Inquisitive pragmatics
Ignorance, possibility and exhaustivity

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Structure

Pragmatics
(Grice, 1975)

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- ▸ The utterance of a sentence in context may convey more than the sentence's literal meaning.
- ▸ The context includes assumptions about the dialogue participants' behaviour, in particular that they behave *cooperatively*, as captured by a set of maxims:
  - ▸ **Quality:** Say only what you believe to be true.
  - ▸ **Relation:** Say only what you believe to be relevant.
  - ▸ **Quantity:** Be just as informative as required for the goal of the conversation.
  - ▸ **Manner:** Be concise, clear, etcetera.

Grice (1975) on the maxim of Relation

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Though the maxim itself is terse, it's formulation conceals a number of problems that exercise me a good deal: questions about what different kinds and focuses of relevance there may be, how these shift in the course of a talk exchange, how to allow for the fact that subjects of conversation are legitimately changed, and so on.

Ignorance and possibility implicatures

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Ignorance and possibility implicatures
Classical explanation

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6. She must believe that John or Mary came. (Quality)

7. Hence, she must consider it possible that Mary came.
   → Possibility

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3. Hence, that *John came* would be relevant too. ??
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- What are the relevant alternatives?
  - Semantically there is nothing special about a disjunct.
  - A syntactic explanation would not generalize.

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Classical explanation

1. The speaker said *'One of John and Mary came'*.
2. Hence, that *one of John and Mary came* is relevant.
3. Hence, that *John came* would be relevant too. ??
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   she would have conveyed that instead
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Ignorance and possibility implicatures

Classical explanation

1. The speaker said *'Maybe John came'*.
2. Hence, that *maybe John came* is relevant.
3. Hence, that *certainly John came* would be relevant too. ??
4. Had the speaker believed that *certainly John came*, she would have conveyed that instead
5. Hence she must not believe that *certainly John came*.

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Classical explanation

1. The speaker said *'Most people came'*.
2. Hence, that *most people came* is relevant.
3. Hence, that *all people came* would be relevant too. ??
4. Had the speaker believed that *all people came*,
   she would have conveyed that instead
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Classical explanation

1. The speaker said *'Five people came'*.
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3. Hence, that *six people came* would be relevant too. ??
4. Had the speaker believed that *six people came*,
   she would have conveyed that instead
5. Hence she must not believe that *six people came*.

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1. The speaker said *'It's warm'*.
2. Hence, that *it is warm* is relevant.
3. Hence, that *it were hot* would be relevant too. ??
4. Had the speaker believed that *it was hot*,
   she would have conveyed that instead
5. Hence she must not believe that *it was hot*.

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  - ‣ **Quantity**: Be just as informative as required for the goal of the conversation.

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However:

- ‣ This seems too rigid: quiz contexts do require informative sincerity, but not inquisitive and attentive.

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However:

- ▸ This seems too rigid: quiz contexts do require informative sincerity, but not inquisitive and attentive.
- ▸ And also: what a waste!

Aims of this talk

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Aim 1
To maintain the spirit of the classical explanation, using the richness of unrestricted inquisitive semantics to solve the two problems (characterizing relevance and goal).

Exhaustivity implicatures

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- ‣ This holds for 'old' accounts of utterances in isolation, as well as newer accounts of responses to a question (Schulz and Van Rooij 2004, Spector 2007).
- ‣ And the new accounts are quite elaborate (but do not take my word for it).

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Aim 2
To give a new account of exhaustivity implicatures, in particular those of responses to an initiative.

Structure

Framework: unrestricted inquisitive semantics

Whiteboard intermezzo!

Structure

Relevant alternatives

Challenge

How to characterise which proposals may take the place of X in:

4. 'Had the speaker believed X, she should have said so.'

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Assumed division of labour

- The goal is (typically) to settle a proposal in a most informative way.
- Relevance is closed under entailment.

Characterising the goal

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In the context there is a proposal under discussion, the *PUD*.

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Default assumption
The *PUD* is the most recently made proposal

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The *PUD*, with all proposals that entail it, are the only relevant proposals.

