

Pragmatics Homework #2: Indirect speech acts and implicature

Exam Number B018520

February 12, 2015

1. The temporal use of “and” as demonstrated in (i) appears to be a case of generalized conversational implicature. This judgment stems from my observations that the temporal reading of “and” does not appear to be dependent on a specific given context (and ergo not an instance of particularized conversational implicature), nor is this reading of “and” difficult to cancel (and ergo not an instance of conventional implicature).

As evidence for the former, consider the following sentence:

Add the chopped vegetables and bring the broth to a boil.

Without the need for a specific context (e.g. “Perform these steps in the exact order I say”), in my evaluation the natural reading of this sentence carries the implicature that the chopped vegetables should first be added (to, presumably, a soup of some kind), after which point the broth should be brought to a boil. Conversely, someone performing these actions the other way around (first bringing the broth to a boil, then adding vegetables) would seem to have severely misapprehended the instructions.

It might be argued that there is a natural temporal relationship between adding vegetables to a dish and bringing the dish to a boil, in that in many common recipes the dish is brought to a boil after all or nearly all ingredients have been added. To further support the claim that the temporal use of “and” is not particularized, we can consider the following two discourses featuring events with no immediate causal relation:

Alice: I talked to Mallory briefly, and went to see the movie.

Bob: # Did you tell her what you thought of it?

Alice: I went to see the movie, and talked to Mallory briefly.

Bob: # I hope she didn’t spoil anything for you!

In my evaluation, in both these contexts Bob seems to have misinterpreted the implied order of events, which has been established without the need for a particular context outside Alice’s utterances. By contrast, we can add a context which dispels the temporal reading of “and”, a hallmark of generalized conversational implicatures:

Alice: I bumped into Mallory the other day! I went to see the movie, and talked to her briefly.

Bob: Oh, was she going to see it as well?

Alice: Yes, we ended up sitting together.

As mentioned previously, the temporal use of “and” can also be canceled with ease, providing evidence against its being a conventional implicature. Consider the following example:

He’ll probably move away, and we’ll never see him again. Although, we might never see him again even before he moves away!

In this case, the implicit temporal relationship between the person moving away and never being seen is negated without trouble. This can likewise be demonstrated in the following example:

Add the chopped vegetables and bring the broth to a boil, although not necessarily in this order.