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Understanding utterances: An introduction to pragmatics. By DIANE
    BLAKEMORE. (Blackwell textbooks in linguistics, 6.) Oxford & Cambridge,
    MA: Blackwell, 1992. Pp. xi, 191. Cloth £37.50, paper £12.95.

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Sperber & Wilson's *Relevance: Communication and cognition* is an ex-
tremely important and thought-provoking book. It presents a comprehensive
theory of communication based on the single principle that when a hearer recog-
nizes an utterance or action as one made with the intention to communicate,
the hearer will presume that a minimal effort will return information that is
worth processing, i.e. that is relevant to the hearer. This theory should be
discussed in any course on pragmatics or communication. The present book,
written by a student of Wilson's, presents this theory and some of the work
done in the framework since the publication of *Relevance* in a textbook format
for beginning students of pragmatics. The book is divided into three parts of
three chapters each. Part 1, 'Fundamentals', outlines the theoretical assump-
tions that underlie the discussion in the rest of the book. In Ch. 1 ('Communica-
tion and the context', 3–23) and Ch. 2 ('Relevance', 24–38) B shows that, for
communication to take place, the hearer must use contextual assumptions both
to recover the meaning of the words of the utterance and to work out the
inferences that result from the addition of the proposition recovered from the
utterance to the contextual assumptions. These contextual assumptions are
not necessarily preexisting, but are created as needed by the hearer. Mutual
knowledge, then, is not a condition for communication, but is the outcome of
it. In making the inferences necessary to understand an utterance, the hearer
will be constrained by the assumption that the speaker is attempting optimal
relevance, i.e. that the speaker will choose a form for the utterance that will
lead the hearer to recover the set of assumptions intended by the speaker with
the minimum necessary processing effort.

B argues in Ch. 3 ('Pragmatics, linguistics and literature', 39–53) that the

semantic properties of utterances do not of themselves produce a complete proposition, but only provide 'blueprints' (logical forms) for the propositions they are meant to express, whereas truth conditions are assigned only to complete propositions developed out of the blueprints using contextual information. Semantics is then limited to the study of these blueprints, while pragmatics studies how the blueprints are developed into complete propositions. The discussion in this chapter assumes a modular view of linguistic competence, but this is not a necessary assumption for Relevance theory. In fact the discussion by Sperber & Wilson (1986:185ff.) of the relationship between the linguistic input module and the central inferential mechanisms in the identification of propositional form could be used to argue against the modular view. They point out that the modular view they accept (that of Fodor 1983) requires that a module be informationally encapsulated, and so without access to general encyclopedic information or the non-domain-specific processes; yet they show that the identification of propositional form must involve contextual information, including general encyclopedic information and inference. Their solution is to suggest that the input module and the central inferential mechanisms interact on a constituent-by-constituent basis, but it is much simpler to abandon the modular view of grammar in favor of a view of grammar as largely relatively motivated (in the Saussurean sense), and a speaker's knowledge of grammar as constructed using the same central inferential mechanisms as those used in interpretation. A second problem with B's discussion of the modular view of grammar is the importance of grammaticality judgments to this view. B states that 'Grammatical well-formedness ... is independent of what we know about the world; if a sentence is ungrammatical, it is ungrammatical in every context' (40). But it has been shown (e.g. in Bolinger 1979 and Nagata 1988) that grammaticality judgments for many sentences differ depending on context. As there is no way we can predict every possible context, there is no way to say that a sentence 'is ungrammatical in every context'.

Part 2 ('Explicature') deals with what is explicitly communicated, while Part 3 ('Implicature') deals with what is implicitly communicated. Ch. 4 ('Explicating and implicating', 57–64) explains the difference between the two; Ch. 5 ('The proposition expressed', 65–90) shows how contextual information and the principle of relevance are used in the assignment of reference, the semantic enrichment of propositions (including generalized conversational implicatures), and the establishment of discourse coherence.

