

THE EXPLICIT/IMPLICIT DISTINCTION IN PRAGMATICS AND THE LIMITS OF EXPLICIT COMMUNICATION^{*}

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Abstract:

This paper has two main parts. The first is a critical survey of ways in which the explicit/implicit distinction has been and is currently construed in linguistic pragmatics, which reaches the conclusion that the distinction is not to be equated with a semantics/pragmatics distinction but rather concerns a division within communicated contents (or speaker meaning). The second part homes in on one particular way of drawing such a pragmatically-based distinction, the explicature/implicature distinction in Relevance Theory. According to this account, processes of pragmatic enrichment play a major role in the recovery of explicit content and only some of these processes are linguistically triggered, others being entirely pragmatically motivated. I conclude with a brief consideration of the language-communication relation and the limits on explicitness.

Key words:

what is said, explicit communication, implicit communication, Relevance Theory, free enrichment, semantics, pragmatics,

1. Introduction: Aspects of utterance meaning

It is widely accepted that there is a distinction to be made between the explicit content and the implicit import of a verbal utterance. There is much less agreement about the precise nature of this distinction, how it is to be drawn, and whether any two-way distinction is sufficient to

^{*} I am grateful to Alison Hall, Vladimir Žegarac, and two anonymous referees for helpful comments on the contents of this paper, and especially to Catherine Wearing for a close reading of the text and insightful suggestions. Many thanks to Piotr Cap and Iwona Witczak-Plisiecka for inviting me to speak at the Fourth Łódź Conference on 'New Developments in Linguistic Pragmatics' (May, 2008), for their warmth and hospitality throughout the conference, and for their editorial support and patience while this paper was in preparation. Funding from the CSMN (Oslo) provided welcome support during the writing of the paper.

capture the levels and kinds of meaning involved in utterance interpretation. In order to approach these issues, let us consider the following conversational exchange:

1. Max: How was the party? Did it go well?

Amy: There wasn't enough drink and everyone left early.

Focusing on Amy's utterance in response to Max's question, it seems fairly clear that she is communicating that the party was not a great success. This is not something she says explicitly; rather, it is an indirect or implied answer to the question – a 'conversational implicature', as such implicitly communicated propositions are known. The hearer derives this implicated meaning by inferring it from the proposition which is more directly and more explicitly communicated by Amy together with his readily available beliefs concerning the characteristics of successful versus unsuccessful parties.

The question now is: what is the explicit content of Amy's utterance? One possibility is that it is simply the linguistically encoded meaning of the sentence that she uttered, so it is a conjunction of the context-free meaning of the two simple sentence types: (a) 'there wasn't enough drink', and (b) 'everyone left early'. Certainly, that meaning is as explicit as any meaning can be, but what does it amount to exactly? Consider, for instance, the noun 'drink', which includes in its extension camomile tea, tap water, and medicines in liquid form, to mention but a few of the many drinks which are unlikely to be relevant in the context of Amy's utterance. A similar sort of point applies to the linguistically encoded meaning of the bare quantifier 'everyone', whose extension includes vast numbers of people whom Amy has no intention of denoting. In the context of the dialogue above, it is clear that she intends to convey that everyone who came to the particular party that Max asked her about left that party early. So, although the linguistic expression employed by Amy, the words she actually uttered, have a meaning and that meaning is, arguably, the most explicit meaning that her utterance provides, it seems to be somewhat remote from the proposition Max is likely to take her to have directly communicated (to have said, stated, or asserted). That seems to be more like the content in (2) (where the italicized elements all go beyond the encoded meaning of the linguistic expressions uttered):

2. There wasn't enough *alcoholic drink to satisfy the people at [the party]_i* and so everyone *who came to [the party]_i* left *[it]_i* early.

This is the proposition on the basis of which Amy's utterance would be judged as true or false, would be agreed or disagreed with ('Yes, there was so little alcohol that we all had to go off to the pub', or 'No, not everyone left the party early and those who did had an exam the next morning'). Notice also that it is this proposition (and not the very general encoded linguistic meaning) which plays the crucial role of premise in the reasoning process which leads to the implicated conclusion that the party didn't go well.

So we have two candidates for the explicit content of Amy's utterance: (a) the encoded linguistic meaning, which *is* fully explicit but which doesn't seem (on its own) to constitute a communicated proposition (part of the speaker's meaning¹), and (b) the richer content given in (2), which *is* communicated (part of the speaker's meaning) but which does not seem to be fully explicit, in that it includes elements of meaning that have no linguistic correlate in the utterance but arise from considerations of contextual relevance. Ultimately, I will argue in favour of the latter construal of explicit content and so for an explicit/implicit distinction which is a distinction between two kinds of communicated (speaker-meant) propositions. Both are pragmatically derived by hearers, but with the difference that the 'explicit' one is a pragmatically inferred development of the linguistically encoded content while the implicit one(s) are wholly pragmatically inferred. However, there are other views to consider first, in particular Paul Grice's saying/implicating distinction, which is not identical with either of the two positions so far discussed. And there is another distinction which is closely entwined with the explicit/implicit distinction, that is, the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. Any clarification of the former requires some consideration of its relation to the latter.

2. Grice and the saying/implicating distinction

Grice made a distinction between *what is said* by a speaker and *what is implicated*, where what is said is taken to be the truth-conditional content of the utterance (the basis for judging the speaker as having spoken truly or falsely) and the implicature(s) of an utterance are

¹ This is 'speaker meaning' (or meaning-*nn*) in the sense of Grice (1957), where 'S meant something by her utterance *x*' is roughly equivalent to 'S uttered *x* with the intention of inducing a belief in an addressee by means of his recognition of this intention'. This characterization was refined and reformulated in later papers (see Grice 1989). Speaker meaning is a somewhat narrower notion than meaning or content falling under a speaker's communicative intention in some other pragmatic theories, such as Relevance Theory (see discussion in Sperber & Wilson 1986/95: chapter 2, and Wharton 2003). However, for the purposes of this paper, this difference can be ignored.

additional communicated propositions which do not contribute to truth conditions.²

Implicated propositions may be either *conversational* (that is, dependent on the presumption that the speaker is following certain rational principles of conversational exchange) or *conventional* (that is, largely generated by the standing meaning of certain linguistic expressions, such as ‘but’ and ‘moreover’).

