Explicatures are NOT Cancellable

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Abstract In this chapter I argue that explicatures are not cancellable on theoretical grounds. I take that explicatures are loci of pragmatic intrusion, where pragmatics mimics semantics. I attempt to differentiate explicatures from conversational implicatures on logical grounds. I answer some objections to Capone (2009) by Seymour (2010) and I also respond to Carston (2010). The crucial problem addressed in this paper is whether by cancellability of explicatures we should intend the evaporation of an explicature from an act of saying when a different context is considered. I discuss the logical problems which this view gives rise to. In this paper, I explore the consequences of considering cancellability of an explicature a language game. I conclude that the cancellability test proposed by Carston can never be unified with the other side of cancellability (explicit cancellability cannot be unified with cancellability due to an aspect of the context that cancels the inference). Furthermore, I consider that cancellability à la Carston is neither a definitional, nor a constructive nor an eliminative language game. The paper makes use of important considerations by Burton-Roberts (2013) on intentionality and also discusses some of his examples.

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will not embark on the task of unifying various considerations on the cancellability of explicatures (or rather the lack of it) scattered in my papers on pragmatics and modularity of mind, attributive/referential and quotation. Since here I mainly want to deal with a high level of abstraction, I will not consider those data in detail (but I need to say that they appear 'prima facie' to support my own

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inclination to say that explicatures are NOT cancellable). I confine myself to theoretical considerations which are in line with those data. The positive position I will explore, support and justify is that explicatures are natural loci of the tension between semantics and pragmatics, where the tension is resolved in favor of pragmatics but the cost involved is that pragmatics becomes more and more se-manticised. And this may mean that explicatures should not be cancellable if they constitute loci of the tension between semantics and pragmatics and loci where pragmatics simply aims to mimic the semantic resources of the language, that is its truth-conditional apparatus. I have already hinted at this in my paper 'On Grice's circle', even if the aim of that paper was to resolve a specific problem (the circularity of the view that explicatures take input from pragmatics and impli-catures take input from explicatures), and not to address the general problem of how language mobilizes resources of a pragmatic nature to mimic semantic resources (and to amplify them).

2 A First Distinction

While I was attempting to publish Capone (2009), a referee suggested that I should distinguish between the pragmatic components of the explicature and its semantic components. Presumably, the referee thought that there was a semantic basis on which the explicature was built (the output of decoding) and that these parts ought to be distinguished, presumably because the pragmatic components of explicatures are cancellable (or are considered to be cancellable), whereas the semantic com-ponents (the entailments) are not or should not be.[1] Of course, it should be added that theorist believed that entailments cannot be cancelled without contradiction of what is said and that explicatures (or rather, conversational implicatures) are cancellable without contradiction of what is said. Yet, at some point it appeared to me that it is clear that contradiction is itself a logical notion that (possibly) requires pragmatic intrusion, because if you do not fix the references of the words and if you do not clarify that you are talking about a serious assertion, in which a speaker is committed to the explicatures, there can be no contradiction of what is said,

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[1] An objection to this view could be the following: the explicated proposition is pragmatically inferred by the hearer. And doesn't that mean that, however the hearer recovers them, the "components" of an explicated proposition are entailments of that proposition? In other words, it's difficult to know what I mean by "pragmatic versus semantic components of the explicature." An explicature is a proposition and propositions are constituted by their entailments.

  My reply is that, while obviously it is true that the explicated proposition is part of the truth-conditional content of the sentence, relevance theorists might insist that there is a semantic component (the output of linguistic decoding) and a component which is pragmatically inferred. [See Capone (2009) on this]. I agree with the objection that both components are subject to pragmatic processing and thus even if initially it makes sense to distinguish or want to distinguish between the semantic and the pragmatic components of the explicature, in the end it does n ot really make sense to make this distinction.

simply because we have not settled on the question of how to elucidate what is said properly. I think all this has been clear enough since some eminent statements by Levinson (1983), perhaps now ignored by the current theorists. Levinson, to explain deixis, made clear that a very simple deduction does not work unless we fix the references of the terms involved. So deduction occurs at the level of statements, not of sentences. Does this mean that entailments are things that belong to statements, rather than to sentences? Not necessarily. It is obvious that if I say that 'Every man is clever', then a, b, c, d which make up the domain of the quantifier are all (and each) clever. If I want to test the entailment and to do so I need the notion of contradiction, I need to test the entailment through an assertion. However, this is natural, since the aim of a semantic theory is to provide the resources necessary to make statements and it is through statements that we can test the logical properties of words (entailments) provided that we are able to separate what belongs to semantics from what belongs to pragmatics. To make an example:

I say:
This man is clever and happy.
Then I say:
This man is clever but unhappy.

If I were to unify those two thoughts, I would obtain a contradiction PRO-VIDED that I keep the reference of 'this' fixed. Although I have tested the entailments of my first sentence through a statement, I have obtained intuitions about semantics, since the pragmatics was kept fixed: in particular, I kept fixed the reference(s) of 'this man' and I have made a serious assertion in both statements.

So now, to go back to the issue of keeping separate the semantic and the pragmatic components of the explicature, I should at least say that the entailments that form part of the explicature must go through a pragmatic filter, as they must be judged part of a serious (or otherwise not serious) assertion. Thus it is not so clear that it makes sense to distinguish between the semantic and the pragmatic components of the explicature. In fact, if we consider the explicature a contribution to what is said, to the proposition which a speaker is committed to, we had better not make this distinction at all, since the entailments work only through the statement (they are active only if expressed through a statement). Considerations on cancellability also militate against making such a distinction, since the entailments, once they go through the pragmatic filter which makes them eligible for a serious assertion, cannot be cancelled in the same way in which the pragmatic components of the explicature cannot be cancelled. In fact, as everyone knows since the work by Hintikka on knowledge, entailments can be cancelled, in the context of a loose assertion, as when one says 'John knows that Mary is in Paris but she is in London'. Here the entailment of 'know' is cancelled in favor of the interpretation 'believes he knows'. Explicatures, instead, are loci where entailments cannot be cancelled at all—and that is because they are fixed through intentions and intentions exclude loose uses if the speakers do not intend to speak loosely.