Ch. 6 ('Higher-level explicatures: Attitudes and speech acts', 91–120) argues that there is no need for a separate theory of speech acts. Very often we perform two acts of communication with one utterance, one of which essentially helps the hearer to process the other. The form of the utterance as declarative, imperative, or interrogative alone does not determine the use of the utterance as saying, ordering, or asking, though it can assist in determining the relevance of the utterance.

Whereas in explicature there is a connection between the linguistic properties of the utterance and the proposition the hearer derives from it, in implicature,

which is introduced in Ch. 7 ('Types of implicature', 123–33), there is no such connection. In interpreting the relevance of the explicature, the hearer may be forced to make two types of implicature, one which is the conclusion (an 'implicated conclusion') and the other the contextual assumptions ('implicated assumptions' or 'implicated premises') necessary for deriving the conclusion. The degree to which the hearer is forced to make a particular strong implicature rather than a set of less determinate weak implicatures depends on the degree to which the form of the utterance constrains the hearer in choosing the contextual assumptions necessary to achieve relevance in interpreting the utterance. One way in which the speaker can constrain the interpretation of implicature is the topic of Ch. 8 ('Constraints on implicatures', 134–54). This is the use of discourse connectives such as *so* and *after all* to alert the hearer to the fact that one part of the utterance has a particular relationship to another part, such as providing additional evidence or an explanation.

Utterances that only invoke weak implicatures, such as metaphors, are discussed in Ch. 9 ('Implicatures and style', 155–79) as 'loose uses' of language, in that they only loosely resemble the speaker's thoughts. They are nevertheless representations of the speaker's thoughts, and in some cases they are the optimally relevant way to express those thoughts. In creating an utterance, a speaker must decide what to make explicit and what to make implicit, and this is done on the basis of the speaker's estimation of the hearer's processing abilities and contextual resources. Because of this, parts of an utterance may be produced only to assist the hearer in interpreting the main part of the utterance. The more explicit the utterance, the more constrained the interpretation, and the less responsibility the hearer has in the selection of contextual assumptions and conclusions; the more implicit the utterance, the more responsibility the hearer has in determining the proper interpretation.

While B presents this view of responsibility for interpretation purely in terms of a speaker's choices in creating an utterance in a particular language, it is parallel to Ross's distinction (1982, cited in Huang 1984) between 'hot' and 'cool' languages, based on the degree to which certain anaphoric elements must be made explicit—'hot' languages being those that require explicitness, 'cool' languages being those that do not. Speakers of 'hot' languages can be said to be generally putting less of the responsibility for interpretation on the hearer than speakers of 'cool' languages. This view could be extended to other aspects of the grammar as well, and so a language such as Chinese, which, I have argued (LaPolla 1990, 1993, 1995), is more pragmatically based than, for example, English, could be said to be one that generally assigns much more of the responsibility for interpretation to the hearer. This brings us back to the problem mentioned earlier of determining what is grammatical and what is not, because in a language such as Chinese, where the explicature is often radically underspecified, it is very difficult in many cases to say whether a particular sentence is grammatical or not grammatical—only whether it is interpretable or not in a particular context.

A list of recommended readings and exercises accompanies each chapter.

This book differs from most textbooks, however, in that the exercises are not at the end of the chapter, but instead are worked into the chapters at the points where they would be most relevant.

While the length of Blakemore's book and the frequent repetition of the main points make it useful as a textbook, the discussion of the more concrete issues is rather sketchy. The discussion of reference, for example, does not include much of the detailed work done by Ruth Kempson (e.g. 1988a,b) using Relevance theory. The book does not attempt to deal with all aspects of pragmatics, so if it is used as a text for either a general course on pragmatics or one on Relevance theory, it would need to be supplemented by other introductory texts or readings. In my own teaching of a general pragmatics class, I have relied on Levinson 1983 and Green 1989 as the main texts and have used Sperber & Wilson 1987 to introduce Relevance theory and show how it deals with some of the same phenomena. Blakemore's book will now replace or complement the latter in that course.

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