Chapter Nine

Ad-Hoc Concepts, Linguistically Encoded Meaning and Explicit Content: Some Remarks on Relevance Theoretic Perspective

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# Introduction

Ad-hoc concepts in relevance theory (RT) (Sperber and Wilson 1986/95; Wilson and Sperber 2004) base on modifications of atomic mental concepts denotation, potentially leading to its complete change. Since ad-hoc concepts (by the underdeterminacy thesis[[1]](#footnote-1) and RT lexical pragmatics assumptions (Wilson 2003/2004; Wilson and Carston 2007 and more)) are omnipresent, the connection between mental concepts encoded by public lexicon and those actually conveyed may disappear. This leads to the situation in which linguistic (lexical) semantics potentially becomes unnecessary, which would result in abandonment of the original RT claim (Carston 2008 and more) of linguistic semantics and truth-conditional semantics being important theoretical constructs of the theory.

On closer examination, it turns out that the extent to which ad-hoc concepts can depart from the denotation of the mental concepts encoded via public lexicon makes them either stop being concepts (lack of stability) or stop being ad-hoc in the theory’s own terms. In the former case, they cannot add to the explicit content conveyed and in the latter, the very notion: ‘ad-hoc concept’ becomes spurious.

# Concepts, words and explicit content in RT

In RT, for an entity to be a concept it must be stable. Concepts are

enduring elementary mental structure[s] capable of playing different discriminatory or inferential roles on different occasions in an individual’s mental life (Sperber and Wilson 2012, 7).[[2]](#footnote-2)

They may be lexicalized atomic concepts, atomic concepts not encoded in our linguistic system and some innate concepts (Carston 2010, 14).[[3]](#footnote-3)

There are indefinitely many atomic mental concepts, many of which are stable and effable but not mapping onto words. Lexicalized atomic concepts are activated via words giving access to three entries: lexical, logical and encyclopedic.[[4]](#footnote-4) Lexical entries contain formal (phonological, syntactic) linguistic information. Logical entries are inference rules which are content constitutive.[[5]](#footnote-5) Encyclopedic entries give access to all information related to the concept (Carston 2010, 8, 10).

Concepts may be shared between interlocutors (for example in mathematics), idiosyncratic but grounded in common experience or fully idiosyncratic and non-communicable. They are “arrived at through mutual pragmatic adjustment of explicatures and contextual implicatures” (Carston 2010, 10) and they contribute “[…] to explicature (hence to the truth-conditional content of the utterance), rather than merely being implicated” (Carston 2010, 7). Ephemeral representations of particulars[[6]](#footnote-6) and complex conceptual structures are not concepts, while stabilized idiosyncratic, non-lexicalized concepts based on private experience are concepts (Sperber and Wilson 2012).

Ad-hoc concepts are

pragmatically derived, generally ineffable, non-lexicalized […] rough indication to aid readers in understanding what we have in mind in particular cases (Carston 2010, 13).

They may be retrieved from memory or constructed on the spur of the moment. The former already have a firm presence in the hearer’s cognitive system and so are not ad-hoc, while the latter are entirely ad-hoc (new, occasion specific) and thus they do not qualify as full concepts (see Carston 2010, 15).

The denotation of the pragmatically inferred concept is narrower and/or broader than the denotation of the lexical, encoded concept which provided the evidential input to its derivation (see Carston 2010, 14).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Words may encode full-fledged (atomic) concepts, pro-concepts (conceptually incomplete information) or procedural meaning (pronouns, discourse connectives, tense/aspect/mood indicators, particles, interjections) (see Carston 2010, 8). In the case of open-class items (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs), there is a simple mapping from lexical form to mental atomic concepts (see Carston 2010, 9).

More generally, words map onto addresses in memory. The addresses give access to lexical, encyclopedic and logical entries of concepts. The addresses are a basic element of the language of thought. Its content or semantics is its denotation. The lexical form (word) inherits its denotational semantics.