3 On Intentions

A man who speaks intends the hearer to grasp the message she intends to convey through the use of words and syntactic concatenations of linguistic elements as shaped by knowledge of the language and by pragmatic principles (or principles of language use). A linguistic action is different from a non-linguistic one in that it is not only animated by an intention but makes that intention explicit through a linguistic form. So, when a man switches the light on, he is animated by the intention of switching the light on. The action reveals that intention in a non-linguistic way. Given the action, it is obvious enough that that is what he intended to do (unless he wanted to deceive us). However, given a linguistic action, it is not obvious enough what its point is, as that may but may not be revealed by the words used (serious vs. non-serious uses). Furthermore, given that through an utterance one can accomplish many actions, even if we were to find a simple way to detect the correlate intention, we could not easily find out the other intentions which are linked to the utterance.

But at least this must be clear. The speaker said u for some reason and by saying u he had the intention of doing x. So, the main task for the language users is how to grasp the intention which is behind the utterance (sometimes hidden by the utterance). So far we have been presupposing, perhaps simplistically, that intentions are a priori and fixed through utterances. And this is what some philosopher imbued with anthropology (say Duranti 1988) may want to deny, favoring the idea that intentions emerge from interactions and that hearers are instrumental in fixing such intentions. I do not deny that there are such complex cases. When a novelist discusses his novel with his readers he may very well come up with interesting remarks on the authorial intentions and he may even accept such suggestions. There is also the case of the academic writer who discusses an article with her editor who is able to maieutically extract what the author really wanted to say and helps her put that into writing. There is also the case of an intention which is 'in fieri' and, which, therefore, is likely to be modified by interaction with an audience. However, it is undeniable that there are also cases of simple *a priori* intentions, as when Mario asks his mother whether dinner is ready. It is clear enough that he intends to eat, in the context of utterance, and there is no cogent reason for doubting that he had such an intention in saying what he said. So, in this paper, I will assume that what I have to say is only applicable to the simple cases, while I accept that the special cases need deeper discussion.

And now the Deus-ex-Machina of this paper. How can an intention be executed/implemented and then be cancelled? Surely, a speaker can retract an intention if he repents saying what he has said and is willing to replace it with a different assertion. However, the very fact that the intention must be retracted means that the intention is still there, behind the previous utterance [See Burton-Roberts (2005), 2013]. Consider the case of the politician who says, in the middle of a conversation, 'That bloody negro….' and then stops because he remembers that there is a black person within the audience. He has committed an offence, and

although surely he can retract the previous thought, the procedure for doing so is quite laborious and it is not obvious at all that he can immediately cancel the offence he has produced. All he can do is to rely on the forgiveness of the hearers, but he need not expect that the offence can be eliminated so easily as it was produced. This example merely shows that intentions (once executed) in many cases are not easily retractable. In the easiest cases, however, one can pretend that he used the wrong word.

Communicative (or better, communicated) intentions are entirely transmitted through pragmatics. No (communicative) intentions can be fixed through the semantics of the language, although language is instrumental in fixing intentions. Even the law requires interpretation, and despite the fact that the law-maker tries to be as explicit as possible, there are residual interpretative ambiguities. In the end, the most rational interpretation of the law is the one which wins (Dascal 2003), but we still need interpretation, which shows that executions of intentions are pragmatic things.

Linguistically expressed intentions require a matching between what is understood and what is said. Without this matching, there can be no communication, at least ideally. According to some theorists, it is sufficient that the message understood and the message conveyed are similar enough; a strict matching is not indispensable (Wilson and Sperber 2012). I quite agree that a certain degree of approximation should be tolerated in actual communication; however, ideally communication cannot be successful unless there is a perfect match between the speaker's intentions and the message recovered by the hearer. A sound linguistic methodology will prescribe that we should not be happy unless the communication processes described by our linguistic theoretical apparatus capture this match. An ideal pragmatic theory is not one that solely deals with interpretation, but one that deals with the way intentions are communicated. The same predispositions to communicate information should work both at the level of codification and at the level of interpretation. Take for example the principle of Relevance by Sperber and Wilson (1986). According to this principle, a speaker communicates by an ostensive act a presumption of Relevance. It follows that this Presumption of Relevance should also guide interpretation. Interpretation is mainly a reconstruction of the speaker's communicative strategies. There is even a mirroring relationship between what the hearer does to understand and what the speaker does to communicate. The speaker takes into account the hearer, her needs and limits, and the hearer takes into account the predispositions of the speaker to take into account the dimension of the hearer.

4 Explicatures

I have said that explicatures are loci of the tension between semantics and pragmatics. In particular, they are loci where pragmatic inferences are hard or impossible to cancel. The reasons why they are hard to cancel may be multiple.