This truth-conditional/non-truth-conditional distinction was essential to Grice in his concern to defeat the ‘illegitimate use’ arguments of a certain group of ‘ordinary language’ philosophers (Grice 1967, lecture 1). Those arguments won’t be reviewed in detail here, but the utility of the distinction can be demonstrated by considering an utterance of the sentence in (3), where ‘this’ refers to a patently red London double-decker bus directly in front of the speaker and hearer:

3. This looks red to me.

This utterance would be quite odd in a situation where lighting conditions are good and there is nothing impeding normal visual perception. However, contrary to the claims of some philosophers, Grice’s point was that this oddness need not militate against the use of such statements in a theory or analysis (in this case, a theory of perception), because the statement made (the proposition expressed/said) by the utterance is perfectly true and that is all that matters for the theory or analysis. The oddness or infelicity lies outside the truth-conditional content of the utterance; it is due (merely) to the conversational implicature that such an utterance would be likely to convey: that there is some doubt about the redness of the bus, an implication which, in the given circumstances, is false. A similar story can be run for a case of conventional implicature which gives rise to some conversational infelicity:

4. This looks red to me but it is red.

² One of the referees has pointed out that it is hard to find any passage in Grice’s writing where he explicitly identifies ‘what is said’ with truth-conditional content. That is true, but it is noticeable throughout his discussions of cases of what he argues to be conversational implicature (e.g. in Grice 1967 lecture 1 ‘Prolegomena’, reprinted in Grice 1989: 3-21) or to be conventional implicature that, in distinguishing these components of speaker meaning from what is said, he makes repeated appeals to those aspects of the meaning of an utterance which render it true or false. For instance, in his argument that the conventional meaning of ‘therefore’ is not part of what is said but is implicated, he says ‘I do not want to say that my utterance of this sentence [“He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave”] would be, *strictly speaking*, false should the consequence in question fail to hold. So *some* implicatures are conventional ...’ (Grice 1975: 45). That is, throughout discussions of the saying/implicating distinction, Grice seems to be distinguishing the truth-conditional content *of an utterance* from its implicatures. It is very difficult to interpret these passages without taking it that he is equating what is said with the truth-conditional content of the utterance. See Neale (1992: 521), who also reads Grice in this way.

The use of ‘but’ carries a conventional implicature that there is some sort of contrast between the contents of the two assertions it conjoins, which, in the case of (4), is likely to be false in many contexts. However, according to Grice, this does not impinge on the truth-conditional content of the utterance (the statement explicitly made), which is equivalent to ‘X looks red and X is red’, a proposition that could well be true in those contexts. The general situation is summarized as follows:

5.	what is said	vs.	what is implicated
	truth-conditional		non-truth-conditional
	<i>if false, utterance is false</i>		<i>if false, utterance is merely odd</i>

According to the standard interpretation of the Gricean account, what is said (the truth-conditional content of the utterance) is very closely related to the conventional meaning of the sentence employed (excluding those expressions that give rise to conventional implicatures). It is not, however, identical to encoded or conventional linguistic content since the linguistic forms uttered may include ambiguous or indexical elements; Grice explicitly conceded that disambiguation and reference assignment might be required for a full identification of what the speaker has said (see his discussion of an utterance of ‘he is in the grip of a vice’ (Grice 1975: 44-45)). So, viewed as a candidate for the explicit/implicit distinction, Grice’s saying/implicating distinction is different from both of those discussed in the previous section; in particular, his conception of explicit content seems to fall between context-free encoded linguistic meaning and the considerably pragmatically-enriched content illustrated in (2). Many truth-conditional semanticists have found this an appealing notion of content since it appears to allow for an equation of what is said by uttering a sentence (explicit content) with the truth-conditional semantics of a sentence (albeit relativised to a context). The domain of pragmatics is then taken to concern how conversational implicatures arise, based on Grice’s system of conversational maxims (quality, quantity, relevance and manner) and his overarching Cooperative Principle. On this view, then, the two distinctions, explicit/implicit (saying/implicating) and semantics/pragmatics effectively coincide (see section 3.1 below).

However, when we look at particular examples of utterances, there seems to be a serious problem with the view that explicit utterance content is captured by the Gricean ‘what is said’:

6. *Mother (to child crying over a cut on his knee):*

You're not going to die. (example due to Bach 1994)

- a. You (Billy) are not going to die from that cut.
- b. You (Billy) should stop making such a fuss about it.

What the mother means (what she intends to communicate to the child) is given in (a) and (b), where (b) is clearly an implicature and (a) seems to be what she explicitly communicates. But the proposition delivered by conventional linguistic meaning and the assignment of a referent to the pronoun 'you' (hence the Gricean 'what is said') is 'Billy is not going to die', which seems to entail that Billy is immortal, something that the mother has no intention of conveying. Here's another example that makes the same point:

7. Jim: Would you like some supper?
Sue: I've eaten.

What Sue has said here, according to the strict Gricean construal, is 'Sue has eaten something at some past time', but surely what she intends to express and what Jim will take her to have expressed is that she has eaten *a meal this evening*. It is this proposition that is needed as input to the pragmatic inferential process that delivers the implicated answer to Jim's question, namely that Sue is declining his offer of supper. The earlier discussion of 'drink' and 'everyone' in Amy's utterance in example (1) points in the same direction; that is, it looks as if there is quite a bit more to the recovery of what a speaker has said or asserted than just reference fixing and choice of the intended sense of an ambiguous form.

Grice wanted 'what is said' to have the followed two properties: (a) to be an aspect of what the speaker meant (her 'm-intended' content), that is, like implicatures, it was to fall under what the speaker overtly intends her addressee to take from her utterance; (b) to be 'closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) uttered', modulo disambiguation and reference assignment (Grice 1975: 44). What the examples indicate is that, for many utterances, it's just not possible to have it both ways. In other words, it is not generally the case that a single level of meaning can do double duty as both the semantics of natural language sentences and the explicitly communicated content. Broadly speaking, and setting aside many differences of detail, there have been three kinds of response to this situation among post-Griceans. The first two involve dropping one or other of his favoured properties of 'what is said', while the third approach maintains the two properties but assigns them to different constructs in the overall account. These are discussed in the next section.

3. Post-Gricean positions

3.1 Minimalist ‘what is said’ plus implicatures

On what we can call the minimalist (or literalist or semantic) view, the first of Grice’s requirements on ‘what is said’ is dropped, so that ‘what is said’ need not be speaker-meant but, rather, may be used as an instrument for the communication of something else. It is this possibility that certain truth-conditional semanticists call on when they invoke a ‘pragmatic’ (= implicature-based) account for cases like the following:

8. a. Everyone screamed.
- b. The door is locked.
- c. There is milk in the fridge.
- d. I’ve had breakfast.

The idea is that what is said by an utterance of (8a) is that everyone (in existence) screamed, but what is meant, hence implicated, on any given occasion of use will almost always be something more specific (e.g. everyone watching such and such a horror movie screamed). Similarly, for (8b), what is said is that there is one and only one door (in the universe) and it is locked, but what is meant, hence implicated, concerns the lockedness of some specific door in the context. In both cases, what is said directly reflects the (alleged) semantics of the construction and is so patently false that it cannot be part of what is meant. In both (8c) and (8d), a very weak general proposition is what is said: for (8c), that there is some presence of milk in the fridge (perhaps just a stale drip or two on a shelf); for (8d), that the speaker’s life is not entirely breakfastless. Of course, something much more specific is understood in context (for instance, that there is milk usable for coffee in the fridge; that the speaker has had breakfast on the day of utterance) and, arguably, it is only these latter that are speaker-meant and so, on this kind of account, these are implicatures (for advocates of this approach, see Kripke 1977, Berg 2002).

