

A Pragmatic Analysis of Impference as a Collective Term for Implicature and Inference

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Abstract: *There have been plenty of studies and research in the areas of implicatures and inferences. They consider implicature and inference as tools for any speech event. After analyzing both terms and highlighting their significance in communication, the researcher hypothesizes that whenever both the speaker's conversational implicature and the hearer's generated inferences are identical, they can be referred to as 'imference'. This proposed term marks a new addition in the field of pragmatic analysis in any given speech event. The study aims at proposing this new term 'imference' to be defined in dictionaries and language encyclopedia. Resultantly, this new term will facilitate for a simple reference to the occasions when both the speaker's conversational implicature and the hearer's generated inference meet.*

Keywords: *Imference, Conversational implicature, inference, communication, intention.*

1. INTRODUCTION

People communicate, and in order to make their communications successful they need to cooperate. Cooperation among interlocutors in a communication is manifested in the implicatures and inferences. If the speaker and the hearer talk about different and unrelated issues explicitly or implicitly, resultantly miscommunication is expected. However, if they understood each other through the perfect match between the speaker's intended implicature and the hearer's generated inference, the conversation goals could be easily achieved and the communication will be marked successful.

This paper is an attempt to suggest a shelter term for situations in which the speaker's conversational implicature is identical to the hearer's generated inference. No such term has so far been detected, and linguists rather refer to each of implicature and inference individually. The suggested term in this paper is 'imference' which is a combination of inference and implicature both in form and content. The new proposed term is completely the researcher's.

2. IMPLICATURE AND INFERENCE

Herbert Paul Grice introduced the verb 'implicate' and the cognate noun implicature to refer to something implied by saying something else (Davis, 1998: 14). The term 'implicature' basically meant to make a sort of conventional and/or conversational connection between what is said and what is meant, inspired by the attitude that the two might not be the same. Additionally, as Thomas (1995: 57) refers to the common property of conveying additional level of meaning in spite of the semantic meaning of the words, they differ in the constant implication of conventional implicature and the varying meaning of conversational implicature. This could be considered a reasonable proposition, but taking inclusion into consideration, i.e. what is said is included within the domain of what is meant in a cause and effect relationship, as the two are highly interdependent, and might be represented by what Austin categorizes as illocutionary and locutionary acts respectively.

2.1. CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE

Cruse (2000: 349) points out that conversational implicatures are characterized as "propositions or assumptions not encoded, completely or incompletely, in what is actually said." Whether *what is said* and *what is meant* are considered as completing each other or as distinct entities, it could be still vital that meaning identification is the most dynamic and effective conversational tool that the speaker can

handle in order to pass the intended meaning (illocutionary force) to reach the desired perlocutionary act by the hearer/listener whether the hearer/listener is a second party or it is the speaker himself/herself (in monologues). The speaker passes the implicated meanings, and if the hearer/listener receives and perceives it, he/she could form inferences out of them. Consider the following short dialogue.

(1) Wife: I can't find my keys.

Husband: They are on the key holder behind the entrance door.

Wife: Oh, you are right. Thanks dear.

Husband: You are welcome, darling.

In the dialogue, the wife makes a statement about the keys that she cannot find. The husband takes a turn and states that they are on the key holder behind the entrance door. Considering the follow-up response by the wife for the husband's statement (They are on the key holder behind the entrance door.) maintains the wife's satisfaction with his response, because the wife's first statement was rather an inquiring implicit act of questioning about where the keys might be, and the husband's response was to the point. Observing the output, one can see the conversation between them successful as the speaker (the wife) could have implicated other meanings, such as (accusing the husband of hiding the keys, suggesting going to work together by the husband's car, having no option for closing the door except shutting it, and others). The husband could have also similarly generated other inferences based on contextualized conversational implicatures. Moreover, the conversation might have ended with a misunderstanding if the husband has not successfully dealt with flouting the maxim of relation, as the possessive determiner (my) refers to keys of a car, apartment, office, etc., extremely different from a possible statement, such as (2):

(2) The wife: I can't find my pills.

where (my) refers to something that she uses for herself.

