

Revisiting the typology of conversational implicatures

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Prominence in pragmatics

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The following talk develops my paper (in press):

Revisiting the typology of pragmatic interpretations

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Grammatical codes and pragmatic inferences

Pragmatic inferences are essential to communication, because natural languages are underinformative.

Linguistic meanings cannot by themselves exhaust speakers' intended meanings (Grice, Sperber and Wilson, Carston)

Grice: Conversational implicatures

What's discourse prominence?

A communicated message is discourse prominent to the extent that:

- Objectively, it contributes truth conditional aspects to the propositional content
- Subjectively, the speaker is taken to endorse it (Sternau et al)
- Socially, the speaker cannot deny it (Sternau et al)
- It is directly communicated
- The interlocutor is likely to address it

Surprisingly enough, these criteria do not always converge perfectly (Sternau et al)

Prominence in discourse: Initial predictions

Linguistic codes are noncancelable and direct, hence discourse-prominent.

Conversational implicatures are cancelable, indirect and optional, hence, not discourse-prominent.

If so, coded messages are discourse-prominent, pragmatic messages are not.

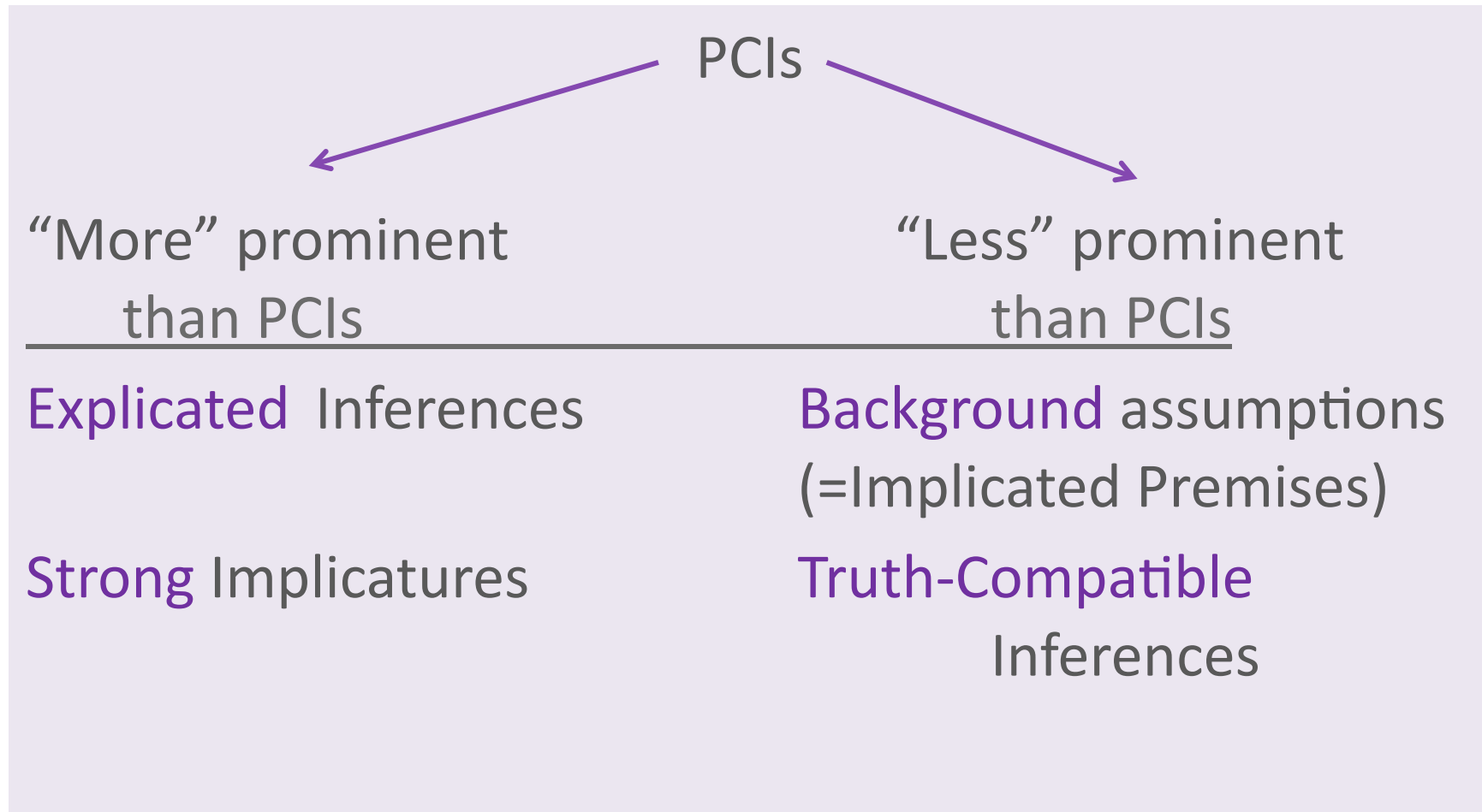
My thesis: Pragmatic interpretations are not all nonprominent and their (non)prominence comes in degrees.