We may go along with Burton-Roberts (2005; 2013) and say that explicated meanings are cases of speaker's meaning, that is to say cases in which a speaker commits himself to his meaning (what he said). Since he intended to say something, such a message cannot be un-said and the intention behind it cannot be cancelled. Explicature cancellation, in Burton-Roberts's view, amounts to aborting an (executed) intention, but how can an (executed) intention be aborted if it was there in the first place (that is if it was already executed)? Another cogent reason why an explicature cannot be cancelled (or aborted) has to do with the logical structure of discourse. If an explicature is there to play a role in the logical structure of discourse, in particular in rescuing a fragment of discourse from illogicality, contradiction, and logical absurdity, then such an explicature cannot be aborted, because this would amount to returning to the problems which, in the first place, necessitated the explicature. We can, derivatively, couch this notion in Burton-Roberts' notion that intentions cannot be abrogated, provided that we are clear at this point that it's not individual intentions—arrived at through specific clues disseminated in the text—that count in this case, but the intentions that are derived through the desire to say something logical—and not illogical. So, at the basis of explicatures, we can find the general intention to be logical, from which other individual and concrete intentions can be derived. We are obviously faced with Jaszczolt's (1999) distinction between the individual and the social path of intentionality, where individual intentions have to conform to what must be the case in order to preserve the logical structure of discourse. So, the difference between Burton-Roberts and me, although minimal, is not trivial and is worth being discussed. The other difference between Burton-Roberts and myself is that I said that explicatures are loci of the tension between semantics and pragmatics. When linguistic decoding cannot independently provide a logical structure of discourse, pragmatics has to intervene and must provide a truth-conditional intrusion. In other words, there is a gap in truth-conditional meaning which is due to the insufficiency of semantics and this gap must be filled through pragmatics. There is a tension because pragmatics intervenes to fill the truth-conditional lacuna, and also because pragmatics becomes attracted by semantics and ends up playing the role of a substitute, which has at least some of the properties of the thing for which it is substituted. One of such properties is non-cancellability. So, if one side of the story on cancellability of explicatures depends on intentions, the other half of the picture depends on the structural role played by pragmatics and, in particular, by the exigency of replacing semantics and of mimicking at least some of its properties.

Before delving into the theoretical part of the paper, it may be convenient to provide and briefly discuss some examples of explicatures. The leading idea of explicature is that pragmatic intrusion contributes to the truth-conditional import of the statement (thus, it contributes to what is said). Important scholars like Carston (2002) and Levinson (2000), therefore, have been busy to show that, without pragmatic intrusion, it is not possible to calculate the full truth-conditional import of a statement. Consider the following:

1. If the king of France dies and France becomes a republic, I will be happy, but if France becomes a republic and the king of France dies, I will not be happy.

Semantically, the two conjuncts (conjoined by 'but') appear to be the same; but then the contrast would not be justified; however, there is a genuine contrast if pragmatic intrusion applies and the pragmatics of 'and' contributes to the full truth-conditional import of the utterance.

2. It is better to meet the love of one's life and get married than to get married and to meet the love of one's life.

One of the requirements of the comparative 'better' is that the things compared be different. Thus, we expect that the propositions compared are different. At the sentential level, however, they are the same propositions, thus we need pragmatics to arrive at the full propositional level (where temporal variables are assigned values).

3. If the children eat some of the cake, then we will eat the remainder.

Now consider the quantified expression 'some cake'. Unless a scalar implicature applies to it and it is interpreted as 'some but not all of the cake', the conditional does not work properly, as the consequent follows ONLY if the scalar implicature is actually computed and becomes part of truth-conditional meaning.

4. A: Why don't you join us for dinner?

   B: Thanks, but I have already eaten.

In this example, B is clearly explicating that she has already eaten dinner; it is not enough that she has eaten, say, an ice-cream. The reply counts as an explanation for the tacit refusal. The speaker cannot accept because she has already had dinner and one cannot have dinner twice in the same day. To make the reply relevant, it is not enough that the speaker had dinner at some time in the past, but the explanation to be relevant has to be about a time interval immediately preceding the time of the invitation to dinner.

In all these cases, it does not make sense to cancel the explicature, because by cancelling it one returns to a discourse which is pointless; if an explicature is needed to cure potential contradictions or absurd speeches or the provision of trivial information, then by cancelling the explicature one returns to problems which cannot be remedied otherwise. Consider now the following.

5. You will not die (of this cut).

The mother who says 'You will not die' to her son, does not obviously mean that the child will never die, but that he will not die due to his cut. The contextual provision of an adjunct serves to make the truth-conditions of the utterance more precise.

The work on explicatures does not end here. In previous work, I have in fact shown that explicatures play an important role in the following areas: belief reports (null appositives), 'de se' attitudes, Immunity to Error through Misidentification, knowing how, quotation, referential/attributive, indirect reports, pronominal clitics, etc.

5 On the Tension Between Semantics and Pragmatics

I take a semantic theory to be a system of knowledge allowing people to communicate by using signs and structured strings of signs in order to express thoughts. A structured string of signs corresponds to a thought (I take ambiguities to be related to utterances capable of being given different structural analyses). We could very well think of thoughts as minimal structures capable of being enriched through further layers of meaning through pragmatics. Yet the minimal structure must be there for enrichment to occur. These minimal structures can be assigned basic truth-conditional meaning. One reason why I take there to be a basic tension between semantics and pragmatics is that while an undoubtedly complex semantics has been devised to deal with recurrent and culturally salient aspects of reality, this cannot completely deal with new aspects of reality which require some kind of pragmatic adaptation, or extension of the semantic system. Pragmatics serves to boost and amplify the semiotic potentialities of the system; needless to say, if a construction tends to be associated through pragmatics with a certain meaning, and such an association becomes recurrent and ends up capturing an aspect of reality which, for some reason, has now become culturally salient, then there are chances that the explicature will become semanticised through various stages of language use. A stage in which the use is relatively unstable will be followed by a stage in which the use becomes stable enough in that it has come to represent the needs of a multiplicity of users who, faced with a recurrent problem, have found a certain construction and its pragmatic explicatures useful to express a recurrent aspect of reality. Only when there is a convergence between the needs of a multiplicity of language users and the potential benefit that a construction represents in that it is capable of resolving a recurrent expressive problem, does the need for grammaticalization arise. Consider the following Searlian Principle:

Anything that can be thought can be expressed.