An upshot of this view is that many utterances, including those in (8), do not communicate any proposition explicitly; that is, the speaker has not made any kind of statement or direct assertion since the proposition(s) that she intends to communicate are all merely implicated. This flies in the face of very strong intuitions that, in each instance, the speaker has directly and explicitly communicated the proposition at issue and committed

herself to its truth. For instance, in the case of (8d) the speaker may have communicated both (i) that she has had breakfast within the last few hours, and (ii) that she is (therefore) not hungry. There seems to be a clear difference in the status of these two propositions: (i) is built directly out of the encoded linguistic meaning while (ii) is not, and (i) is the basis on which the speaker would be judged to have told the truth or not, and it provides the essential premise for inferring the further (implicated) proposition (ii). It seems that by treating these as on a par, as both implicatures, not only do we ignore intuitions about directly asserted content, we also lose a distinction that does clear work within an account of communication.

3.2 Pragmatically enriched ‘what is said’ plus implicatures

The second response to the dilemma presented by Grice’s notion of ‘what is said’ is to retain the first requirement (that it is speaker-meant) while dropping the second one. On this view, it is acknowledged that the gap between encoded (conventional) linguistic meaning and explicit utterance content is much wider than Grice allowed and cannot be plugged simply by assigning referents to indexicals and selecting among the several senses of an ambiguous linguistic form. The claim that there is such a gap, requiring quite extensive processes of pragmatic enrichment, is sometimes known as the linguistic underdeterminacy thesis (Atlas 1989, 2005; Carston 1988, 2002) and the theorists who hold to it in some form or other are known as ‘contextualists’ (Bezuidenhout 1997, 2002; Elugardo & Stainton 2004; Recanati 1993, 2001, 2004; Soames forthcoming; Stainton 1994, 2005, 2006; Travis 1981, 1985) or as ‘pragmatists’ (Carston 1988, 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Neale 2000, 2005; Powell 2001, 2002; Sperber & Wilson 1986/95; Wilson & Sperber 2002, 2004).³ On this view, the truth-conditional content of an utterance is taken to mesh with ordinary speaker-hearer intuitions about what a speaker has said or asserted, so in the case of appropriately contextualised utterances of the sentences in (8), what the speaker meant and said (as opposed to merely implicated) could be as roughly shown in (9), albeit with a more fully determinate content replacing the instances of ‘such and such’ and the remaining indexicals:

³ Distinguishing ‘contextualists’ from ‘pragmatists’ is a somewhat subtle move and some might feel it does not need to be made. Certainly, the two groups have a great deal more in common than not and they stand together in opposition to ‘literalists’ or ‘minimalists’ with regard to explicit utterance content. The main difference between them (as I see it, at least) is reflected in their labels: while ‘pragmatists’ take it that the processes responsible for delivering primary speaker meaning (explicit content) are fully pragmatic (that is, they involve principles/maxims geared to the recovery of speaker intentions), ‘contextualists’ tend to see these processes as constrained by a criterion of contextual best fit, which does not involve the kinds of pragmatic maxims and inferential processes typical of conversational implicatures. Furthermore, talk of ‘contextualist *semantics*’ tends to lead to this position being presented as in opposition to ‘minimalist semantics’ (see discussion in footnote 6), while pragmatists acknowledge a (generally non-propositional) minimal semantics as well as a pragmatically enriched level of explicit utterance content. For some preliminary discussion, see Carston (forthcoming).

9.
 - a. Everyone who was watching such and such a horror movie at such and such a time screamed.
 - b. The door we are standing in front of is locked.
 - c. There is no milk suitable for using in coffee in the fridge.
 - d. I've had breakfast this morning.

An important distinguishing characteristic of the contextualist-pragmatist approach is its claim that some of the processes of pragmatic enrichment involved in recovering the speaker's explicit meaning are 'free', that is, they are not triggered by an element of linguistic form, such as an indexical, but are entirely pragmatically motivated (for instance, by considerations of contextual relevance). One particular manifestation of this kind of approach, as developed within the framework of Relevance Theory, will be elaborated in more detail in section 4.

3.3 Semantic 'what is said' plus two levels of communicated content

There is a third response to the Gricean dilemma, which encompasses both of the preceding approaches by advocating a minimalist semantic notion of 'what is said' while also recognizing a level of pragmatically enriched content which is communicated (speaker-meant) but is distinct from, and logically prior, to implicature (Bach 1994, 1997, 2001). Bach maintains a notion of what is said which is very close to encoded meaning but includes the assigning of referents to pure indexicals such as 'I', 'you' and 'today', which allegedly do not require any consideration of speaker intentions (hence are not a matter of pragmatics). He explicitly drops the requirement that what is said should be speaker-meant; rather, it is a semantic notion which captures 'the linguistically determined input to the hearer's inference to what ... the speaker intends to be conveyed in uttering the sentence' (Bach 2001: 15). One upshot of this is that, for Bach, in the vast majority of cases, nothing is explicitly communicated. In his view, there are two distinct kinds of communicated proposition, but both are implicit: there are standard Gricean implicatures and there are what he calls 'implicatures' which are communicated propositions that are 'implicit in what is said' (Bach 1994). Here is an illustration of this three-way distinction applied to the example in (6) above:

10. You're not going to die.

What is said: Billy is not going to die.

Implicature: Billy is not going to die from the cut on his knee.

Implicature: Billy should stop making such a fuss about the cut.

Here ‘what is said’ differs from the encoded linguistic meaning only in that a referent for ‘you’ has been determined; this level of content is not a component of speaker meaning (what is communicated). There are various problems with this semantically-oriented notion of ‘what is said’. First, demonstrative indexicals like ‘she’ and ‘that’ are not assigned a specific referent at this level since that would involve a fully pragmatic process; rather the semantics of ‘she’ is manifest in ‘what is said’ as something like A CERTAIN FEMALE and ‘that’ as A CERTAIN DISTAL ENTITY. So this notion of ‘what is said’ is a mix of encoded constraints (for demonstratives) and contextually-provided content (for pure indexicals) and it is often subpropositional (for instance, in the case of utterances of sentences such as ‘John is ready’ or ‘I’ve had enough’). Second and more important, there doesn’t seem to be any role for this conception of ‘what is said’ that cannot equally well be played by the linguistically encoded expression-type meaning of the sentence, e.g. the logical form of ‘You’re not going to die’, which is the input to any context-dependent pragmatic processes required to recover the intended utterance meaning. If this is right, the move to this semantic, not-speaker-meant construal renders the notion of ‘what is said’ redundant. For further discussion, see Carston (2002, 2008b). Dispensing with this notion of ‘what is said’ leaves us with a position which, terminological differences aside, is very similar to that discussed in the previous subsection: among the propositions communicated (speaker-meant) there are two kinds, implicature and implicature, both of which are pragmatically derived, differing in that the first, implicature, is a result of processes of pragmatic enrichment applied to linguistically supplied content (‘completion’ and ‘expansion’ processes, as Bach 1994 calls them), while implicatures are derived wholly inferentially.⁴