Words do not have to encode the same concept for all successful users. Concepts encoded will only occasionally be the same as the ones communicated. The concepts actually conveyed have to be contextually worked out. Words are used to convey not only the concept they encode but also indefinitely many other related concepts to which they may point in a given context. Almost any word can be used to convey another concept from the one the word encodes (see Sperber and Wilson 2012, 3). “The occurrence of a word in an utterance provides a piece of evidence, a pointer to a concept involved in the speaker’s meaning” (Sperber and Wilson 2012, 15).

Speaker’s meaning, that is the thought communicated by a speaker, is explicit if it is the explicature of the speaker’s utterance:

An assumption communicated by an utterance U is explicit (hence is an explicature) if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by U, where explicitness is a matter of degree […]. Any assumption communicated, but not explicitly so, is implicitly communicated. It is an implicature (Sperber and Wilson 1986/95, 82).

The main criterion allowing to distinguish explicature from implicature in RT is the availability principle (Carston and Hall 2011; Recanati 1993).[[8]](#footnote-8) The explicit content of explicatures, or rather thoughts expressed by them is truth-conditional in character (Carston 1991; 2000 and more).

The presented close reading of selected assumptions of relevance theory is intended to provide grounds for a critical discussion of theoretical grounding of ad-hoc concepts, linguistically encoded meaning and explicit content in the theory.

# Discussion

The analyses of three examples in terms of recalled assumptions allow to raise substantial doubts concerning the theory-internal consistency of relevance-theoretic interpretations of the three discussed phenomena: ad-hoc concepts do not have to be concepts, neither do they have to be ad-hoc, linguistically encoded meaning may lack stability and constancy and explicit content does not have to be intersubjective.

1. Context: Two people (A and B) are talking. C overhears them.

A: Mary is a princess

The comprehension process of A’s utterance, as predicted by RT apparatus, would probably differ for A and B (or possibly for A and B, respectively) on the one hand and for C on the other. C’s interpretation may be as follows. The word “princess”, being an open-class item (noun), encodes a full-fledged atomic concept. There is a simple mapping from the lexical form “princess” to the mental atomic concept PRINCESS. The word points to addresses of the concept’s three entries: lexical, comprising phonological, morphological and syntactic information on the word “princess”, encyclopedic, containing all information relating to princesses in C’s memory and logical, which is a set of inference rules constituting truth-conditional semantic content of the concept. The rules are similar in the outcome of their application to meaning postulates – *If* *Mary is a princess*, *Mary is a female royal family member*, so *Mary is a female royal family member*.[[9]](#footnote-9) On the one hand, the meaning of the concept PRINCESS is given by those content constitutive inference rules and, on the other, the concept’s meaning is its denotation (for example [female royal family member] inherited by the word “princess” as its meaning).[[10]](#footnote-10) The concept activated for C may be exclusively PRINCESS – lexicalized atomic concept, the meaning of which is its denotation inherited by the word. It may so happen that this meaning is shared by A, B and C, straightforwardly adding to the truth-conditional explicature of A’s utterance *Mary is a princess*. Equally well, it may be that A and B, via the process of mutual pragmatic adjustment of explicature and contextual implications would arrive at PRINCESS\*, that is a related ad-hoc concept whose denotation is a modification (narrowing and/or broadening) of the denotation of PRINCESS, with C recovering only the latter for lack of relevant contextual premises. It may also be the case that A’s intended meaning of “princess” is PRINCESS, the one recovered by B is PRINCESS\* and by C – PRINCESS\*\*, depending on what is relevant to each of them.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Since what is explicitly communicated is the explicature of an utterance (here, of A’s utterance *Mary is a princess*), within which A’s, B’s and C’s interpretations of the word “princess” depend on what is relevant to each of them, we have no way to decide what is explicitly communicated other than by relying on our individual intuitions, as predicted by the availability principle. Consequently, establishing the explicit content of an utterance, even in the apparently simplest, closest to “literal” interpretation cases is not intersubjective. Since words may encode different concepts for different people and the concepts encoded do not have to be the concepts conveyed, and what in fact is conveyed to a large extent depends on what is relevant to a given individual, intersubjectivity of concepts meaning (that is their denotation and truth-conditional content constructed by inference rules of their logical entries) should not be expected. Consequently, the explicit content of an utterance established by our individual intuitions alone (according to the availability principle) does not have to be intersubjective, either. If so, the nature of explicitness of explicatures meaning, which is not intersubjective, remains unclear.

