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Implicature as a tool for matching addressee expectations in public discourse (politics/press/advertising, with implications for analysis)

Theoretical prerequisites

1. Implicature as a product of violation of conversational maxims in the face of cooperative principle; properties of implicature (conversational, but sometimes also conventional i.e. underlying a specific lexical item (*and, but, etc.*))

- calculability
- non-detachability
- variability
- cancellability

2. Analysis of these properties in real-life discourse corroborates the fuzziness of the distinction between conversational and conventional implicature (cf. Sadock 1994, Levinson 1983 & 2001, etc.)

3. Both conversational and conventional implicature are rhetorical tools in public discourse.

4. **Cancellability** as a property of an extreme rhetorical appeal (for both conversational and conventional implicature)

- negates („cancels”) a previously expressed proposition, e.g. by adding more content
- creates a spectrum of interpretations which binds together the expectations and aspirations of different addressee groups (cf. research in social psychology – the addressee has a natural drive towards generating the most favourable interpretation and thus maintaining *homeostasis*, stability of beliefs – cf. Festinger 1957, Noelle-Neumann 1991, Jowett i O'Donnell 1992, etc.)
- warrants „rhetorical safety” of the speaker

5. In sum: implicature is a viable tool for controlling/monitoring the flow and reception of the message, countering undesirable interpretations, binding attitudes and thus earning credibility (viz. public discourse)

Analysis I

(President Nixon on the White House involvement in the Watergate affair)

No-one presently employed in the White House participated in any way in the break-in at the Democratic National Committee Headquarters

(President Nixon on the White House involvement in the Watergate affair, two weeks later)

I repeat: no-one presently employed in the White House participated in any way in the break-in at the Democratic National Committee Headquarters, nor indeed anyone who has ever worked in the White House

- Function/effect of the original implicature (viz. *presently*): time-buying, the addressee's attention gets distracted, etc.
- (Undersirable) by-effect: implicit act of accusation of the previous administration(s) (must be cancelled in view of the addressee's predispositions)
- Thus, implicature cancellation (viz. *nor indeed anyone...*) and waiving the implicit accusation

Analysis II

(*The Guardian* on the resignation of Margaret Thatcher from her Prime Minister position in November 1990)

(Opening sentence)

For the sake of the country the Prime Minister should stay until the summer [summer 1991]

(Follow-up sentence)

Now is no time for street parties!

- Implicature in the opening sentence: acknowledges the vital role of Margaret Thatcher in the proper functioning of the country
- Implicature in the opening sentence gets cancelled by the content of the follow-up sentence. The cancellation is at the same time a new implicature: „November weather discourages celebrations obviously following Margaret Thatcher's resignation”
- Function of the follow-up implicature: mockery („set him/her up and knock him/her down” strategy for generating sarcastic humour, cf. Billig, etc.)

Analysis III

(a TV commercial)

New Ariel Platinum. Three times more effective.

- spectrum of interpretation = binding attitudes/interpretations of different addressees
- cancellability potential = rhetorical safety of the speaker

(many more examples)

The New Ford GTI. 700% quieter. (unfinished comparison)

Sale. Up to 50% off! (scalar implicature – originally in political discourse, viz. *(programs for) weapons of mass destruction* in the Iraq war, etc.)

etc. etc.

“Chasing implicatures”: A deductive overdetermination of analysis in the discourse of advertising and matching the ‘analytic expectations’

- **Database:** Ogilvy (1964), Leech (1966), Turner and Pearson (1966), Goffman (1976), Williamson (1978), Dyer (1982), Schudson (1984), Vestergaard and Schroeder (1985), Chapman (1986), Lutz (1990), Myers (1994), Goddard (1998).

- **Analytic stance:** an *a priori* claim (claims) about the necessarily manipulative nature of advertisements consisting in a clever use of some standard lexical and textual devices such as ‘weasel words’, ‘unfinished comparisons’, ‘parity claims’, cf. Lutz (1990, opening lines):

Advertisers try to wrap their claims in language that sounds specific and objective, when in fact the language of advertising is anything but [...]

Unfinished comparisons abound in advertising since they create a possibility of filling the claims differently by different addressees [...]