⁴ Those familiar with the ‘covert indexicalist’ account of Jason Stanley and others (King and Stanley 2005; Stanley 2000, 2002; Stanley and Szabo 2000) may be wondering where it fits into the picture. These theorists can be viewed as having a distinct response to the Gricean dilemma, which is to maintain both of his requirements on ‘what is said’ (it is speaker-meant and closely related to encoded linguistic meaning) while advocating a richer notion of linguistic structure (hence of linguistic meaning) than any of the three positions so far outlined. So what is said (the truth-conditional content of an utterance) is equated with the non-minimalist content that answers to native speakers’ intuitions but its pragmatic input is confined to the saturation of linguistically provided variables. To make this sort of account run, it is necessary to postulate a great many covert (aphonic) indexical elements in the linguistic logical form. Stanley and colleagues mount various arguments in support of this strategy and against the existence of unarticulated constituents of content provided by processes of free pragmatic enrichment. Indexicalism crosscuts the minimalism/contextualism debate: semantic minimalists (e.g. Cappelen and Lepore 2005) tend to see it as a manifestation of contextualism (of a

3.4 Semantic content plus pragmatic ‘what is said’ and implicatures

There is a current semantic position which should also be mentioned in this survey of the post-Gricean landscape, but which doesn’t fit quite neatly into any of the three stances just discussed. It is characterised by the context-insensitivity and propositional minimality of the linguistic semantics proposed, which is coupled with recognition of a distinction between two kinds of communicated propositions (a richly pragmatic notion of ‘what is said’ and, of course, conversational implicatures). Prominent proponents of this approach are Borg (2004) and Cappelen and Lepore (2005). Of the two, Borg’s approach is the more resolutely context-free (Cappelen and Lepore allow for pragmatic reference fixing of all overt indexicals) and I will confine my discussion here to her account. Although rather similar to Bach’s framework outlined above, Borg’s differs in that her semantics is fully propositional and she takes it to be the output of an encapsulated language module, so the redundancy complaint I made above with regard to Bach’s semantic ‘what is said’ does not arise for her account. Thus, whereas the semantic content of an utterance of ‘He is ready’ would be subpropositional for Bach (a ‘propositional radical’, as he puts it) and would include a general descriptive constraint as the semantics of the indexical, for Borg it would look something like the following:

11. THERE IS SOME X SUCH THAT α IS READY FOR X

Here α is a linguistically provided singular concept (triggered by the indexical token ‘he’) and the adjective ‘ready’ comes with a hidden argument (here existentially bound) as part of its lexical semantics. This semantic content is fully propositional, hence truth-evaluable and, doubtless, its truth value is true (since one is virtually always ready for something or other).⁵

Borg makes it emphatically clear that this semantic content is seldom among the propositions that comprise speaker meaning (communicated content) and that it is, thus, quite distinct from what is said or stated by a speaker. She endorses the view that ‘what is said’ is as much a pragmatic notion as conversational implicature and that it is, therefore, to be kept clearly distinct from the concerns of a semantic theory (Borg 2004: 110-131). In the case of

moderate variety) and contextualists tend to see it as a kind of literalism (see Recanati 2004: chapter 6).

⁵ For more detail of Borg’s approach, in particular her advocacy of linguistically generated hidden arguments and some other subtle differences between her and Cappelen and Lepore (2005), see Borg (2007). For a discussion of Borg’s semantic framework, focusing in particular on her informationally encapsulated treatment of the semantics of demonstratives, see Carston (2008a).

an utterance whose semantic content is as in (11), what the hearer ultimately recovers as speaker said-and-meant will require, at a minimum, identification of the specific referent of 'he' and a specific content (or value) for the hidden argument of 'ready' (e.g. TO START AN INTERVIEW). Cappelen and Lepore (2005) also take this stance on semantic content and 'what is said': 'For those engaged in "semantics vs. pragmatics" talk, sayings and implicatures are both on the pragmatic side of the divide' (p.204).

So Borg's account appears to share much with the contextualist/pragmatist position outlined in section 3.2. Both espouse a linguistic semantics which is autonomous, syntactically-driven and formally tractable (whether propositional or not) and this is distinguished from the domain of pragmatics (speaker-meaning). Within the latter, there is a distinction between two kinds of communicated propositions, one of which (what is said or stated) bears a closer relation to the semantic content than the other (what is implicated), which is wholly pragmatically inferred.⁶ At this point the question of a distinction between explicit and implicit content becomes to some extent a matter of labelling preferences. We could talk of the minimal semantically-given proposition as the explicit content of the utterance, although it (usually) isn't communicated, and of the communicated propositions collectively as implicit content. There are two reasons for finding this unappealing (though they are far from knock-down arguments): it doesn't mesh with ordinary speaker-hearer intuitions about what a speaker communicated explicitly as opposed to what she merely implied, and it would amount to nothing more than a relabelling of the semantics/pragmatics distinction. So, from now on, I shall take it that we are dealing with two distinctions: the semantics/pragmatics distinction (where sentence semantics, whether propositional or not, is autonomous from pragmatics) and the distinction between two kinds of communicated (or pragmatic) content, variously characterised as 'direct versus indirect', 'primary versus secondary', 'said versus implicated', or 'explicit versus implicit'. Thus, in what follows, the

⁶ Like Cappelen and Lepore (2005) and other minimalist semanticists, Borg sees herself as being in a head-on dispute with contextualist semanticists: minimalists hold that natural language sentence tokens have a truth-conditional semantics while contextualists deny this and maintain that it is utterances or speech acts, i.e. pragmatically enriched entities, that are the bearers of truth conditions. The starting assumption here is that a semantic theory must be about truth-conditional content. If we drop that assumption, it turns out that the minimalists (Borg, Cappelen and Lepore, and others) and the contextualists-pragmatists (Recanati, Sperber and Wilson, and others) have more in common than not: both favour a minimal (context-insensitive) linguistic semantics and a pragmatic distinction between two kinds of speaker meaning. (For discussion of this point, see Wedgwood 2007 and Carston 2008a, 2008b). From this perspective, the only real remaining sticking point concerns whether the pragmatics-free meaning of natural language sentence tokens is propositional or not, and, if it is not, there arises the question of just what it consists in (propositional radicals, templates or schemas for constructing full-fledged propositional forms, sets of constraints or procedures, or something else).