Conversational implicatures cannot be cornered by the interlocutors easily, including the speakers themselves. The speaker's role in initiating an implicature is vital, in terms of his/her identification of the hearer(s), the context of situation, the code and the content of the message. The speaker's failure to account for one of those main tenets may cause dramatic change in the content and direction of the talk. Consider example (3) in which the speaker, supposed to be the minister's spokesperson, is addressing a number of demonstrators who demand the release of their salaries:

(3) The speaker: You have the right to demand for your rights. You have my full support. I do promise to follow up the issue with the minister, and ask him to release your salaries if he has got enough funds.

The demonstrators: (If) means (No).

Perhaps the speaker wanted to be honest and give his word to do something that he could actually achieve for the demonstrators, but they made a different reading from his response, and postulated that the use of if in his response could not be interpreted as anything except a (No) to their demands, implicitly expressed through a conditional.

Other factors might hinder the realization of the speaker's intended implicature. In (4) and (5), the same speaker might give the same reply as an answer to two different questions, but making two completely distinct implicatures (Cruse 2000: 349).

(4) A: Have you cleared the table and washed the dishes?

B: I've cleared the table.

(5) A: Am I in time for supper?

B: I've cleared the table.

B's answer in (4) implicitly implicates that he/she has cleared the table from the dishes and food leftovers, but might have not washed the dishes yet. Hence, it implicitly bears a partial (Yes) answer to A's inquiry. In (5), however, B's answer makes the implication that A could not catch up for supper and that the dishes have even been cleared from the table. So, it implicitly bears a (No) answer to A's inquiry.

Although implicatures might lead to miscommunication among the interlocutors, it is still mainly under the speaker's control to make the intended implicatures explicitly or implicitly, or fail to do that due to some factors, prominently including speaker's identification of the hearer and/or the context.

2.2. INFERENCE GENERATION

The term 'inference' has been differently defined. Some state that inferences are implicatures (Davis 1998: 124 and Griffiths 2006: 9). However, as Thomas (1995: 58) clarifies, the dominant view attributes implicatures to speakers and inferences to hearers. Nonetheless, it has not been, and may not be practically settled as to whom it dominates the direction of meaning: the speaker or the hearer. Grice (1957) obviously empowers the speaker (*utterer* in Gricean term) to the level that even if misunderstanding erupted from a discussion, the speaker can be asked about his intention, and thus obscurity vanishes.

Consider the following example.

(6) Teacher: Where is your assignment?

Student: My dad was sick.

By flouting the maxim of relation and possibly observing the maxim of quality, the student might implicate that the reason for not preparing his assignment was that he had to take care of his dad. Therefore, a follow-up response from the teacher highly depends on the context of the conversation, knowledge of the world and the teacher's experience with similar justifications from the same student or others. If the student, for example, had failed to submit assignments of earlier classes and had given similar justifications, it is left for the teacher to believe him/her or not. Perhaps, with a simple follow-up of the student's father's case, he may find out that the student is an orphan, and hence violating the maxim of quality in his excuses. However, if the father was alive and was actually suffering from a severe chronic disease, the teacher would very probably accept the student's justification for not submitting the assignment. Resultantly, concluding either way does not only result from what the speaker implicates, but also on how the hearer makes judgments based on knowledge of the world and the teacher's experience of students' excuses for not doing assignments.

Similar or even complicated scenarios might be confronted in communication due to the reciprocity property of language, that's both the speaker and the hearer can swap roles. This continuum weakens any possible guarantee from the interlocutors so as to absolutely avoid misunderstandings and misjudgment of each other's propositions. Consider the following example.

(7) Father: Have you done your school assignments?

Daughter: I did Social Science and Math.

Father: Great, how about English?

Daughter (goes extremely red and keeps silent.)

Father: I am sure you will keep your promise with daddy and do all the assignments before you go to bed.

Daughter: I will, daddy.

In the dialogue, the father infers from his daughter's answer that she has not done her English assignments. He wants to certify his inference, therefore he asks her about English assignment. Her getting red and keeping silent supports and settles the father's generated inference as definitely true. Then, he reminds his daughter of her promise and the necessity of doing her English and other assignments before going to bed, something that the daughter validates with her follow up answer (I will, daddy.). Thus, the same inference was generated and certified in three interrelated components of the conversation to make sure that both the father and the daughter are on the same page.