This principle embodies the basic tension between semantics and pragmatics, since when there is an expressive problem arising due to the fact that the semiotic resources of the language are not capable of coping with a certain area of language use, then pragmatics allows expressibility. However, I would even add that pragmatics allows thought in the absence of adequate semantic resources; so it is also an amplifier of thought, a means through which thought is capable of existing, of being articulated, of being developed through more complex structures than those that are allowed through the existing semiotic system. In other words, pragmatics is a basic tool or utility which makes thought more flexible and more complex, thus ensuring progress in those cases where the limits of semantics would invariably mean stagnation. A certain amount of creativity is introduced into language though pragmatics, which does not only boost thought and the existing semantic resources, but ensures that the evolution of thought can take place even in the absence of new linguistic resources or of 'ad hoc' creations.

6 On the Distinction Between Conversational Implicatures and Explicatures

A sound and coherent picture would be one according to which explicatures are calculated before implicatures. The rationale for this is that explicatures contribute to truth-conditional meaning while conversational implicatures can be cancelled (are cancellable in principle). In any case, conversational implicatures are normally calculated after truth-conditional meaning is calculated. It is not impossible that implicatures and explicatures can be calculated at the same time and that implicatures help determining the explicature. Even granting this logical possibility, these cases are rare. The cases of explicatures I have discussed are confined to those where explicature comes to rescue the discourse from a defect, such as illogicality, contradiction, triviality, etc. It is in such cases that it is hard to cancel the explicature. Considerations of parsimony also militate against the idea that explicatures can be cancelled, because once the cost of pragmatic inference has been incurred, some extra cognitive cost will be required to cancel the explicature. But this extra cost is not generally justified. Instead the cost of pragmatic inference in the case of explicature is justified by the need of liberating discourse from some obvious defect.

So, what's the difference between an explicature and an implicature? They are obviously generated by the same pragmatic principles and they are both generated when the discourse seems defective for some reason. In the case of conversational implicatures, there is often a defect in the flow of information and to restore the balance of the flow of information an implicature is needed. In the case of explicatures, there is a problem with the logicality of the discourse and one needs an explicature to liberate it from e.g. some obvious contradiction or absurdity. So, in any case both the implicature and the explicature can potentially deal with problems, but the problems cured by explicatures are more acute and are not confined to lack of relevance or lack of information on the part of the speaker.

The consequences of this preliminary discussion on cancellability are obvious. Explicatures are obviously not cancellable, because by cancelling them one returns to a severely ill-formed fragment of discourse. Conversational implicatures are cancellable in the sense that one can retract the intention behind them more easily. Consider the following case:

6. A: We should get rid of Berlusconi.

Properly contextualized, A's utterance could be taken as an invitation to get rid of Berlusconi physically. And in recent political discourse, there has been a controversy on whether this type of language counts as an incitement to violence. The implicature, however, could easily be denied by the speaker, who might simply say that he was speaking metaphorically (get rid of Berlusconi from the political scene).[2] Since there is a residual vagueness, intentions of this type can be

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[2] A commentator doubted that these inferences could ever arise. Notice, however, the analogy with the utterance allegedly proffered by Henry II "Who will rid me of this meddlesome priest?"

easily retracted. This is not to say that in all cases of conversational implicatures, these can be cancelled. If there are numerous clues all leading in the direction of fixing the speaker's intention, then it will be difficult to cancel the implicature, because the intention is expressed in the form of a strong implicature. It may make sense to distinguish (as Wilson and Sperber 2012 do) between strong and weak implicatures. It is obvious that the stronger implicatures are hard to cancel.

But then, could we not count the explicatures as cases of strong implicatures? Considerations of parsimony would lead us to get rid of the cumbersome distinction between implicatures and explicatures. This is more or less what Levinson (2000) does, even if he talks of intrusive constructions. Yet, I would resist the idea of conflating explicatures and implicatures, because while surely strong intentions are present in the case of explicatures, it is structural configurations which make the intentions stronger. While in the case of strong implicatures, one might say that the implicatures are stronger because the speaker disseminated such an amount of clues in the text as to make cancellation difficult or impossible and strong intentionality depends on the speaker's intention to make his intention evident, in the case of explicatures, it is the structural configurations of discourse rather than the amount of clues disseminated which make the intention stronger and difficult to cancel.

7 The Pragmatic Cancellation Principle

According to Carston (2002, 138) all pragmatic inference is cancellable. Since explicatures are cases of pragmatic inference, it would follow that they are cancellable too. Now, these apparently innocent remarks require investigation and proper deepening. It may seem obvious that many cases of explicatures involve cases of Gricean scalar implicatures or in any case of Gricean generalized implicatures. For example, use of the connective 'and' may give rise to temporal readings (and then) or even causal readings (and therefore); and the use of the quantifier 'some' may give rise to interpretations such as 'some but not all'. So according to Carston, Grice's GCIs can be analysed as explicatures. Surely we must grant that at least some explicatures are arrived at through pragmatic inferences and, in particular, generalized implicatures. Yet, we must also recognize that explicatures are loci of the tension between semantics and pragmatics and that, even if generalized implicatures are utilized to fix an intention, at these loci of pragmatic intrusion there is more at stake than conversational implicatures. Conversational implicatures are only one ingredient of explicatures; then these

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(Footnote 2 continued)

which were heard by some of his knights as an incitement to violence against Thomes Beckett. Of course, the political context is different and will yield different implicatures. In the Italian political scene, the incitement to violence interpretation is a bit strained, but certainly the supporters of Berlusconi argued that utterances like (6) could be interpreted in this way.

must be combined with the output of linguistic decoding, and in the case of explicatures a particular mode of pragmatic composition prevails, one that uses pragmatic inference to cure a logical problem. Thus structural considerations prevail and the conversational implicature is only a tool to be used in a complex machinery that throws out entailments rather than implicatures. So we may say that implicatures are part of the input, but the compositional machinery turns pragmatic inference into semantic inference. Thus, it is true that pragmatic inference is cancellable (e.g. potential explicatures), but once it is turned into semantic inference, it is no longer cancellable. It is the recognition of the loci of pragmatic intrusion or of the tension between semantics and pragmatics that makes Carston's Pragmatic cancellation inference quite irrelevant with respect to cancellability of explicatures. Since explicatures are logically different from implicatures, even if explicatures are made out of implicatures, Carston's Pragmatic Cancellation principle no longer applies.