1. Context: John, Peter and Mary are friends. They know one another very well. John and Peter consider Mary beautiful, adorable and desirable. John says to Peter in Mary’s absence.

John: Mary is a princess\*

Here, the word “princess”, being an open-class item and encoding a full-fledged atomic concept PRINCESS as in (1), cannot point to this lexicalized atomic concept (whose meaning is its denotation [female royal family member]) because this interpretation would not be relevant to John and Peter.

Since the concepts encoded by words do not have to be the concepts conveyed, the word “princess” may point to a related ad-hoc concept PRINCESS\*, which it does not encode but which it conveys. Such conveyed ad-hoc concepts are pragmatically derived, non-lexicalized and possibly ineffable. They may be retrieved from interlocutors’ memory or constructed by them in a given situation.

In the context provided, the ad-hoc concept PRINCESS\* is shared by John and Peter and it is retrieved from their memory. In this sense, the concept PRINCESS\* is not ad-hoc because it has become conventionalized and stable for the interlocutors and is not occasion specific. The meaning of PRINCESS\* is its denotation, which, according to RT, is to be a narrowed and/or broadened denotation of the concept PRINCESS (from example (1)). Narrowing the denotation of PRINCESS, that is [female royal family member], would possibly result in [beautiful adorable desirable female royal family member], which, if broadened, may give [beautiful adorable desirable female], thus becoming the meaning of the concept PRINCESS\*.

It is an open question whether the concept PRINCESS\* can have its meaning established by truth-conditional content constitutive inference rules. If we assume that such firm, stabilized ad-hoc concepts have logical entries in interlocutors’ memory, the answer should be affirmative but for one reservation. How would the entry be accessed by the users, that is what entity would point to the relevant addresses in memory? If it is the word “princess” serving as such a pointer,[[12]](#footnote-12) then the concept PRINCESS\* is not ad-hoc not only because it is stabilized and retrievable from the users’ memory but also because it is as if lexicalized by the homonymous word “princess”. Consequently, recovery of the explicit, truth-conditional content of PRINCESS\* is analogous to the recovery of the content of PRINCESS from example (1). However, in example (2), the explicit content of PRINCESS\* would be explicit according to the availability principle only to John and Peter but not to any eavesdropper not sharing with them the same contextual premises. Whichever way we look at it, PRINCESS\* is not an ad-hoc concept because, though being a concept (“enduring elementary mental structure”, see the previous section) it is not occasion specific, that is it is not ad-hoc.

1. Context: John and Peter are acquaintances. Peter has never met Jack. John hadn’t talked about him with Peter.

John: Jack is a princess\*\*

As in example (2), the word “princess” cannot point to the lexicalized atomic concept PRINCESS. The meaning of PRINCESS is its denotation [female royal family member]. This denotation would surface in the explicature of John’s utterance as *Jack is a female royal family member*, which would not be relevant to John or Peter. The word “princess” must point to an ad-hoc concept PRINCESS\*\* or even to two ad-hoc concepts PRINCESS\*\*¹ (for John) and PRINCESS\*\*² (for Peter). None of them would be encoded by the word. Since any word can be used to convey another concept from the one the word encodes, its occurrence in an utterance may serve as a pointer to a concept somehow involved in the speaker’s meaning. In example (3), for lack of contextual premises, there is no way to determine the meaning (that is the denotation or truth-conditional content constitutive inference rules) of the concept(s) PRINCESS\*\*1 and/or 2. PRINCESS\*\*1 and/or 2 are truly occasion specific and thus ad-hoc but, being so, they are not stable and consequently they are not concepts by the RT definition of concept. In RT, such ephemeral representations of particulars are not concepts. Not being concepts, they cannot add to the truth-conditional explicit content of the utterances in which they appear.[[13]](#footnote-13) Such entities as PRINCESS\*\*1 and/or 2, though ad-hoc, are not ad-hoc concepts. Their denotations are not determinable via retrieval from memory or constructible for lack of contextual premises.