Generating inferences tends to be more valuable than conversational implicatures, since the former settles the implicated message, expressed explicitly or implicitly. This goes back to the controversial proposition of whether meaning resides with the speaker or the hearer, which, as explained by Archer et al. (2012: 179), cognitively speaking, the relevance theory could be theoretically utilized to make the hearer the center of speech interpretation. In order to have a successful communication, the hearer must cooperate with the speaker in arriving at a joint thought behind the conversation. If (7) is an example of complete cooperation between both interlocutors, example (8) manifests a different result:

(8) A: What did you have for lunch?

B: Food.

B's answer does not help A gain the required informative answer, since people definitely have food when they are hungry, but they also have food preferences. This strict commitment to Grice's quality maxim and non-observance of his quantity maxim results in misunderstanding. Hence, an expected reaction from A might be a follow up question or a sort of anger. Communications are rich of such examples whenever interlocutors decide not to cooperate. So, the meaning value of A's question eventually fades away, which leads to the conclusion that hearers have enough tools in the assessment of meaning.

In both (7) and (8) it was realized that the hearer has the lion's share in settling the smooth transference of meaning among the interlocutors. Nonetheless, generating inferences in communication depends on the amount of cooperation that both the speaker and the hearer offer to each other.

3. IMFERENCE

Communication is sorted successful if both the speaker and the hearer read from the same page. That is, if the speaker implicates something and the hearer forms an inference identical to the speaker's implicature. This type of a one-to-one relationship between the speaker's implicature and the hearer's inference could be considered as the peak of a successful communication which, in Austin's term, meets necessary felicity conditions (Crystal, 2003: 178f). Terminologically, as it was analyzed in the previous sections, each of conversational implicature and inference formation has been dealt with individually per the speaker and the hearer respectively. However, if the addresser and the addressee are referred to as 'interlocutors', and their involvement in a discussion could be termed 'speech event', it could be plausible to suggest a joint common term for the speaker's conversational implicature and the hearer's formed inference, only and only if the implicature and the inference are identical. The suggested term by the researcher for this perfect match is 'imference'. The idea of suggesting a shelter term for both concepts is not a mere blending of the first syllable of the word 'implicature' and the last two syllables of 'inference': *im* of implicature and *ference* of inference; it goes back to the seemingly proved fact that the major aim of participants in a conversation is communication through cooperation regardless of the absence of a consensus over the logical power of Gricean maxims. Imference could be seen as a collective term that saves pragmaticians from labeling conversational implicature and inference-formation individually. Consider the following examples:

(9) *Job interviewer*: How much do you expect to gain as your monthly salary?

Job interviewee: According to the job grade, I don't think it will be less than two thousand dollars.

In the conversation, if the job interviewer's actual intention behind the question is to know the interviewee's expectation of the monthly salary, then the hearer is considered successful in tackling the exact intention. Therefore, the imference of the conversation among the interlocutors could be something like: revealing the expected salary. This may highly depend on the verbal or non-verbal follow-up by the interviewer. It is also possible that the intention was rather to see if the interviewee's main purpose of seeking for a job is to gain money, and that salary is his/her top priority as in (10). The context which is not the main topic of this paper can help diagnose those intentions.

(10) *Job interviewer*: How much do you expect to gain as your monthly salary?

Job interviewee: Money is not my biggest deal. Actually, I would like to practice my specialty.

Therefore, if the interviewer's intention was to see whether or not the interviewee's top priority is money, the imference could be 'money or job affiliation first'.

Interlocutors are normally expected to intensively encounter situations in which their implicatures and inferences match. Accordingly, in their analysis, pragmaticians do not need to refer to each alone. They could simply diagnose the common 'imference' for the both the conversational implicature and the generated inference.

4. CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that since there are cases in which both the speaker's conversational implicature and the hearer's generated inferences are identical, they can be referred to with a proposed unified term 'inference', as a collective term both in form and content. Additionally, it is concluded that the identical implicature and inference mark successful communication, otherwise misunderstandings might erupt. Hence, a collective term for the implicature and inference mismatch is far from logical proposition

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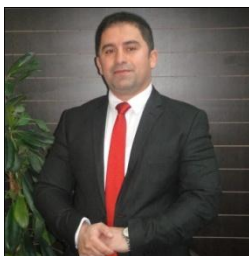
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