There are further reasons for believing that Carston's Pragmatic Cancellation Principle is innocuous. To have full validity and generality, one should be able to contrast linguistic decoding and pragmatic information. (See Burton-Roberts 2013). Presumably, on a view such as Carston's, pragmatic inference is cancellable, while semantic inference is not. Yet, as shown in Capone (2009), the entailments that constitute the semantic layers of the explicatures also need pragmatic intrusion to rise to the level of intended meaning.[3] Only when they rise to the level of intended meaning, they are no longer cancellable. Otherwise, as insisted on by theorists such as Kent Bach (2001), the entailments are neither here nor there. We can easily suspend them or cancel them, as shown by numerous cases of ironic utterances. So, in the same way as we can distinguish between weak and strong implicatures, we can distinguish between weak and strong entailments. And it appears that entailments are strong, in the sense of not being cancellable, only when they rise to the level of speaker's intentions. In other words, it is the speaker's intentions that determine that the entailments cannot be cancelled. But if such are our conclusions, there are no strong or cogent reasons for distinguishing between semantic and pragmatic inference in terms of cancellability—while of course there are other reasons to ground the distinction, mainly having to do with compositionality.

8 Cancellability as a test for Conversational Implicature

The literature on conversational implicature has converged on the idea of using cancellability for testing conversational implicatures (in particular, for distinguishing them from entailments). All textbooks agree that cancellability is the most

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[3] Perhaps the most clear case of cancellability of entailments is constituted by Hintikka's consideration that the entailments of 'know' can be cancelled, as in loose or parasitic uses such as 'John knew that p, but it turned out that p was false'.

important test for conversational implicature, in the sense that, if something is an implicature, then it should be cancellable (without contradiction of what is said). However, Sadock's (1978) seminal paper, at least some scholars have insinuated a doubt as to whether cancellability can be used as a(n automatic) test. Levinson (1983) despite his faith in cancellability agrees that as an autonomous test, it can sometimes fail and that cancellability must be used together with other tests (non-detachability, non-conventionality, the ability of constructing an argument that posits the implicature). The fact that we need cumulative testing shows that cancellability, after all, does not work properly as a test. And why should we need a test after all? Why should we need a diagnostics? We need testing when we are not sure; but if we are sure that something is an inference, we do not need to test it.

If this were not enough, two delicate problems besiege the theory based on cancellability as a test (or as a way of testing). There are cases of meanings which start as pragmatic and end up becoming semantic. They are cases of frozen pragmatics. It would be best to say that these are cases in which the tension between semantics and pragmatics on the one hand has used pragmatics to extend prior senses, on the other hand usage has consolidated the pragmatic innovations, accepting them as part of the praxis because of their usefulness and because of the communicative success of the innovation—a majority of speakers have felt that the innovation has been useful and has filled a hole in the system, has provided something for which there was an acute need. A use becomes consolidated when it provides a concept that is culturally salient enough. Of course, for such consolidated uses, cancellability as a test does not work—not only for the easy reason that one is mixing synchrony and diachrony, but because usage has, so to say, invested an inference with the approval of the community and has thus circulated the inference as a culturally salient use, rather than as an 'ad hoc' creation or innovation.

The other problem, which is more acute, is that even assuming that conversational implicatures are naturally—even if not uncontroversially—cancellable, we have no certainty that explicatures are cancellable. If they were to be completely identified with implicatures, then by identification, we would expect them to be cancellable. However, if there is a complex relationship, which is not necessarily one of identification, between implicatures and explicatures, then we should not expect explicatures to be cancellable on a par with implicatures.

In fact, if it is natural to say, to posit, or to argue that if there is a test for conversational implicatures, this should include cancellability (however controversial that test should be), it is not natural to argue that cancellability is a test or diagnostics for explicatures,[4] because we have seen that explicatures arise in loci of the tension between semantics and pragmatics, where pragmatics becomes a substitute for semantics and provides full truth-conditional meaning. Thus, it would be natural to expect that indeed non-cancellability should be a test or diagnostics for explicature. After all, explicatures are cases where the speaker's

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[4] This cannot be Carston's view since she also believes that implicatures are cancellable.

intentions cannot be different from those that help rescuing a certain discourse configuration from implausibility and where the speaker's intentions render logical something which is or should be 'prima facie' illogical (contradictory or absurd). If intentions proceed along the social path of intentionality (Jaszcolt 1999), then the social intentionality would make them hard to cancel or uncancellable, because cancelling them would amount to proceeding along the path of individual intentionality, as opposed to social intentionality. The social path of intentionality ensures that an inference is not cancellable, because cancelling it would result into something which is not socially acceptable. Contradiction, in general, or absurdity is not socially acceptable, thus the intentions that promote contradictory or absurd readings cannot be tolerated.

