

Implicature: A golden anniversary tour

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Although Grice rolled out his program for conversational and conventional implicature in his 1967 William James lectures, after first defining (but not labeling) those relations in his “Causal Theory of Perception” (Grice 1961: §3), it was not until the 1970s that linguists began to invoke the role of implicature to provide a fuller picture of the landscape of meaning beyond entailment and presupposition and to account for the distribution of lexical items and meaning change. By the late 1960s, linguists had discovered presupposition (cf. McCawley 1968, Fillmore 1969, Horn 1969, Lakoff 1969, Morgan 1969, Kiparsky & Kiparsky 1970). But “presupposition” has been employed within both linguistic semantics and the philosophy of language to cover a multitude of *Sinns*; as has been periodically pointed out (e.g. Karttunen & Peters 1979, Simons 2001, Karttunen 2016), so-called “presuppositional phenomena” in fact form a disparate and heterogeneous class, many (but not all!) of whose members can be located in the workings of conversational and conventional implicature, as described by Grice (1967) and presaged in earlier work by Mill (1865) and Frege (1918). In particular, the notion of scalar implicature arose from the recognition (Horn 1970, 1972; Chomsky 1970) that presuppositional treatments of the relevant phenomena, including the relation of (1a) to (1b) and the upper-bounded understanding of (2), would be empirically unsatisfactory.

- (1) a. Few arrows hit the target.
b. Some arrows hit the target.
- (2) a. Two of my five children are in elementary school.
b. No more than two of my children are in elementary school.

On hearing (2), “one is entitled to assume that three of my children are not in elementary school, perhaps by virtue of general conditions on discourse of a sort that have been discussed by Paul Grice in his work on ‘conversational implicature’” (Chomsky 1970: §7.1.3). Chomsky goes on to suggest, with some hesitation, that the “presupposition” in (1) should be incorporated in a theory of grammar, while that in (2)—involving “quite another sense” of presupposition, should not be. In any case, he adds, “It would be of some interest to develop sharper analytic criteria in this area.” As I shall try to show, much of the history of theoretical and experimental pragmatics in the 50 years since these words were written can be seen as an attempt to address this challenge.

Selected references: Chomsky, N. (1970). Some empirical issues in the theory of transformational grammar. *Distrib.* by Indiana U. Linguistics Club. Frege, G. (1918) *Thought*. In M. Beaney (ed.), *The Frege Reader*, 325–345. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. Grice, H.P. (1961). The causal theory of perception. *Proc. Arist. Soc.* 35: 121–152. Grice, H.P. (1967). The William James lectures, published in *Studies in the Way of Words*, Harvard U. Press, 1989. Horn, L.R. (1969). A presuppositional analysis of only and even. *CLS* 5, 98–107. Horn, L. (1972) On the semantic properties of logical operators in English. UCLA dissertation. Karttunen, L. (2016). Presupposition: What went wrong. *SALT* 26, 705–731. Kiparsky, P. & C. Kiparsky (1970). *Fact*. In M. Bierwisch & K. Heidolph (eds.), *Progress in Linguistics*, 143–173. Mouton. Morgan, J.L. (1969). On the treatment of presupposition in transformational grammar. *CLS* 5, 167–177. Mill, J.S. (1865). *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy*, 2d ed. Longmans.