explicit/implicit distinction at issue is taken to concern this latter distinction within pragmatics.⁷

4. The explicit/implicit distinction in Relevance Theory

4.1 Explicature and processes of pragmatic enrichment

A well-established pragmatic account of utterance interpretation which embraces the contextualist-pragmatist stance on the explicit/implicit distinction is that developed within the cognitive framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986/95; Wilson & Sperber 2002, 2004). This account recognizes a level of explicit speaker meaning, labelled ‘explicature’ within the theory, which is defined as follows: ‘A proposition communicated by an utterance *U* is *explicit* if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by *U*’ (Sperber & Wilson 1986/95: 182). Any other communicated proposition is an implicature. Looking again at Amy’s utterance in (1) above, repeated here in (12), the linguistically encoded meaning (or logical form) is a schema or template for pragmatically ‘developing’ the much richer content which constitutes the proposition she has directly asserted (explicitly communicated), indicated here in (13):

12. Max: How was the party? Did it go well?

Amy: There wasn’t enough drink and everyone left early.

13. There wasn’t enough *alcoholic drink to satisfy the people at [the party]_i* and so everyone *who came to [the party]_i* left *[the party]_i* early.

⁷ Another kind of (apparently) minimalist stance, one which is currently generating intense debate, is that of semantic relativism. While it is difficult to give a characterization that accurately captures the range of positions discussed under this general rubric, the central idea is that, in a range of cases, what would be a component of content on a contextualist account is better treated as lying outside that content (as a parameter of the circumstance of evaluation or a feature of the context of assessment). For instance, for utterances about values/tastes (e.g. ‘This risotto is delicious’) and utterances that attribute knowledge (e.g. ‘Mary knows her car is in the garage’), the proposition expressed is constant across contexts (specifically with regard to the meaning of ‘delicious’ and ‘know’) but its truth value varies with (is relative to) a standard (of taste, of knowledge). I do not discuss this approach here (despite a referee’s criticism for the omission) as I am unclear how (or even whether) it bears on the explicit/implicit distinction viewed as a distinction among communicated (speaker-meant) contents. I assume, however, that the information a hearer recovers must, in some fashion, include the relevant standard of taste/knowledge and that this is not a matter of implicature, in which case, from the point of view of utterance comprehension, there may be little difference between the relativist (at least the moderate relativist) and the contextualist positions. For a helpful overview of what motivates the relativist stance, see Kölbel (2008), and for a representative sample of the range of positions (moderate and radical) within the general stance and of the current state of the debate, see García-Carpintero and Kölbel (2008).

Explicatures differ in their degree of explicitness depending on how much pragmatic inference is required in their recovery, but, in every instance, decoded linguistic content provides a crucial foundation and frame for the building of the asserted content.^{8,9} On this view, the explicit/implicit distinction is quite distinct from the semantics/pragmatics distinction. In fact, the two distinctions cross-cut each other: not only do pragmatic processes contribute to explicit utterance content (explicature), but also, it is claimed, the encoded meaning of certain words, such as ‘but’, ‘moreover’ and ‘anyway’ (cases of Gricean conventional implicature), does not contribute to explicit content but rather functions as a constraint on the inferential processes to be performed by the hearer in deriving implicatures (see Blakemore 1987, 2000, 2002).

It’s worth noting that this particular manifestation of contextualism-pragmatism comes with certain psychological commitments, arising from its close interface with work in generative linguistics, on the one hand, and evolutionary psychology, on the other. Sperber and Wilson (2002) take a modular view of human cognitive architecture, so that understanding verbal utterances involves two distinct modules: the linguistic decoder whose output is linguistic expression type meaning (a logical form or ‘semantic’ representation, unaffected by extra-linguistic context, and usually less than fully propositional) and a pragmatics module which is triggered into operation by verbal utterances and other overtly communicative acts. In the case of utterances, the pragmatics module takes as input the linguistic logical form and, in accordance with its own internal principles and operating procedures, it computes the speaker’s meaning, that is, explicature(s) and implicature(s). More philosophically-oriented contextualist views are agnostic about the cognitive architecture involved or the nature of the psychological computations performed. Given a long tradition of thinking of semantics in truth-conditional terms, they are also less inclined to

⁸ In practice, the content of an explicature is usually very similar to what Bach has called ‘implicature’, but, arguably, the term ‘explicature’ better reflects language users’ intuitions that speakers communicate explicitly as well as implicitly. For a discussion of some of the deeper theoretical difference between the two concepts, see Bach (forthcoming) and Carston (forthcoming).

⁹ Relevance Theory also proposes a class of ‘higher-level’ explicatures, which are communicated propositions whose pragmatic development includes embedding under a higher-level description, such as a speech-act or propositional attitude predicate. For instance, in the case of Amy’s utterance above, a likely higher-level explicature is: ‘Amy believes that there wasn’t enough alcohol at the party and therefore everyone left early’. The status of these higher-order propositions is contentious (some theorists take them to be cases of conversational implicature or to not be communicated at all). They raise various interesting issues but, since these are tangential to my concerns in this paper, I confine my attention here to basic explicatures. For discussion of higher-level explicatures, see Wilson and Sperber (1993), Ifantidou (2001) and Carston (forthcoming).

use the term ‘semantics’ for the rather meagre, often subpropositional, meaning encoded by linguistic expression types. For instance, when Travis (1985), Recanati (2004) and others talk of ‘contextualist semantics’ they mean the highly context-dependent truth-conditional content that a speaker directly asserts or states, hence what is known as explicature in relevance theory. (For discussion of different construals of ‘semantics’, hence of different ways of drawing the semantics/pragmatics distinction, see Bach 1997; Carston 1999, 2008b; King and Stanley 2005.)

There are two kinds of pragmatic process that relevance-theorists (and contextualists-pragmatists more generally) take to contribute to explicatures. The first of these, often known as ‘saturation’, involves finding the intended content (or value) for a linguistically indicated variable or slot. For instance, the occurrence of the pronoun ‘she’ in a particular syntactic position in an utterance overtly indicates that a specific female individual is to be identified and represented in the corresponding position in the developing propositional understanding. Saturation is generally thought to be a much more widely manifest process than simply finding values for overt indexicals. Arguably, it is involved in those pragmatic developments of the decoded representations of the following utterances which provide answers to the bracketed questions:

14. a. Paracetamol is better. *[than what?]*
- b. It’s the same. *[as what?]*
- c. He is too young. *[for what?]*
- d. It’s hot enough. *[to what?]*
- e. I like Sally’s portrait. *[portrait in what relation to Sally?]*

This ‘completion’ process is obligatory on every communicative use of these sentences, since without it there is no fully propositional form, nothing that can be understood as the explicit content of the utterance. So, although there is no overt pronounced constituent in these sentences indicating the need for contextual instantiation, the claim is that there is a slot in their logical form, a kind of covert indexical, which marks the saturation requirement. The lexical items ‘better’, ‘same’, ‘too’ and ‘enough’ carry these imperceptible elements with them as part of their linguistic structure.