9 Sliding from Generalized Implicatures to Explicatures

Burton-Roberts (2013) believes that the reason why Carston (2002) sticks to the idea that explicatures are cancellable is that, after all, she believes that certain conversational implicatures can be analysed as explicatures and, therefore, ends up arguing that generalized implicatures are 'ipso facto' explicatures, presumably because they can be embedded. Consider the following case:

7. If the children eat some of the cake, we will eat the remainder.

Presumably, the conditional makes sense on the understanding that the children will eat part of the cake and NOT all of it; only in this case, in fact, can the adults eat the remainder. There is no remainder if the children eat all of it. I agree that conditional constructions are loci of the tension between semantics and pragmatics, where pragmatic inferences become semanticised and can no longer be cancelled. However, I do not think that scalar implicatures (in general) are 'ipso facto' 'explicatures'. Consider, in fact, the following case:

8. I hope some students will come (to the class).

The professor who hopes that some students will come to the class, may be open to the idea that if all the students come, that is even better. Certainly, he does not hope that some students will not come, even if he may believe that some are not likely to come. A case like the one above is enough to show that in certain contexts, the implicature (potential, in fact) does not get through. It is well known that professors want their classes to be full and it is certainly not appropriate behavior for a teacher to hope that certain students will not come. In this scenario, the generalized implicature does not get through. Thus to say that conversational implicatures can be analysed as explicatures is not correct (alternatively, the claim must be qualified further to avoid generalization), as the relationship between implicature and explicature is a complex one. An explicature requires an implicature, but it also requires a locus of tension between semantics and pragmatics. Conversational implicatures do not require such loci of tension between semantics

and pragmatics. In easier terms, we could say that if there is an explicature, then there is an implicature; but if there is an implicature, there may or may not be an explicature. In other words, the implicature, to be promoted to an explicature, needs to be associated with an intrusive construction in the sense of Levinson (2000). The term 'intrusive' construction has been avoided by Relevance theorists presumably because it may indicate that the contribution of pragmatics to semantics is sporadic and not systematic. Instead, Relevance Theorists believe that semantics is radically underdetermined and that pragmatics is needed to arrive at full truth-conditional meaning. Making use of the term 'intrusive constructions' does not, however, amount to denying that the contribution of pragmatics to semantics is systematic (even if we may accept that it is more sporadic than claimed by Relevance Theorists). Intrusive constructions are pretty systematic and to recognize them (or their types) amounts to accepting that the role played by pragmatics in complementing and integrating semantics is systematic. In fact, work must be done in recognizing all types of possible intrusive constructions. To say, in a rather general manner, that the output of linguistic decoding is totally underdetermined amounts to allocating a role to pragmatics which competes with linguistic decoding; so much so that it does not make sense to start with linguistic decoding at all. Pragmatics could then very well take over. Recognizing that there is a tension between semantics and pragmatics amounts to recognizing the foundational role of semantics, which constitutes the first type of semiotic layer, and then to admitting that in certain cases, where semantics is not sufficient, pragmatics takes over. Furthermore, one also recognizes that semantics, to work, must be embedded in a pragmatic layer that allows it to work, by ensuring that speakers' intentions are serious as opposed to non-serious ones. Pragmatics constructs a certain path in which semantics can work (Higginbotham, p.c.) and the loci of tension between semantics and pragmatics are presumably the pragmatic scaffolding which is needed so that semantics can work properly. But now, if we assume that pragmatics is a sort of scaffolding on which semantics works properly, why should we take this sort of pragmatics to be cancellable? If it is pragmatics that ensures that a certain string of words has to be taken seriously, rather than say ironically or metaphorically, why should we think that pragmatics should be cancellable? The structural role played by pragmatics in doing the scaffolding is not compatible with the idea that pragmatic inference is cancellable, even if we are open, of course, to the idea that some pragmatic inference is cancellable (e.g. potential implicatures in the sense of Gazdar).

10 An Escape Route: Seymour Against Capone (2009)

One might argue against my tack on explicatures something along the lines of Seymour (2010):

Capone (2009) has argued recently that some particularized conversational implicatures were not cancellable, but he reached that conclusion while

considering very specific conversational situations. However, if he is right this only means that conversational implicatures cannot be cancelled from a specific conversational context, and it does not imply that they could not be cancelled from a specific act of saying. So for instance, in the context of writing a letter of recommendation for a candidate to become professor in a university department, it is impossible not to infer a particular negative implicature if I merely write that the candidate has a good handwriting. There seems to be no way of suggesting anything else. So in such a case, it looks as though sentence meaning were determined by pragmemes. But in the context where the same person would be applying for a job involving essentially writing abilities, the very same act of saying could become quite positive. So the fact that an implicature cannot be cancelled from a particular context of utterance does not imply that it is not cancelable. Cancelability should suppose the consideration of different contexts of use. The fact that a particular implicature cannot be cancelled from a particular context of use is compatible with its cancellability within a different context of use. Particularized conversational implicatures may be difficult to avoid in a particular context of utterance, but the very same act of saying involved in them could have been made in quite a different particularized context of utterance, and this is all we need to argue that conversational implicatures are cancelable. (Seymour 2010, 2871).

Notice, for the time being, that Seymour's considerations apply to implicatures (in fact, particularized ones), and not necessarily to explicatures. However, since we believe that, generally speaking, explicatures imply or require pragmatic processing, such considerations are against my general apparatus concerning conversational explicatures. I will later examine an objection by Carston to Burton-Roberts on cancellability of explicatures which is analogous to this one by Seymour. Summing up Seymour's argument, particularized conversational implicatures are 'prima facie' not explicitly cancellable, however since the very act of saying could be proffered in a different context (promoting or eliminating the possibility of such an implicature) they are contextually cancellable (which means that, in a different context, the same implicature would not arise). Presumably Seymour is writing of evaporation of explicatures, as opposed to explicit cancellation (without contradiction of what is said). The example provided by Seymour is that of Grice's reference letter in which a professor praises a candidate's handwriting without saying much about the candidate teaching abilities. That letter is clearly negative, but if the context was one in which the candidate applies for a different job, the letter might very well be positive. This I do not deny, of course. And of course, Seymour's considerations are stimulating and worth replying to. If we take Seymour seriously, it is an act of saying which, in a given context, gives rise to an implicature and the implicature might be different, depending on the context. Does the fact that the implicature might be different depending on the context amount to saying that the implicature (whatever it is) is cancellable? To cancel an implicature, the minimum we require is an act of saying and a context and the speaker's intentions. However, since the same act of saying might give rise to a different implicature in a different context, we cannot say that a different context or the implicature that arises there can cancel (or contradict) the