Conversational Implicatures are not enough

- ❑ Sperber and Wilson: Conversational implicatures >
 - Implicated premises Vs. implicated conclusions
 - Strong Vs. Weak implicated conclusions
 - Inferences participating in constructing the explicature: Explicated inferences
- ❑ Ariel: Truth-Compatible inferences
- ❑ Searle: Background assumptions

My thesis: We need almost all of the above, and they come with different degrees of prominence.

Equal prominence for equally Particularized Conversational Implicatures?



A classical PCI: Definition

- Cancelable
- Has its own truth conditions
- Does not affect the truth conditions of the propositional content

A classical PCI example

Rivlin: MY wife_i doesn't intervene with ((political)) appointments (Originally Hebrew, Nov. 7, 2010). 

PCI: 'YOUR wife_j does, which is inappropriate'

A faithful report: \surd Rivlin said that his wife doesn't intervene with political appointments, **and in addition he indirectly conveyed** that Netanyahu's wife does...

PCI Test: **The Indirect Addition faithful report**

A classical PCI is **not** 'said'/explicated

The following is not a faithful report:

??Rivlin said that his wife_i doesn't intervene with political appointments, **that is to say** that Netanyahu's wife_j does...

PCIs fail the That Is test, which identifies Explicatures.

A PCI cannot be directly responded to either:

Rivlin: MY wife_i doesn't intervene with (political) appointments

~Journalist: ?? That's true. She_j does.

PCIs and discourse prominence

- PCI:
1. Passes the Indirect Addition test: it is faithfully reported as an **additional, indirectly conveyed** message.
 2. Does **not** pass the **That IS** (explicature) report test.
 3. Fails the Direct Response test: it **cannot** be directly confirmed or denied by an interlocutor as true/false.
- Hence, PCIs have a (relatively) **nonprominent discourse status**.

Explicated inferences: Definition

Explicated inferences (Sperber and Wilson) are **pragmatic** inferences that contribute **truth-conditional** aspects to the propositional content.

They are integrated into a single meaning representation together with the bare linguistic meaning, which they enrich (Recanati's Availability Principle).

*They are afraid to **talk** for fear they will be hurt* →

Explicature: The Abu Ghanem women are afraid to talk about the “honor” murder for fear...

Explicated inferences

Explicated inferences fail the PCI Additional Indirect test:

??? S said that they are afraid to talk for fear they will be hurt, **and in addition, she indirectly conveyed** that the Abu Ghanem women are afraid to talk about the “honor” murder.

Explicated inferences

Explicated inferences pass the **That IS** explicature test:

✓ The speaker said that they are afraid to talk, **that is to say** about the “honor” murder for fear they will be hurt.

The **direct response** test:

A: They are afraid to talk for fear they will be hurt

B: ~✓ **Yeah**, although on **other** topics they are quite chatty.

Explicated Inferences and discourse prominence

An Explicated inference:

1. Fails the PCI Indirect Addition test: It is **not** indirectly communicated.
2. Passes the That Is test: It is faithfully reported as if it was said directly .
3. Passes the Direct Response test: It can be confirmed as true/false by an interlocutor without explicit mention.