The second, and much more controversial, process is known as free enrichment, ‘free’ because it involves pragmatic enrichment of the decoded linguistic meaning in the absence of any indication (overt or covert) within the linguistic form that this is necessary. Consider

the linguistic form used, so are known as ‘unarticulated constituents’ (see Recanati 2002, 2004), and (b) cases where the pragmatic process does not supply a whole new constituent of content but adjusts or modulates an existing element of linguistic meaning. The latter have recently become a major focus of investigation, under the label ‘lexical pragmatics’ (see Blutner 1998; Carston 1997, 2002; Recanati 1995, 2004; Sperber & Wilson 1998; Wilson & Carston 2006, 2007). Consider utterances of the following, focusing on the meaning communicated by the italicized word:

16. a. Boris is a *man*.
- b. Buying a house is easy if you’ve got *money*.
- c. Let’s get rid of the *empty* bottles.
- d. This policy will *bankrupt* the farmers.

Reaching the intended interpretation of (16a) and (16b) is very likely to involve an optional pragmatic process of concept narrowing. In most contexts, the proposition that Boris is an adult male human will be trivially true and uninformative, so the lexically encoded concept MAN is likely to be strengthened to IDEAL MAN or TYPICAL MAN (where the notion of what constitutes a typical man or an ideal man will itself vary from context to context); similar comments apply to (16b), since it is patently false that just any amount of money will do for buying a house. In these cases, the communicated concept picks out a subset of the denotation of the lexical concept. Arguably, (16c) and (16d) require an adjustment in the opposite direction, that is, a broadening of the encoded concept, so although ‘bankrupt’ *could* be taken literally, in certain contexts it would be understood as a loose use of the concept or even as a hyperbole, conveying that, as a result of the government’s policy, the farmers will be substantially poorer than might have been expected or desired. In cases like this, the denotation of the concept communicated is broader than (and so includes) the denotation of the encoded concept. Relevance theorists and other contextualists (in particular, Recanati and Travis) take the view that some degree of modulation of word meaning in context occurs across virtually all utterances and is essential in deriving the intended truth-conditional content (i.e. the explicit content of an utterance).

Looking back again to Amy’s utterance in (12), it can be seen that recovering the proposition she explicitly communicated has involved the full range of pragmatic processes discussed here: saturation, e.g. ‘left *the party*’, and both kinds of free enrichment, e.g. the concept encoded by ‘drink’ is narrowed to the kinds of drink typical of parties, while the

cause-consequence relation taken to hold between the two states of affairs looks like a case of a linguistically unarticulated constituent of content.

4.2. Challenges to the explicature/implicature distinction

The existence of the kind of ‘free’ pragmatic processes just outlined is strongly disputed by quite a number of semanticists who find it unacceptable that pragmatics should have this kind of freedom to ‘intrude’ on the truth-conditional content (the ‘semantics’, as they construe it) of an utterance (King and Stanley 2005; Martí 2006; Stanley 2000, 2002; Stanley and Szabo 2000). In their view, the only pragmatic process (in addition to disambiguation) that can affect explicit utterance content is saturation; any pragmatically derived meaning that has not been mandated by the linguistic form must, therefore, be a conversational implicature. The most important challenge here comes from Stanley (2002), who argues that the process of free enrichment is so unsystematic and unconstrained that it predicts constituents of explicit content that patently do not occur. For instance, given that in comprehending an utterance of (17a), free enrichment can provide the italicized constituent shown in (17b), what stops it (he asks) from supplying the italicized constituent in (17d) in a context where it would be highly accessible and relevant in understanding an utterance of (17c)?

17. a. Jane answered every question.
- b. Jane answered every question *on her syntax exam*.
- c. Bruce likes Sally.
- d. Bruce likes Sally *and he likes his mother*.

Within the relevance-theoretic framework,¹⁰ this question is currently being addressed by Alison Hall (2008a, 2008b), whose account turns on two main points: [1] While implicature derivation is a global inferential process (operating over complete propositional forms), free enrichment is a local process, which modifies subparts of the linguistic logical form (see the examples in (15) above); [2] Utterance interpretation is an inferential process (albeit a subpersonal one) but pragmatic enrichments of the linguistic logical form are not logically warranted by a set of propositional premises. Rather, they are justified by their role

¹⁰ This is, obviously, an issue for any account that allows linguistically unarticulated constituents of propositional content, but it is Relevance Theory that has been the primary target of the challenge. This is perhaps because the theory is explicitly concerned with the task of providing an adequate account of the cognitive principles and processes that deliver utterance interpretations, while more philosophically-oriented accounts steer clear of the on-line processing questions.

in delivering an optimally relevant interpretation (that is, by being highly accessible in the context and contributing to the derivation of implicatures and other cognitive effects).¹¹ Together these two factors ensure that contextually relevant propositional forms (such as BRUCE LIKES HIS MOTHER in the case of (17d)) are precluded from composition into the explicature (the truth-conditional content of the utterance) and maintained as independent propositional forms, leaving them available to function as premises in further processes of inferential interpretation (such as implicature derivation). Hall extends the argument in a number of ways to show that other cases of alleged overgeneration do not arise; for the full details of her account, see Hall (2008b, chapter 3).

A related question is how to tell with regard to some clearly pragmatically-derived element of utterance meaning whether it contributes to explicit content or is, rather, an implicated proposition. Take, for instance, the cause-consequence relation that is understood to hold in some cases of ‘and’-conjunctions, such as Amy’s utterance in (12) above. This is not a case of saturation (it is not mandated by an element of linguistic form), but while it is treated as an instance of free enrichment of explicit content by relevance theorists (Carston 1988, 2002, 2004b), neo-Gricean pragmatists assume that it is a conversational implicature (Horn 1984, 2004, 2006; King and Stanley 2005; Levinson 1987, 2000). Another widely discussed and disputed sort of phenomenon is scalar pragmatic inference, as in the strengthening of the concepts lexically encoded by ‘some’ (equivalent to ‘some and perhaps all’) and ‘or’ (equivalent to ‘at least one of the disjuncts’) to the upper-bounded meanings SOME BUT NOT ALL and EITHER BUT NOT BOTH, as in the following examples:

18. a. Some of the children went swimming.
- b. I’ll watch a video tonight or work on my essay.