RT account of concepts, word-concept mappings and the resulting explicatures, used here in the analysis of three artificially constructed examples to summarize its predictions and capacities, raises some doubts connected with the theoretical grounding of ad-hoc concepts, linguistically encoded meaning and explicit content within the theory.

In the case of **ad-hoc concepts**, the reservations concern their definition, nature and meaning. Ad-hoc concepts are pragmatically derived, generally ineffable and non-lexicalized. Their function is to help interlocutors recover what we have in mind on a given occasion.

The name “ad-hoc concept” suggests that the discussed entities are concepts, that is they are stable mental structures, and that they are ad-hoc, that is occasion specific. It turns out that on the one hand, they do not have to be concepts (example (3)), being non-conceptual, ephemeral representations of particulars and, on the other hand, they do not have to be ad-hoc (example (2)). In fact, when they are concepts, by the RT understanding, they have to be stable, so they cannot be ad-hoc, and to be ad-hoc they cannot be concepts. What is called ad-hoc concepts in RT are either not concepts but ad-hoc or they are concepts but not ad-hoc. In either case, they are not ad-hoc concepts. The intermediate cases would be ad-hoc non-concepts on their way of conventionalization into concepts. Literally speaking, there are no such entities as ad-hoc concepts in RT, in which the term is an oxymoron.

Naturally, we may treat the term “ad-hoc concept” as a label for a phenomenon, but then the phenomenon (the entity pointed to by the term) needs further explication. The nature of entities so labeled is not unified. Some ad-hoc concepts are retrieved from memory (example (2)) and some are constructed on a given occasion (example (3)) with retrieval and construction being two distinct cognitive processes. One might expect two distinct cognitive processes to have different outcomes, that is to result in different types of entities.

The mental status of ad-hoc concepts is not unified either. By the assumptions of RT, it ranges from firm presence in the interlocutors’ cognitive system (example (2)) to entirely ad-hoc, non-conceptual representations (example (3)), with intermediate cases falling somewhere in between.

The theoretical status of ad-hoc concepts in RT is unclear, because the assumptions of the theory do not provide a common denominator for them. Equally unclear is the RT interpretation of their meaning and its contribution to the truth-conditional explicit content of an utterance.

According to RT assumptions, intended senses of ad-hoc concepts are inferred on the basis of encoded content and contextual information. What has meaning are mental concepts or addresses in memory. Their content or semantics are their denotations. These denotations (through concepts or addresses in memory) may be part of explicit meaning (truth-conditional explicatures).

The meaning of an ad-hoc concept is its denotation which is a modified denotation of the concept encoded by a word which serves as a pointer to it. The ad-hoc concept’s denotation arrived at in this way is a subset and/or a superset of a denotation of the meaning lexically encoded by the word activating it (see the analysis of example (2)). This reasoning applies to cases of ad-hoc concepts, such as PRINCESS\*, which are stable and retrievable from memory. Being relatively stable and retrievable from interlocutors’ memory, such concepts have determinable denotations constituting their meaning. Such mental concepts may have logical entries (addresses in memory) potentially contributing to the explicit, truth-conditional content of explicatures. Some questions arise here though. Assuming the atomic nature of mental concepts in RT, how can their denotations be modified otherwise than by creating them anew as meaning of new mental concepts that just happen to have their denotation related to the denotation of the originally encoded concept (PRINCESS in example (1)). The second question is how can this new denotation be accessed intersubjectively by the interlocutors, if the word serving as a pointer to it may potentially convey indefinitely many related concepts guided by the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure. What “related” means here if the concepts involved are atomic and what happens with the concept originally encoded by the word during the process of accessing via this word new ad-hoc concepts?

The situation is different in the case of example (3). The denotation of the ad-hoc concept PRINCESS\*\*, if determinable at all, does not have to be related to the denotation of lexically encoded concept (PRINCESS in example (1)) by the word activating it (“princess”). If non-lexicalized, ephemeral, non-conceptual representations are involved in utterance interpretation, they cannot have logical entries or determined denotations and, thus, they cannot add to the truth-conditional content of explicatures. Such ad-hoc concepts cannot be part of explicit meaning in spite of what Carston claims (see footnote 13) because RT does not offer any mechanism grounding truth-conditions in ephemeral representations of particulars which have no logical entries or determinable denotation. What the theory allows is that “H takes their conceptual potential to the grounding of intended implicatures [not explicatures EM] of the utterance” (Carston 2010, 15).