implicature we wanted to test with respect to cancellability. Cancellability would minimally require the implicature generated by the new context to contradict the implicature generated in the previous one. Consider the case of the handwriting reference letter. The fact that the professor in a different context might be taken to praise the student in support of whom he is writing cannot be said to cancel the negative implicature generated in the context in which the letter was intended to support a candidate for professorships because, in this other (more positive) context, there was no such implicature in the first place. There can be no contradiction between supporting a student for a secretarial job and not supporting her for an academic job. Cancellability requires contradicting a previous assumption—whether an implicature or an explicature. So, the contextual variation which Seymor has in mind does not reach the status of cancellability.

Most importantly, if we were to take Seymour's considerations seriously, we could very well model implicature contextual cancellation after deixis. In deixis too, an act of saying has different meanings in different contexts. Should we say that while we are in one context, the meaning which a deictic expression such as a pronominal (e.g. 'This man') has in another context is cancelled or cancellable? Surely nobody has proposed so far such a view of deixis—and this is compatible with the view that contextual variability is a way of cancelling possible meanings, but not of cancelling actual meanings. Now, if conversational implicatures follow the model of deixis, we could say that, since the implicatures given rise to by an act of saying are infinite, any act of saying in a definite context involves the cancellation of infinite (or a high number of) conversational implicatures.[5] This is the unpalatable consequence of Seymour's embracing of a contextual view of cancellation—and this is the obvious consequence of considering implicature cancellation not as a process relating to certain definite intentions, but as a process relating to possible intentions. If we accept Seymour's view, we would have to accept that cancelling an implicature is a trivial thing, since at the same time we would have to cancel many other possible implicatures related to the same act of saying, except for one implicature which would arise if a definite context were chosen.

Now while conversational implicatures and interpretations of deictic expressions may have a number of things in common, they are different in the way the intentions are fixed and they are also different because deictic expressions are merely related to referents, whereas conversational implicatures serve to convey full-fledged thoughts.

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[5] Huang (2007) considers deixis fixing as a case of pragmatic intrusion. Yet this does not automatically amount to accepting that deixis fixing is determined through conversational implicature. Deixis fixing looks more like a semantic/pragmatic phenomenon determined by conventions of use. If I utter 'Today I am going to give a talk at Oxford university' I am expected by the audience to fix the date of the lecture by the day of the utterance event through a rule of usage. This is not a conversational implicature.

11 Another Escape Route: Carston (2010) against Burton-Roberts (2005)

As I said, similar arguments could be used to argue that explicatures are indeed cancellable. Carston, like Seymour, claims that we must rely not on explicit cancellation but on contextual variability. I will keep my reply short, because my considerations against Seymour are the same I can use against Carston. If we only rely on contextual variation, we are not capable of distinguishing between cases of conversational implicatures and cases of deixis. Yet, these cases, despite similarities, arguably should be kept separate. (But notice that radical pragmaticists may hold that deixis fixing is exactly a pragmatic process). Most importantly, it would be useless to use cancellability as proof that a phenomenon is inferential, because such a phenomenon could be very well assimilated to a deictic inference. That might proceed along different lines, as the intentions might be fixed by a gesture (that is to say semantically), while the intentions in an implicature are never (just) fixed semantically through a demonstration, but normally through reasoning (whether compressed or not).

Consider now Carston's (2010) statement of her ideas on cancellability as put by Burton-Roberts (2013):

TH

An explicature or implicature p of a given utterance in its context C1 is CANCELLABLE if and only if either (1) it can be cancelled explicitly (i.e. by an explicit act of the speaker) in C1 or (2) there is ANY CONCEIVABLE CONTEXT—Ca—in which p would not be explicated/implicated by an utterance of the same expression.

In addition to my own considerations, there are other reasons for believing that TH is dubious. Consider the following examples taken from Burton-Roberts' most illuminating work (Burton-Roberts, 2013):

9. Bill: Have you read any Proust?

   Anne: Yes.

10. Bill: Have you booked a table?

    Anne: Yes.

The implicature of (9)'s 'Yes' is that Anne has at least read some Proust; instead, the implicature of (10)'s 'Yes' is that Anne has booked a table.

Following Carston's considerations, we could claim that the explicature in (9) is cancellable, because, in fact, the same act of saying, in a different context, does not trigger the same explicature. As I said, such a notion of cancellability is not a diagnostics of conversational implicature/explicature, because it can apply very well to deictic terms. Second, what (9) and (10) at most can show is that the same act of saying can carry different implicatures in different contexts and this is not logically related with the notion of cancellability, because it is trivial that if we add

different elements to S, we obtain different utterances. Ideally, we should be able to relate cancellability in the ordinary sense (an inference can be cancelled in a given context) with cancellability in Carston's revised sense (Cc). (I take this suggestion from Burton-Roberts 2013). The attempted unification, however, does not work, because if Cc predicts that the explicature is cancellable in (9), any attempt to cancel the explicature in the context of (9) fails (Consider how we would take a speaker who answers the question in (9) with 'Yes' and then goes on to say 'But I did not mean that I have read some Proust).

The unification instead holds for explicit cancellability and contextual cancellability (in the sense that an explicature is cancelled by some feature of the context). The details are presented in Burton-Roberts (2013).