Again, the standard neo-Gricean treatment of the upper-bound component of meaning is that it is a matter of (scalar) implicature (Horn 1985, 1992, 2004; Levinson 1987, 2000), while relevance theorists claim that it is better thought of as a case of concept narrowing that contributes to the explicature (Carston 1995; Noveck and Sperber 2007). Some support for the

¹¹ According to Relevance Theory, the relevance of a new input is a positive function of the contextual implications and other cognitive effects it yields and a negative function of the processing effort needed to derive those effects. Utterances and other acts of ostensive communicative are different from other inputs (from, say, direct perception) in that they convey a presumption of their own optimal relevance to the addressee, such that that he is licensed to expect a worthwhile return of cognitive effects from processing the utterance without incurring any gratuitous processing costs. (For more detail, see Sperber and Wilson 1986/95; Wilson and Sperber 2004.)

latter position comes from ordinary speaker-hearer intuitions which take the strengthened meaning to affect truth conditions. That is, people tend to judge utterances such as those in (18) as false when set beside real world facts that show that the upper bound does not hold; for instance, when presented with an utterance of (18a) as a description of a scenario in which it can be seen that, in fact, all of the children went swimming, the majority of adults judge it to be false. (See Noveck 2004 for a survey of relevant experimental results.)

A third contentious area in this respect is the non-literal use of language, such as hyperbole, metaphor and metonymy. Many theorists with a literalist or minimalist orientation (see sections 3.1 and 3.3) treat all instances of non-literalness as cases where the literal encoded concept is a component of what is said (so what is said is not speaker-meant, not communicated) and the effects of the non-literal use emerge as implicatures. Grice wanted to preserve a pragmatic notion of ‘what is said’ so took it that speakers only ‘make as if to say’ the proposition expressed in cases of non-literal use and, again, the speaker-meant content arises only at the level of implicature (Grice 1975, Camp 2006). Relevance theorists and many other contextualists-pragmatists, on the other hand, argue that certain figurative uses, including hyperbole and metaphor, are instances of lexical concept adjustment (involving both broadening and narrowing) and so they also affect the explicature (Carston 1997, 2002; Recanati 1995, 2004; Wearing 2006, 2009; Wilson and Carston 2006, 2007; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004).

Over the past 20 years, various tests and criteria have been proposed in an attempt to find a principled means of distinguishing between conversational implicatures and pragmatically derived meaning that contributes to explicitly communicated content (Carston 1988, 2002 chapter 2; Recanati 1993 chapters 13 and 14, 2004). Some of these have provided useful evidence in particular cases; for instance, the results of the ‘scope embedding test’ have convinced many that the cause-consequence connection inferred for many cases of ‘and’-conjunctions really is truth-conditionally relevant and so must be a component of the explicature. However, it cannot be claimed that we have yet found a foolproof criterion that can be applied satisfactorily across all cases. It seems that it may well require the development of a completely explicit model of the pragmatic principles and processes at work in utterance interpretation before we can fully grasp the different ways in which pragmatically-derived meaning interacts with linguistic meaning in delivering explicatures and implicatures.

5. Conclusion – how explicit can we be?

It's not in doubt that speakers often successfully communicate a thought or proposition explicitly by using a linguistic expression that falls short (sometimes very far short) of encoding that thought or proposition. This is seldom problematic because addressees' pragmatic inferential capacities can easily make up the shortfall. What is less clear is whether this is simply a matter of convenience, making communication faster than it would otherwise be, saving the speaker's articulatory effort and the hearer's processing effort, or it is an intrinsic property of public language systems that they do not (generally) encode our thoughts. Certainly, we can usually be *more* explicit if the situation demands it (and sometimes our hearers do ask us for more), but is *full* explicitness (complete linguistic encoding) generally possible? Some theorists seem to think so; for instance, Bach (1994: 134), discussing cases similar to those in (15) above, involving free pragmatic enrichment, says: '... what is being communicated could have been made fully explicit by the insertion of additional lexical material.'

If this is right, we might expect that communicators will be fully explicit in circumstances where much hangs on correct and determinate interpretation and/or there are reasons to fear uncooperative, self-advantaging or disingenuous interpretation. The framing and interpretation of legal texts, such as statutes and contracts, would seem to be a case in point. However, even a cursory look at a few contentious cases of legal judgements puts paid to this optimistic assumption. A famous case concerns the interpretation of the phrase 'use a firearm' in the context of a statute that sets out penalties for offences where a defendant in a drug trafficking crime 'uses a firearm, during and in relation to that crime'. (I am simplifying here in the interests of brevity; for a detailed account, see Neale (forthcoming) and the references therein.) In the specific case, *Smith v. United States* (1993), it had already been established that Smith had attempted to trade an unloaded automatic gun for two ounces of cocaine and, on that basis, he had been found guilty of drug trafficking. The issue was whether or not he was also guilty of 'using a firearm' (during and in relation to that crime) and so should receive the additional penalty. The Supreme Court judges were divided on this: in one (broad) sense he had used a firearm in carrying out the crime; in another (narrower) sense he had not, as he had neither fired it nor brandished it. In the end, the former interpretation was upheld (by six to three) and the further penalty was imposed on Smith.

There seems no doubt that the statute-writer(s) could have been more explicit in this instance and we might wonder why they were not. But the question of primary interest to the

communication theorist is: could they have been fully explicit, so that a single shared interpretation would have been derived by all the judges and saved a lot of judicial time and effort? Here are some more explicit expressions (just a tiny sample of the possibilities) each reflecting more closely particular interpretations of ‘use a firearm’:

19. a. use a firearm as a weapon
- b. use a firearm as a firearm
- c. use a firearm to facilitate the crime at issue
- d. use a firearm instrumentally in committing the crime at issue

I’m assuming that ‘use for any purpose whatsoever’ is not in the running since there is a range of (probably) innocuous uses a firearm could be put to, even within the crime-committing event, (e.g. scratching one’s back, propping a door open). While Smith would surely have escaped the extra penalty if the statute had used the phrasing in (19a) or (19b), his act of bartering a gun for drugs does seem to fall within the extension of (19c) or (19d). But none of these more explicit versions is without its own interpretive indeterminacies, e.g. suppose the defendant had thrown the unloaded gun across a field so as to induce an annoying dog in the vicinity of his criminal activity (but not in any way involved in its execution) to run off to retrieve it. Would this use of the firearm fall under (19c) or (19d)? Whether removal of the dog from the scene (for a short period of time) facilitated the crime or merely relieved the defendant of some tangential irritation is unclear. And so it goes on – while further linguistic modification might make for a more explicit and more determinate content, a new scenario involving use of a gun can always be imagined to which the phrase’s applicability would again be unclear. Although the vagueness and/or ‘open texture’¹² of most empirical predicates seldom causes problems in ordinary communication (due to the pragmatics of the speaker-hearer interaction), it means that full encoding (total explicitness) is simply not practicable. In fact, contrary to my initial assumption, it is probably not even desirable in the