Denotationally, there is no common denominator between ad-hoc concepts like PRINCESS\* (stable concepts retrievable from memory as in example (2)) and those like PRINCESS\*\* (ephemeral, constructible, non-conceptual as in example (3)). In the first case, the denotation of the ad-hoc concept is related to the denotation of the concept (PRINCESS) encoded by the word “princess” via narrowing and/or broadening, while in the second case the denotation of the ad-hoc concept is not determinable or potentially not related to the denotation of the encoded concept at all.

The prominent presence of ad-hoc concepts in relevance theory requires further clarifications of or answers to the following: a) the status of ephemeral representations of particulars, b) the status of complex conceptual structures, c) what is the difference and relation between words encoding concepts and conveying/pointing to them, d) how exactly are ad-hoc concepts (both those stable and retrievable from memory as in example (2) and ephemeral as in example (3)) accessed via words which at the same time encode different concepts, e) is the search for relevance (triggered by the cognitive and communicative principles of relevance and following the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure) enough to secure even minimal intersubjectivity of ad-hoc concepts interpretation in the process of utterance interpretation? Attempts to answer those questions take us to relevance-theoretic interpretation of **linguistically encoded meaning**.

As recalled in the previous section, words may encode (atomic) concepts, as for C in example (1) or, more precisely, they map onto addresses in memory which are a basic element of the language of thought. The addresses provide the concept’s denotation, which is its (truth-conditional) content or semantics, inherited by the word itself.

Complications start with the claims that a) words do not have to encode the same concept for all users (example (1)), b) concepts encoded by words may have their denotation (semantics) modified in the process of communication (example (2)), c) concepts encoded by words do not have to be the ones communicated because, apart from the concepts they encode, words may be used to convey indefinitely many other concepts (example (3)), d) concepts communicated have to be contextually worked out (examples (1), (2), (3)).

The difference between words encoding concepts and conveying them in RT seems to be the difference between linguistic meaning (semantics) and pragmatic meaning (pragmatics), with only the former being linguistically encoded. If so, then the question is what happens with the concept encoded by a word when the word points to another concept in online comprehension process (for example, what happens with the concept PRINCESS, encoded by the word “princess” in example (1) when this word points to the concept PRINCESS\* in example (2)). Does it disappear from the explicature in example (2)? Is it not accessed at all? Is it replaced by PRINCESS\* or is a new address, new file, new connection created in (2)?

Accepting the difference between encoding concepts (example (1)) and conveying/communicating them (examples (2) and (3)) to be the difference between lexical semantic meaning and lexical pragmatic meaning, would we also agree that the difference consists in the degree of conventionality/stability of the word-concept mapping and its intersubjectivity or its lack? Would it be legitimate to claim that there is a difference between encoding and conveying if in either case intersubjectivity is missing and the level of conventionality of word-concept mapping attained by each interlocutor cannot be determined?

If such a claim cannot be considered justified, would the search for relevance guiding the comprehension process be a sufficient tool to limit the number of indefinitely many related concepts to which the word may point? If a public word does not have to encode the same concept for all successful users, then how similar the retrieved concepts must be to secure intersubjectivity of communication and which assumptions of the theory require this similarity? The search for relevance is not enough because the speaker and hearer may find different meanings relevant. With the RT growing relaxation of the connection between words and concepts, the status of linguistically encoded meaning changes into the direction of syntax – pragmatics distinction from the original syntax – semantics – pragmatics division. This leads to the final question about the nature of **explicit content** in RT.[[14]](#footnote-14)

According to RT assumptions, what is communicated by an utterance is explicit if it is an explicature, that is if it is a development of logical form encoded by the utterance:

The hearer takes the conceptual structure constructed by linguistic decoding (logical form), […] he enriches this on the explicit level and compliments it at the implicit level (guided by the cognitive principle of relevance) (Sperber and Wilson 2012, 39).