Strong PCIs

Definition: Just as PCI, but “strongly communicated”.

R₁: And Haim Getzl (= John Doe) who is a company director ((part omitted)) starts buying

S: OK that’s a criminal offense

R₂: So he has a mother-in-law. 

PCI: 'Haim Getzl would illegally buy shares under his mother-in-law’s name'.

By definition, this is a PCI, because the inference remains separate. It does not develop the bare linguistic meaning into a single meaning layer. It has separate truth conditions.

Strong PCIs

Indeed, it passes the Indirect addition PCI test:

√ R said that H.Z. has a mother-in-law, **and in addition he indirectly conveyed** that H.Z would illegally buy shares under his mother-in-law's name.

And it fails the That IS test:

???R said that H.Z. has a mother-in-law, **that is to say** that H.Z would illegally buy shares under his mother-in-law's name.

Strong PCIs

But what about the Direct response test?

The interlocutor in this case in effect shows the result of the Direct response test:

R: So he has a mother-in-law.

S: For **this** you go to jail (Originally Hebrew, Lotan, 1990: 16).

You go to jail for having a mother-in-law???

You go to jail for illegally buying shares...

Unlike Standard PCIs, **Strong Implicatures pass the Direct response test.**

Strong PCIs

Another natural application of the Direct response test:

INTERVIEWER: Still, how many names of Arab actresses can you enumerate for me in Israeli theatres? (→ ‘Virtually none’)

INTERVIEWEE: **It's true**, but recently I feel that demand has grown (Originally Hebrew, *Yeditot Ahronot*, Jul 23, 2015)

/t=The fact that there are virtually no Arab actresses (the implicature, not the explicature)

Strong implicatures pass the Replacement test

Strong implicatures are so prominent in the discourse, that they compete with the explicature. They may even be seen as replacing it:

√ R said that H.Z. has a mother-in-law, **but actually, he indirectly conveyed** that H.Z would illegally buy shares under his mother-in-law's name.

Standard or Strong PCI?: A delicate **contextual** decision

Context: Reuven Rivlin (=Rubi) is currently Israel's president, Benjamin Netanyahu (=Bibi) is the prime minister. A.H is a TV interviewer.

R.R: If you're asking, Rubi and Bibi were friends in the past, really good friends, almost cousins. ONCE they were friends. (→ PCI: They're not friends now)

A.H: No more?

R.R: Once they were friends. (→ **Strong PCI**: They're not friends now)

Strong PCI

Explicature: Rubi and Bibi were friends once.

Implicature: Rubi and Bibi are not friends now.

Can A.H respond with *That's a shame*? (An application of the Direct Response test)

World knowledge: *That's a shame* is coherent only as a comment on the negative **implicature**, not on the positive **explicature**.

PCI X 2 = Strong PCI

R.R: If you're asking, Rubi and Bibi were friends in the past, really good friends, almost cousins. **ONCE they were friends.**

A.H: **No more?**

R.R: **Once they were friends.**

A.H: ~ **That's a shame.**

Native speakers thought A.H's response is coherent.

So, *once they were friends* generates a Strong PCI here.

Standard PCI

But what about the first *once they were friends*?

R.R: If you're asking, Rubi and Bibi were friends in the past, really good friends, almost cousins. ONCE they were friends.

A.H: ~ *That's a shame.*

- 10/15 speakers thought A.H's response is less coherent following the first *once they were friends* (Only 1/15 thought it was more coherent).

What's the difference?

We have the same trigger in both cases:

ONCE they were friends

But the repetition renders the PCI stronger.

A typical participant's explanation for the difference:

“Although it's clear that A.H's 'it's a shame' refers to once, but only once they were friends and not any more, **for some reason**, the impression is that she is sorry about their having been friends in the past” (I.B).

(Preference for the explicated over the implicated)

What's the difference?

A standard PCI cannot directly be referred to without an explicit mention.

A Strong PCI can directly be referred to without an explicit mention.

Still, the difference is not absolute.

4/15 thought that the two versions were equally coherent (+1/15 who thought the first version was more coherent).