In addition to the considerations so far, which I take to be quite cogent, I want to ask the radical question whether Cc can work as a diagnostics of conversational implicature in the sense of explaining this notion. While generalized implicatures (potential implicatures) are cancellable in that their putative nature is put to the test by a given context, which may promote or otherwise cancel an implicature, the Cc test cannot apply to them, because in the case of generalized implicatures we do not want to know whether in one context the same act of saying promotes implicature x and in other it promotes implicature y. For potential implicatures, all we want to know is whether a context does promote or otherwise abort the implicature. Presumably Cc applies only to particularized implicatures—but whereas for generalized implicatures the diagnostics was important because it predicted that an implicature could get through or not, in the case of particularized implicatures we do not use context to cancel the implicature but to promote the implicature. Thus, the fact that a different context is able to promote a different implicature comes as no surprise and has no intuitively important theoretical weight.

A final argument against Carston's considerations on Cc (Carston's cancellability) may be the following. Carston accepts that an explicature can be cancelled by embedding the act of saying that generated the implicature in a different context. In such a context, the same act of saying no longer has the same explicature. Suppose this line of thought is entertained. Then one should also accept that, however one changes the context, the explicature is cancelled. But one could, in fact, change the context in such a way that the same act of saying still preserves the explicature. Suppose that one is patient enough to contrive a number of contexts in which the inference is preserved and a number of contexts in which the inference evaporates. Should we then say that the explicature is cancellable or not? Contextual variation, at this point, does not seem to be enough to ensure cancellability—one ought to specify those features of the context that genuinely militate against the explicature. And yet such contexts could be embedded in larger contexts that allow us to preserve the implicature/explicature of the original act of saying. At this point, since any context can be embedded in a larger context, for every context that cancels the explicature we could embed it in a larger context that preserves the explicature. Since the proponents and the opponents of the

theory of cancellability could be equally genial in enlarging the context, nobody could really win the dispute.

One further way to see that there is something faulty in Carston's argument is to translate the argument into the terminology of language games [(Wittgenstein 1953); See Carapezza and Biancini (2013) for an articulation of Wittgenstein's ideas in terms of the recent idea of pragmemes (Mey 2001)]. Language games are linguistic acts which avail themselves of context to reach their ultimate meaning. Suppose this time that cancelling an inference is a language game. To be a language game an act must follow a rule. Let us suppose that the rule required in cancelling an implicature is that the context should display elements that contradict the implicature, which are at odds with it. It makes sense to engage in the language game of cancelling an implicature in the case of generalized implicatures, because these inferences are devised in such a way that if everything goes well, they get through, otherwise they do not. Cancelling an inference is surely costly, but the cost must be offset by a congruous number of contextual effects. The language game of cancelling an implicature of the generalized type involves engaging in an act of communication in which the utterance most of the times hooks into contexts which fit it and were made for it. Cancelling the inference is thus recognizing that the context we are in does not fit the act of saying.

When particularized implicatures are concerned, instead one could play a different language game, that is one could try to change the context of the utterance and see how the same act of saying acquires a different shade of meaning (implicature). Since the contexts are potentially infinite, have we got any reason for saying that this, rather than that implicature is cancelled, when another context is encountered? What kind of language game would this be, if, after all, we have no more reason to say that this inference, rather than that inference, is cancelled? When we are dealing with generalized implicatures we know which inference is cancelled and when. But with particularized implicatures, it makes no sense to say: this inference is cancelled because in that other context another meaning accrues to another utterance of the same sentence. We could very well say the same thing of the implicature which arises in that other context. So, which implicature is cancelled? All and none, one could very well answer. And one now finally notices that this language game is impossible, because I do not know where to start and where to end the language game. Furthermore, I do not know what the purpose of the language game is. With generalized implicatures, the language game was to tell when an implicature arises and when it does not. Here we cannot say when an implicature arises and when it does not, since in different contexts different implicatures would arise. What benefits do we have in cancelling the implicature? None. There are no benefits to anyone. In fact, since the things being compared are different, it is impossible to say that one implicature cancels the potential which the sentence in another context would have of generating a certain implicature. In fact, the embedding of a sentence in a context does not at all interfere with the way the same sentence would behave in another context and with the implicature it would trigger. The language game we are embarking on is neither definitional, since we have already said that in this way we cannot distinguish implicature from

deixis, nor constructional, as we are not constructing anything at all. The language game, furthermore, is not even eliminative, since by saying that an act of saying has a certain implicature in a certain context, I am not eliminating completely the possibility that the same act of saying carry the same implicature in a different context, since we are always capable of embedding a context in a different one.

What emerges clearly is that, even if we were to accept Carston's considerations on cancellability, we would have to have two language games, one for generalized implicatures and one for particularized implicatures (I am sure Carston would want to insist that the language game for cancelling generalized implicatures can be partly utilized in the case of particularized implicatures). Now, supposing that we have two different language games, we still would not know how to unify them. Like Burton-Roberts, I believe that unification is impossible.

12 Conclusion

It appears to me that only theoretical, rather than empirically-oriented considerations, can guide or orient our philosophical investigations on the pragmatics of language and on the usefulness of the notion of cancellability (of implicatures/ explicatures). Should we find out that cancellability is of considerable use, we should try to explain why. I doubt that cancellability is of use in determining whether an inference is an implicature—because we intuitively know that when an inference is not driven by semantics it is an implicature. Instead, it is of use in the case of generalized implicature (potential implicatures) because it defines the kind of role which context can play in shaping meaning—namely a negative role. Since in the case of particularized implicatures, context does not have a negative role to play—as the inference is not potential, but must be singled out by the interplay of sentential meaning and context—it can only have a positive role to play. Hence we expect that cancellability has no utility for particularized implicatures.

For explicatures, lack of cancellability, rather than cancellability, seems to be a crucial diagnostics of it, contrary to what is assumed in the literature.

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