Online processing of logical form development consists of disambiguation, assignment of reference to indexicals, filling in missing constituents and free enrichment including pragmatic adjustment of encoded meaning. Deriving explicit content (explicature) as a result of logical form development may be called its operational definition. It hinges on the interpretation of logical form (conceptual structure constructed by linguistic decoding), the nature of concepts it contains and the process of free enrichment. According to RT assumptions, ad-hoc concepts construction or retrieval are free enrichment processes.

In the case of constructed, occasion specific ad-hoc concepts (example (3)), it is claimed here that they cannot be part of explicit content because their denotation is not determinable and explicit truth-conditional meaning constitutive inference rules are not accessible for lack of logical entries in such concepts. Thus, occasion specific constructed ad-hoc concepts are not part of explicit meaning by the RT’s own assumptions.

Stable ad-hoc concepts retrieved from interlocutors’ memory, which have logical entries, may be part of explicit content. Yet, as the analysis of example (2) shows, they are not intersubjective but individual-relative. So, contrary to what is claimed in RT, explicatures, that is explicit content of utterances, in the first case do not contain such ad-hoc concepts’ meaning and in the latter, although the utterance explicit content may have such concepts’ meaning as its part, this meaning is not intersubjective but individual-relative.

Equally individual-relative turns out to be the meaning of linguistically encoded concepts because it undergoes subjective pragmatic modifications in the process of explicature derivation, according to RT assumptions. For subjective meaning to be legitimately called explicit, the nature of such explicitness should be further explicated in RT. Although the theory does not presuppose or require interpersonal shareability or publicity of concepts, it does assume some mutual understanding, that is some kind of intersubjectivity, which should be a property of explicit content, theoretically described in the framework.

Intersubjectivity of explicit content in RT does not follow from the other criterion of utterance meaning being explicit, namely the availability principle, either. According to this principle, the meaning communicated by an utterance is explicit if an individual’s intuitions accept it as such.[[15]](#footnote-15) Since such intuitions are subjective or speaker or hearer-relative, what the speaker considers explicit may differ from what the hearer believes to be so (Mioduszewska 2004). There seems to be no way of ruling out the situation in which what by RT assumptions is a strong implicature would be accepted as explicit content by interlocutors’ intuitions. In either case, explicit content as determined by the availability principle is not intersubjective.[[16]](#footnote-16)

It does not follow, however, that there are no limits to utterance meaning subjectivity. The individual speaker-relative and hearer-relative search for relevance, stemming from the cognitive and communicative principles of relevance and relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure is restricted in its subjectivity by sharing species-conditioned biological endowment,[[17]](#footnote-17) some common ground of experience and mutual cognitive environment. But intersubjectivity resulting from these factors does not follow from the assumptions of the relevance theory. RT does not enforce intersubjectivity of explicit content. There is no principle (comparable to Grice’s cooperative principle) putting limits to potential utterance meaning interpretation other than relevance of an input to an individual. Nothing in RT blocks the possibility that what is relevant for the speaker need not be relevant for the hearer.

Such limits, both to relatedness of concepts (since a word may point to indefinitely many related concepts) and to shareability of explicit content could be provided by using the concept of analogy as understood by Hofstadter and Sander (2013).

# Conclusions

Relevance theorists are aware of many theoretical problems connected with the introduction of ad-hoc concepts into the theory. As Carston (2010, 20) writes:

[…] there are many open questions about the nature of ad-hoc concepts and the role they play in the ostensive communication, and one might even question whether there really are such entities.

If their existence is assumed, their nature in the mind, the processes of constructing and accessing them as well as of their conventionalization and losing their ad-hoc status should be clarified. Ad-hoc concepts contribution to utterance meaning is also problematic (Carston 2010, 20):

Do the various pragmatic modulations of word meaning (ad-hoc concepts) contribute to explicature (often equated with the truth-conditional content of the utterance) as claimed […] in Relevance Theory, or are they, following a more Gricean approach, merely implicated (implicitly communicated non-truth-conditional)?

Claiming their contribution to the truth-conditional content of utterances leads to problems with stability of linguistically encoded meaning and intersubjectivity of explicit content.