Strong PCIs

As a PCI:

1. It passes the PCI Indirect Addition test.
2. It fails the That Is test.

But:

3. It passes the Direct Response test.
4. It passes the Replacement test.

Pragmatic inferences that are weaker than PCIs

Implicated Premises (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995): Contextually accessed assumptions needed to derive other PCIs.

*At a meeting with several female residents, one of the women likened the killing of women in the family to **the activity of the Islamic State*** (Nov. 2, 2014).

PCI: The Abu Ghanem murderers are as horrible as the Islamic State fighters, and they should be condemned and pursued just like them.

Implicated Premises

The PCI here is based on a preliminary assumption that:
The activity of the Islamic State is abhorrent and unacceptable.

- Only if we assume that the activity of the Islamic State is abhorrent (to be condemned, and eradicated), can we infer that the speaker is implicating that the Abu Ghanem murderers should be abhorred, condemned, pursued etc.

Implicated Premises and implicated Conclusions

We have a chain of inferences, whereby one PCI is based on another.

But should we assign the same discourse status to a discourse relevant PCI (The family honor murderers should be condemned etc.) and to a background assumption interlocutors are expected to retrieve from their general knowledge?

Grice (1989: 86): **Yes.** PCI is "what is required that one assume a speaker to think in order to preserve the assumption that he is observing the Cooperative Principle, if not at the level of what is said, at least at the level of what is implicated".

Implicated Premises and implicated Conclusions

But premises and conclusions are cognitively distinct.

Moreover, it is **Implicated Conclusions** that the speaker wishes to convey. She simply takes for granted the implicated assumptions.

- In terms of their discourse profiles, **Implicated Conclusions** are typically New and crucial in rendering the speaker's contribution relevant (that is, bearing contextual implications). They can be quite controversial.
- **Implicated Premises** are not in themselves contextually relevant. While not always absolutely Given information, they must not be controversial.

Weaker than PCIs: Background assumptions

Background assumptions are necessary for interlocutors to judge an utterance interpreted literally as true or false (Searle 1978).

The speaker is no doubt committed to such assumptions, but, not by virtue of what she says, but by virtue of what interlocutors assume about the world.

*As a first step they decided to ask the Imams to **address the issue of the murder on the Friday sermon** (ibid).*

- Background assumption: An Imam addressing a murder will condemn it.

Background assumptions and Implicated premises

I see no difference between SW's Implicated premises and Searle's Background.

Both assumptions are **meant**, **but not conveyed**.

Meant:

A: *Excuse me, do you happen to know if there's an Aroma ((Café)) here or something like that?*

B: *Yes, at the Weizman Center. You'll have to go out of here ((the hospital)).*

But I don't know if it's open (Originally Hebrew, June 5, 2008).

Meant but not conveyed

The speaker has no **communicative intention** regarding:

- ‘The activity of the Islamic State is abhorrent (to be condemned, and eradicated)’ (**Implicated premise**)
- ‘An Imam addressing a murder will condemn it’ (**Background**).
- ‘The Aroma café at Weizman Center is open’ (**PCI according to Grice**).

Background assumptions

Background assumptions **fail the PCI Indirect addition test** (not to mention the Explicature That Is test):

?? The speaker said that as a first step they decided to ask the Imams to address the issue of the murder on the Friday sermon, **and in addition she indirectly conveyed** that an Imam addressing a murder will condemn it.

??The speaker said that one of the women likened the killing of women in the family to the activity of the Islamic State, **and in addition she indirectly conveyed** that the activity of the Islamic State is abhorrent and unacceptable.

The unique status of Background assumptions

A: When you come home,
I'll have the food ready **on the table**.

B: I'd rather have plates.

A: What?

B: I'd rather have plates.

A: (LAUGH) (7.27.2005).

‘Food will be served on plates’=Background assumption
But the wise-guy B ignores it, because it is not
communicated. That’s uncooperative of him.

The unique status of Background assumptions

I hate all these retarded directions that they have on foods. Take, let's say, these frozen schnitzels in the fridge. It says **heat and serve**. Aha. It's good you tell me. Because my instinct was to **serve and heat**, (Channel 22, 28 January 2004).

