family); and "black market" (… to buy fuel at the black market) evolved.

Meanings around the clause provide fascinating insights on the pragmatic potentials of linguistic units "unleashed" around the clause. According to Fowler (1981), "linguistic structure is not arbitrary. It is determined and motivated by the functions it performs3 In this study, the matrix "He is not interested in beating his wife enthusiastically" is analyzed in relation to its multiple linguistic variables: deep structure (semantic) representations, word-class variations and word-patterning. Convingsingly, these variables are instrumental in attaching and detaching implicatures around the clause. See Acheoah (2014) for insights on clause-driven illocutionary acts.

Notes
1. Published in 1923, the book had the very title The Meaning of Meaning, and contained, on pp. 186-7, a list of as many as twenty-two definitions of the words, taking different non-theoretical starting points.
2. The deep structure equivalents of utterances capture the potency of sentential units to vary in form.
3. In a similar vein, Adegbija (1999) opines that "language use is not incidental. It is of credit."

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