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F16 Semantics Midterm
November 28, 2016
Worked with Sadhwi

1. Gricean reasoning

[a]

The implicature in B's utterance is that B does not have a siamese. B's utterance does not directly answer A's question, thereby violating the maxim of relevance. But if we follow the general assumption that participants would be obeying the conversational principles, we expect B's utterance to be somehow relevant to answering A's question. There are two possible cases: B either has a siamese or not. If B indeed has a siamese, saying "I have a cat" would be violating the maxim of quantity, since it is less restrictive than saying that B has a siamese. Technically B's utterance would not be false if B had a siamese, but by not specifically saying that we can infer that B's intention was to convey that s/he has a cat but it is not a siamese.

Good

14/15

B might have chosen to respond this way to keep the conversation going by providing extra information that might be an interest to A or might be relevant to the current discourse. Since siamese is a type of cat, B might have inferred that cats might be a topic that A is willing to talk about. Therefore, B might have chosen this response over B' that straightforwardly says "No", which is directly relevant but would probably end the current discourse.

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Should also do a cancellation test to show that this is an implicature not an entailment 0/3

2. Possessives

See Lambda Notebook

3. Expressive adjectives

[a]

These epithets add information about the speaker's attitude towards the noun they appear with in the DP (i.e., the speaker has a negative feeling towards the noun). The direction (and possibly the degree) of the speaker attitude seems to interact with prosody; compare (1) My fucking sister won the Nobel prize. vs (2) My fucking *sister* won the Nobel prize. The former seems to carry the negativity but the epithet in the latter seems to be used more for emphasis than for expressing negativity, similar to the adverbial use of fucking as an intensifier (e.g., The show was fucking amazing).

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[b]

The negative attitude of the speaker towards the noun in DP expressed by epithets (in the given sentence, that the speaker feels negatively about the computer) seem to project from embeddings:

- Alfonso didn't break the damn computer.

- Did Alfonso break the damn computer?

- Break the damn computer!

$\rightarrow$ For all of the above, the speaker feels negative about the computer

However, this contribution does not seem to fit the typical descriptions of presuppositions or conversational implicatures, since it is not cancellable regardless of embedding:

- #Alfonso broke the damn computer, but I love that computer (but I don't think negatively of that computer).

- #Alfonso didn't break that computer, but I love that computer (but I don't think negatively of that computer).

Considering that this contribution due to the use of epithets follows from lexical meanings of the words themselves, it seems to fit the description of "conventional implicatures" from Potts (2005). Since they are independent of what is actually said, they are not equivalent to at-issue entailments.

Potts, C. (2005). The logic of conventional implicatures. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[c]

See Lambda Notebook

[d]

The set of expressive adjectives in a language (*damn, fucking, stupid, amazing, brilliant, wonderful,* etc.) seems to express a gradation of speaker attitudes, ranging from very negative to very positive, although the intuition about where exactly to place each adjective on this spectrum and how they would be ordered may vary. We could try to capture this by introducing a numerical scale, somewhat similar to what we did when defining the meanings of quantifiers such as every and most. For instance, the CI(x) I introduced in 3[c] can be replaced by a speaker attitude scale value function (SA) that returns a value between -1 to 1, where -1 is the most negative and 1 is the most positive. With this idea, the epithets *damn* and *amazing* could have a meaning like the following, supposing that it has a value of -0.4 and 0.6, respectively:

$$[\![\text{damn}]\!]_{\langle\langle e,t\rangle,\langle e,t\rangle\rangle} = \lambda f_{\langle e,t\rangle} . \lambda x_e . (f_{\langle e,t\rangle}(x_e) \wedge (SA(x_e) = -0.4))$$
$$[\![\text{amazing}]\!]_{\langle\langle e,t\rangle,\langle e,t\rangle\rangle} = \lambda f_{\langle e,t\rangle} . \lambda x_e . (f_{\langle e,t\rangle}(x_e) \wedge (SA(x_e) = 0.6))$$