‘Heat first serve second’= Background assumption
But the comedian treats it as a speaker-intended explication or PCI. He then complains that this is too trivial a message to be actually conveyed.

The unique status of Background assumptions

Taken together:

- The first example shows that Background assumptions are **meant** and must be taken into consideration.

But at the same time,

- The second example shows that Background assumptions do **not** count as **speaker-intended** messages.

Background assumptions mustn't be taken as "too prominent" nor as "too nonprominent".

Another inference weaker than PCIs: Truth Compatible Inferences

REBECCA: (H) U=m,

**.. do you guys have the cash to pay for it
right now?**

... When you- to get out? (SBC: 008).

What's the status of:

'The addressees may be too poor to afford the parking fee'.

Valid? Most likely true according to Rebecca.

But **NOT speaker-intended**.

Truth-Compatible Inferences

No doubt Rebecca thinks that it may be hard for the addressees to pay the parking fee, or she wouldn't have asked her question.

However, Rebecca definitely does NOT intend to convey this rather embarrassing assumption.

Indeed, precisely in order to avoid the “poverty inference” as a PCI:

She uses *cash* rather than *money*;

She restricts the question to 'right now'.

Truth-Compatible Inference: Definition

A pragmatically plausible inference (given the speaker's utterance and contextual assumptions), but one the speaker has no communicative intentions about. It is not Relevant in that the addressee is not licensed by the speaker to draw that inference, nor to derive contextual effects from it. Unlike Background assumptions, it has **no discourse presence**.

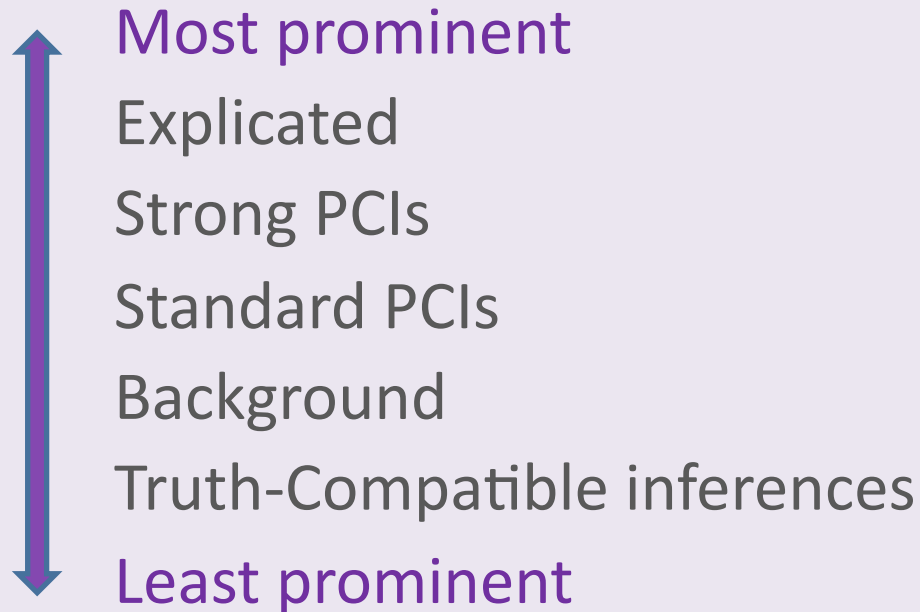
But Truth-compatible inferences will have to wait for another talk...

Mapping different pragmatic inferences

| Pragmatic Inference | Meant | Communi- cative Intention | Directly commu- nicated | Test(s) passed | Deni- ability (Sternau et al) |
|---------------------|-------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Explicated | + | + | + | That is, Direct response | Very Hard |
| Strong PCI | + | + | +/- | Indirect addition, Replacement, Direct response | Hard |
| Standard PCI | + | + | - | Indirect addition | Easier |
| Back- ground | + | - | - | - | Very Hard* |
| TCI | - | - | - | - | Easy, Variable* |

Conclusion: A graded prominence for different pragmatic inferences

Pragmatic inferences are not equally (non)prominent in discourse:



Thank You!

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