LIN241, Winter 2021
Week 3 summary: Conversational Implicatures

1.   Conversational Implicatures

(1)   Conversational Implicatures (CIs) are a form of non-literal meaning of sentences, that can be inferred by reasoning about the speaker's communicative intentions. More precisely, CIs arise under the assumption that speakers are cooperative, in a sense made precise by the cooperative principle.

(2)   **The Cooperative Principle**: Make your contribution as is required, when it is required, by the conversation in which you are engaged.

Quality: Contribute only what you know to be true. Do not say false things. Do not say things for which you lack evidence.

Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not say more than is required.

Relation (Relevance): Make your contribution relevant.

Manner: (i) Avoid obscurity; (ii) avoid ambiguity; (iii) be brief; (iv) be orderly.

(3)   Consult the following slides from lecture 3 for examples of CIs calculations:

Slide 12 to slide 17, slides 19-20, slides 38, slides 41-42

2.   Properties of Conversational Implicatures

(4)   CIs are **calculable**: if a proposition p is an implicature of a sentence S, then p can be calculated using the cooperative principled.

(5)   CIs are **cancelable**: if a proposition p is an implicature of a sentence S, then one can assert S and add some information that entails the negation of p, without creating a contradiction.

For example, as an answer to (6), an assertion of (7a) implicates (7b) but answering (7c) is not contradictory.

(6)   Where does John live exactly?

(7)   a.   John lives somewhere in the south of France

b.   The speaker doesn't know in which city or village John lives.

c.   John lives somewhere in the south of France, in a village called Roussillon.

(8)   CIs are **reinforceable**: if a proposition p is an implicature of a sentence S, then one can assert S and then express p explicitly, with less sense of redundancy than would be the case if S entailed p.

Example:

(9)   A: Where does John live exactly?

B: Somewhere in the south of France, but I don't know in which town.

(10)   Testing for implicatures:

To test whether a proposition is a conversational implicature, check whether it is calculable, cancelable and reinforceable. If it is, you have good reasons to conclude that it is a conversational implicature.