In spite of such serious doubts and reservations connected with ad-hoc concepts, they keep gaining prominence in RT, becoming one of its leading findings.

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1. “The meaning encoded in the linguistic expression type that a speaker utters inevitably underdetermines the content that the communicator [conveys], not only her implicatures but also the propositional content she communicates explicitly (‘explicature’)” (Carston 2010, 4; 2009; 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Concept is a “relatively stable information from long-term memory, enduring mental structure which can function as words meaning” (Carston 2010, 22 note 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Those stable, non-lexicalized concepts regularly employed in our thinking are […] the same in kind as lexical concepts. They are atomic and […] come with logical and encyclopedic entries alike” (Carston 2010, 14). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The distinction between logical and encyclopedic entries is psychological in nature (Carston 2010, 23 note 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In the way in which meaning postulates are truth-conditional content constitutive. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “[…] even in their pre-conceptual manifestation, they can make a contribution to structured propositional states, specifically explicatures […]” (Carston 2010, 15). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The interpretation of concepts in RT is well grounded in the overall discussion on their nature, with there still being more questions than answers (Carston 2010; Sperber and Wilson 1998/2012 and more): Are concepts atomic, decompositional or definitional? Are there logical and/or encyclopedic entries related to them? How stable and/or long-lasting are they as components of our thinking apparatus? What is the nature of the shift from (atomic) lexical concepts to (atomic) ad-hoc concepts? What is the nature of the ad-hoc concepts in the mind? How are ad-hoc concepts constructed or accessed in comprehension? How can they be progressively conventionalized and lose their ad-hoc state? [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The availability principle has it that “in deciding whether a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning is part of what is said, we should always try to preserve our pre-theoretic intuitions on the matter” (Carston and Hall 2011, 14). Other criteria such as minimal complete proposition, linguistic directionality principle, functional independence principle, scope of logical apparatus test have been shown to be inadequate (see, among others, Mioduszewska 2002) and accepted as such by relevance theorists (Carston and Hall 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Relevance theorists do not elaborate on the exact operational steps involved in the rules application. Endorsing the atomic nature of concepts makes their decomposition inadmissible. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The relation between the concept’s denotation and the rules constituting its meaning is not clearly specified. Relevance theoretic interpretation of denotation understood as a technical notion of the theory is assumed rather than explicated. Square brackets are used here as an ad-hoc convention to mark the content of denotation. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Determining the relevance of an input to an individual is guided by the cognitive and communicative principles of relevance and relevance theoretic comprehension procedure (Sperber and Wilson 1986/95; Wilson and Sperber 2004). Relevance of an input is defined as: (a) other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time; (b) other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time (Wilson and Sperber 2004, 609). Presumption of optimal relevance: (a) the ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s processing effort; (b) it is the most relevant one compatible with communicator’s abilities and preferences (Wilson and Sperber 2004, 612). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The question then arises (to be discussed later) what stops the word “princess” from (simultaneously?) pointing to the concept it encodes, that is PRINCESS. It is not clear whether RT postulated online processing and mutual pragmatic adjustment would suffice to stop its surfacing for John and Peter, at the same time favor it in the eavesdropper’s understanding. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Carston’s (2010, 15) claim to the contrary ”[...] even in their pre-conceptual manifestation, they can make a contribution to structured propositional states, specifically explicatures […]” will be discussed later in the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The discussion on the explicit/implicit meaning distinction in RT (and in pragmatics in general) has continued for over two decades now, resulting in extensive literature and reaching no definite conclusion. What is of interest here is the theory-internal interpretation of this distinction and the interplay of various components of explicatures, as predicted by the theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Circularity of the availability principle shows in the following reasoning: utterance meaning is explicit if it is accepted as such by language users; language users accept utterance meaning as explicit if it is explicit. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Accepting the RT assumptions that explicit/implicit meaning distinction is a matter of degree (and so is effability of thoughts or mental states) does not allow us to abandon it altogether, if not for any other reason than to save the relevance theory from substantial reconstruction. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In RT modular view of mind, relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure constitutes a sub-module of the mind reading capacity (Wilson and Sperber 2004, 623-625). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)