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- ‣ **Relation**: Only say what you believe to be relevant.

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Warning: This is unrestricted entailment!

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New inquisitive pragmatics account

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4. Hence, she must not believe that John came. → ignorance

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1. The speaker said '*John or Mary came*'.
2. The *PUD* must contain the possibilities that John came, and that Mary came. (Relation, Quantity)
3. Had the speaker known that John came, she could have settled it more strongly. (Quantity)
4. Hence, she must not believe that John came. → ignorance
5. But she must believe that John or Mary came. (Quality)

Ignorance and possibility implicatures

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5. But she must believe that John or Mary came. (Quality)
6. Hence she must consider it possible that Mary came. → possibility

Structure

Attentive 'might'

(Ciardelli, Groenendijk & Roelofsen, 2009, 2010)

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Idea:

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(2) a. John might be in London or he might be in Paris
    b. John might be in London and he might be in Paris

(3) a. John might speak Russian or he might speak French
    b. John might speak Russian and he might speak French

Purely attentive 'might'

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(4) a. Teacher: Next one: the streets are wet. Has it been raining?
   b. Student: Well, if the streets are wet, it must have been raining.
   c. Teacher: Ah, but the neighbour might have been washing his car.
   d. Student: The neighbour doesn't have a car!
   e. Teacher: Very good! Another one correct.

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Observation

For disjunction, the first two explanations are unavailable.

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- For existentials, these provide an *escape hatches* to block ignorance implicatures.

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Prediction
Existentials trigger ignorance implicatures only when the ability and granularity escape hatches are ruled out.

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1. The speaker said '*One of John and Bob came to me*'.
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Sneak preview: Scalar modifiers

(7) a. At least three boys came
   b. More than two boys came

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Observation

Superlative modifiers mention a possibility explicitly, while comparative modifiers do not.

Structure

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- ‣ The exhaustivity of *responses* to questions is much more robust:

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- ‣ So can we do without the competence assumption in this case?

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(Westera 2012)

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Exhaustivity and unrestrictedness

If compliance and entailment are the same order, no exhaustivity is needed.

Exhaustivity and focus

(10)   a.   John or Mary came to the party.

         b.   JOHN ↑ or MARY ↓ came to the party.

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Question-answer congruence of focus (Rooth, 1996)

The position of focus in an answer corresponds to the questioned position in a wh-question, or the disjuncts in an alternative question.

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A focused constituent presupposes a question under discussion, the Contextual Question, to which it claims to be an exhaustive answer.

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- ‣ If 'implicates', we have a good story:
    - ‣ Responses to the *PUD* implicate exhaustivity.
    - ‣ Focus serves the purpose only of highlighting that it is a response to the *PUD*, ensuring the implicatures are recognised.

Some examples

(11) Who came to the party?

Some examples

On the whiteboard!

(11) Who came to the party?
    a. JOHN came to the party ↓.

Some examples

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Sneak preview: Scalar modifiers

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Scalar modifiers 'at least', 'more than', etc., likewise presuppose a
question(/proposal) under discussion.

Structure

Mention-some questions

▸ Responses to wh-questions can be interpreted exhaustively or non-exhaustively.

▸ Questions that typically do not trigger exhaustivity are called 'mention-some' questions.

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E.g., (Schulz and Van Rooij, 2005)

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(12) A: Where can I buy an Italian newspaper?
B: In the little shop around the corner
$\not\rightarrow$ not anywhere else

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Prediction
There exist no mention-some disjunctions.

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   B: Yes, my father will be home.
   $\not\rightarrow$ my mother will not be home.

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(15) A: Is your father or mother home?
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- Unrestricted inquisitive semantics enables us to capture *relevant alternatives*, as those that entail the *PUD* and provide just enough information to maximally strongly resolve it.
- We used these in deriving:
  - ignorance implicatures and possibility implicatures, without inquisitive/attentive sincerity;
  - exhaustivity implicatures of a response, without competence assumption.
- We have looked at related topics: 'might', granularity, focus and mention-some questions.