The biggest weasel word used in advertising is ‘help’; once the advertisement starts with ‘help’, it can develop to make whatever (insincere) promise or claim, because ‘help’ qualifies all the follow-up of the sentence [...]

- **Reasons:** the analyst as part of the investigated discourse; exposure to the uniform advertising experience; ‘expert knowledge’ similar to ‘common knowledge’; feeling of ‘analytic safety’ when formulating a functional claim → thus, easiness of developing a function-oriented hypothesis

- **Consequences and hazards:** (notwithstanding the apparent truthfulness of the hypothesis) very limited motivation to corroborate the hypothesis by componential analysis of the linguistic form (accounting for distribution, not interaction, of the macrofunctional cues), or to break down the hypothesis to cover atypical instances (e.g. non-profit advertising) of the principal discourse type

- **2 analytic tracks**, as in a) Goddard (1998) and b) Lutz (1990)

a) Goddard (1998)

Functional (hypo)thesis → data (sometimes atypical) → no thesis (fear of triviality?)

Make no mistake: advertising works [...]. It is not difficult to see that and why advertisers should want to make their texts capture our attention. The whole aim of the copywriters is to get us to register their communication either for purposes of immediate action or to make us more favourably disposed in general terms to the advertised product or service. (Introduction)

Advertising is so familiar to modern readers that it may seem odd to ask what an advertisement is [...]. At the root of the word ‘advertisement’ is the Latin verb ‘advertere’, meaning ‘to turn towards’ [...]. Central to the idea of an advert appears to be the factor of conscious intention behind the text, with the aim of benefiting the originator. (Chapter 1)

One attention-seeking strategy is the startling image, combined with emotionally stirring text. The Benetton clothing company, for example, showed a series of large-scale hoardings which featured real scenes of life and death - a baby being born, covered in blood from the mother’s womb, a man on his deathbed, some of them shockingly coupled with a sequence of universally-appealing, emotion words. (Chapter 2)

Analytic traits: placement of (hypo)thesis claim (cf. Intro) prior to data identification (cf. Ch.1) and data description/analysis(?) (cf. Ch.2). Hypothesis apparently clear, so no thesis backup. Hypothesis apparently plausible, so data description only (visuality), rather than interactional analysis thereof (esp. elements of the lexis, cf. ‘universally-appealing, emotion words’). Later on in Goddard 1998, the data space full of atypical data (non-profit ads)(!), never announced at the initial (hypo)thesis stage (fear of triviality?; fear of ‘mental plagiarism?’).

b) Lutz (1990)

(Series of case-specific, methodologically identical formulae, actually exemplification chunks rather than analyses proper):

Functional (hypo)thesis (ultra-clear, technique-specific) → data (case-specific) → “thesis” (mere repetition of hypothesis, little alteration or updating, could well be skipped, cf. Goddard 1998)

HYPOTHESIS

One of the most powerful weasel words is “virtually” [...]. “Virtually” is used in advertising claims that appear to make specific, definite promises when there is no promise. (:88)

DATA

(ctd. from the same example)

In 1971 a federal court rendered its decision on a case brought by a woman who became pregnant while taking birth control pills. She sued the manufacturer for breach of warranty. The woman lost her case. Basing its ruling on a statement in the pamphlet accompanying the pills, which stated that, “When taken

as directed, the tablets offer virtually 100% protection,” the court ruled that there was no warranty, expressed or implied, that the pills were absolutely effective. In its ruling, the court pointed out that, according to Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, “virtually” means “almost entirely” and clearly does not mean “absolute” (Whittington versus Eli Lilly and Company, 333 F. Supp. 98). (:88)

THESIS

(ctd. from the same example)

[...] So whenever one encounters an ad claim that uses the word “virtually”, one should translate that claim into its real meaning, which is “in essence or effect, although not in fact.” (:88)

- **Discourse of advertising analysis: conclusion**

Analysis of the discourse of advertising is liable to the excessive application of “top-down” (deductive) hypothetical claims, to the treatment of hypothesis and thesis in identical or at least similar terms, to the underrepresentation of componential, text-based study of solid data chunks or, alternatively, “redressive” inclusion of data atypical of the hypothesis, and to the selection of data reflecting predominantly cognitive-visual experience.