

The landscape of non-at-issue meaning: case studies

One hazard to theorists exploring the semantics/pragmatics borderland is sorting out the categories of non-at issue aspects of meaning: how many categories are needed, and what are the relevant linguistic diagnostics. One category (Horn 2002, 2009) is that of assertorically inert entailments—material that is semantically entailed and hence truth-conditionally relevant but is not pragmatically at issue and as a result is transparent to linguistic diagnostics. Examples are the prejacent of *only XP* or the polar component of *barely VP*, which are veridical but fail to block NPIs (*Only Robin has ever been to Ghent; You barely lift a finger to help anyone*).

Other phenomena require different approaches. While the multidimensional approach to meaning developed by Kaplan (1998), Bach (1999), and especially Potts (2005, 2007) works well for expressives (including familiar vs. polite 2d person pronominals, honorifics, slurs, and some classes of evidentials), evidence suggests that different approaches are required for non-restrictive relative clauses, which involve secondary assertion, and for adversatives and discourse markers like *but* or *even*, where the contrast or unexpectedness invoked by the use of such particles is encoded meaning which is irrelevant to the truth conditions of the larger sentence; this involves conventional implicature in the classical Fregean and Gricean sense.

I will present two additional cases for conventional implicature: the uniqueness condition on definites (*The towel is dirty*) and the “subject-involvement” condition on personal datives in southern/mountain U.S. English (*He needs him a new shotgun*). The resulting landscape of at-issue and non-at-issue aspects of meanings, while undeniably complex, is motivated by careful attention to the relevant linguistic phenomena.