¹² As far as I know, it was Waismann (1951) who introduced the notion of the ‘open texture’ of predicates, that is, the idea that the satisfaction conditions of any descriptive predicate are semantically underspecified and so always require pragmatic interpretation. For helpful discussion of this idea, see Recanati (2004: 141-146). The difference(s) between open texture and vagueness could do with some careful explication. While open texture concerns the instability and context-dependence of truth-conditional content and seems to apply to all predicates, what is central to vagueness is the existence of borderline cases and this does not seem to arise for all predicates. The examples standardly given of predicates with borderline cases include ‘bald’, ‘heap’, ‘large (for an ant)’, ‘child’, ‘blue’, while the extensions of words like ‘bachelor’, ‘gold’, ‘square’, ‘flat’, and ‘true’ seem to be clear-cut. However, there is a view that (essentially) all predicates are vague and, if so, this makes the difference between vagueness and open texture a lot less obvious (to me, at least).

case of statutes and other legal texts, given that they must be framed in such a way as to be usable by many individuals (judges and other law enforcers) over decades, if not centuries, and to accommodate scenarios unforeseen and unforeseeable at the time of their formulation.

What about the more basic face-to-face, speaker-addressee utterance situation? I would contend that we cannot be fully explicit here either, even if we might want to be (and we would seldom want to be, given the immediate availability of relevant shared contextual information and the ‘mind-reading’ cues operating between speaker and hearer). Suppose we intend to communicate of some individual α that it has a particular property F, then the full explicitness question can be divided into two sub-questions: Do natural public languages have the resources to provide uniquely-denoting referring expressions (or is reference routinely a context-dependent matter)? Do they have the resources to fully encode the properties and relations we can think about and communicate to each other (or, at least, the Mentalese concepts that denote such properties)? I think the answer to both questions is negative but will briefly discuss just the second of them here.¹³ Consider the communication of concepts concerning human states of mind and feeling, such as particular kinds of tiredness, distress, well-being, excitement, annoyance, which may be quite occasion-specific. These are often (perhaps always) considerably more fine-grained than the linguistically encoded meaning of the word used to express them: ‘tired’, ‘upset’, ‘happy’, etc, each of which covers a great gamut of quite distinct states of mind. Consider the following exchange, where, let us suppose, Amy has had a tough week at work and an upsetting quarrel with her best friend. Aware of this and concerned about her, Max kindly invites her to accompany him and his friend Jim to a football game:

20. Max: Would you like to come to the game with Jim and me?

Amy: No thanks, I’m happy.

¹³ Jerrold Katz (1972: 126-27) endorses a very strong version of a Principle of Effability (or full explicitness) according to which: ‘For every statement that can be made using a context-sensitive sentence in a given context, there is an eternal sentence that can be used to make the same statement in any context’. His primary concern here is with indexicality (linguistic expressions requiring pragmatic saturation) and he outlines some procedures for ridding a sentence of indexical elements, which amount largely to replacing each indexical with a name or a definite description (which, allegedly, has a unique denotation). Together with others, I have argued elsewhere that, while this sort of move makes the proposition expressed more explicit, it never reaches full explicitness (never encodes such a completely articulated meaning that its interpretation remains the same across all contexts). For one thing, any definite description, even if it is freed of indexical elements, inherits the vagueness and open texture of its descriptive terms. For detailed discussion, see Carston (2002: chapter 1).

Given the specifics of the situation, Max cannot take Amy to mean that she is HAPPY where this is the concept encoded by ‘happy’, but rather he has to retrieve a different (albeit related) concept, one which is consistent with her rather subdued psychological state and also provides a reason for her declining his invitation. The concept that Amy communicates implies that she does not feel in need of distractions, does not mind being alone, is in a calm contemplative state of mind, (or, possibly, that she is simply not so far gone as to need to accompany Max and Jim to a football game). In any case, there seems little prospect of formulating a precise paraphrase that Amy could have used had she wished to be fully explicit (which is, of course, very unlikely).¹⁴

It is generally agreed that metaphor is a pervasive feature of ordinary language use. We might sometimes choose to use a metaphor because we want to achieve certain special cognitive effects, but more often it seems that there simply isn’t a word (or a phrase) that literally encodes the concept we want to communicate:

21. a. The knives are dancing.
- b. That woman is eating up my brain.

The first example here is an attested case, spoken by a young child watching the blades of a food processor in operation. It could be explained in two ways: it may be that, at his stage of vocabulary development, the extension of the verb ‘dance’ in his idiolect encompasses this particular movement of metal blades or that, lacking a word with quite the right meaning, he simply latches on to the best one he can find to express his perception. Arguably, this latter characterisation applies to much adult use of metaphor, as in the case in (21b): unable to find any word or phrase in the language that literally encodes my conception of how a particular woman’s behaviour is affecting me, I go for the strictly false ‘eating up my brain’, relying on my addressee’s relevance-constrained inferential capacity to make appropriate pragmatic adjustments to the encoded meaning (including dropping parts of it). It’s often remarked that most metaphors cannot be paraphrased, that the concept encoded by any attempt to spell out literally a metaphorical meaning inevitably misses the target meaning (as well as destroying

¹⁴ Other considerations make it highly plausible that we all manipulate many more concepts in thought than are encoded in our public languages. As Sperber and Wilson (1998: 198-99) point out, there is a range of constraints (social and historical) on establishing a word in a public language which are absent from the much freer process of adding new concepts to an individual’s mental repertoire.

the effects achieved by the succinctness of the metaphor). The prevalence of metaphorical use, then, seems to be another indication of the lack of any one-to-one correspondence between the concepts we can think with and communicate, on the one hand, and the concepts encoded in our linguistic systems, on the other, and thus of the impossibility of full explicitness.¹⁵

The conclusion, then, is that, for at least many, perhaps all, of the thoughts we seek to communicate, full explicitness is not possible. An element of pragmatic interpretation, more or less in different cases, is inevitable. Formulating natural-language sentences of a progressively more explicit sort may approach ever closer to a full encoding of propositions communicated, but the progression is asymptotic.¹⁶

¹⁵ For the sake of the argument here, I am supposing that encoded meaning consists of concepts. This might be quite wrong, in which case the issue of the possibility of full explicitness (encoding of the propositions we communicate explicitly) would be quickly resolved in the negative. The idea that word meanings (whether some, many, or all of them) might not be concepts but something else - constraints, schemas, rules for use, procedures or traces of previous uses - seems to be gaining ground. For relevant discussion, see Carston (2002: chapter 5), Recanati (2004), Pietroski (2005).

¹⁶ It follows from (what I find) a highly plausible evolutionary story, told by Sperber (2000), that public language systems are intrinsically underdetermining of the thoughts we communicate explicitly because they evolved on the back, as it were, of an already well-developed cognitive capacity for forming hypotheses about the thoughts and intentions of others (including their communicative intentions) on the basis of their behaviour, that is, a 'mind-reading' capacity.

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