

# Privileged interactional interpretations

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## Abstract

I have elsewhere argued (Ariel, 2002) against the assumption that we can identify one literal meaning per sentence. Instead, I have suggested that there are (at least) three types of minimal meanings, each differently motivated. One implicit motivation behind the classical definition of literal meaning (Grice's 'what is said') is a wish to capture the core content of sentences. I here examine discourse in order to characterize this type of minimal meaning, which I term 'privileged interactional interpretation'. Privileged interactional interpretations constitute what the speaker is taken to be truthfully or sincerely committed to. Crucially, they also constitute the speaker's relevant contribution to the discourse. I argue that Sperber and Wilson's (1986b/1995) explicatures (linguistic meanings enriched up to full propositionality) are commonly perceived as privileged interactional interpretations, but not invariably so. Interlocutors pick both less enriched meanings (enriched but incomplete propositions, irrelevant unenriched linguistic meanings) and more enriched meanings (particularized and generalized conversational implicatures) as their privileged interactional interpretations. Thus, no single formula of meaning representation (be it linguistic meaning, 'what is said', explicature, implicature, conveyed meaning) can define a privileged interactional interpretation appropriate for all occasions. © 2002 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction: in search of privileged interpretations

All researchers, no matter how different their views are on literal meaning or on the semantics/pragmatics division of labor, have come to recognize that coded meanings constitute only a very small core of the meaning actually conveyed by the

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speaker. It is quite clear that in addition to decoding the speaker's linguistic expressions, we perform a substantial amount of inferencing in order to reach the intended communicated message (See Asher, 1999; Atlas, 1977; Bach, 1994; Barwise and Perry, 1983; Carston, 1998a; Fauconnier, 1997; Récanati, 1989; Sperber and Wilson, 1986b/1995; Travis, 1991; Turner, 1999a).<sup>1</sup> The question that has preoccupied researchers in semantics/pragmatics and literality, is how much inferencing should be allowed for just the semantic (or literal, or minimal) meaning to be generated. Although at one time, researchers assumed that the concept of literal meaning they were after was the linguistic meaning (Katz, 1977), a specification of all the truth conditions of the proposition expressed was included. No arguments were provided as to why the **linguistic** (rather than extralinguistic) meaning (of e.g. *That's nice*) should rely on clearly inferential processes (inferring from context a relevant referent for *that*, e.g. *That* = 'your suggestion to donate money to the women's movement'). It is fair to assume that, at least implicitly, it was presupposed that semantics must represent some basic-level propositional meaning, i.e., that which the speaker is minimally and necessarily committed to. For such a truth-conditional meaning, contextual inferencing had to be introduced (for reference and ambiguity resolutions).

But, how much contextual inferencing should be allowed in generating this basic ('linguistic') meaning? The unanimous decision was 'the less the better'. The amount of inferencing involved in semantic meaning has been maximally restricted because context is 'too unruly'. In the earlier stages, researchers believed that if they restricted context dependencies to reference and ambiguity resolutions they would augment the coded meaning just enough so that the resulting representation would specify all the truth conditions relevant to verifying the proposition expressed by the speaker's utterance. In order to also view these contextual dependencies as effortless and trivial, a list of standard indices was compiled (speaker, addressee, time, place), which was supposed to constitute a given minimal, self-evident, 'ruly' context. Such specifications seemed reasonable given that the definition of understanding was the ability to specify the conditions which have to be met in reality for the content to be true.

However, even after researchers recognized that these minimal contextual specifications are only the tip of the necessary context iceberg for determining truth conditions, many have remained firmly anti-contextualist. Faced with a choice between (1) heavy contextual inferencing for a complete truth-conditional meaning, (2) no contextual inferencing for a purely coded meaning, and (3) 'light' contextual inferencing for a partially truth-conditional meaning, many opted for the third, 'hybrid' option. They could not give up on capturing some truth-conditional meaning, so they couldn't do with just coded meaning (2). But they could not include "too much

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, linguistics and philosophy are not the only disciplines where language is crucial which have come to this realization. Modern translation theories (see Catford, 1965) have shifted from word-for-word to free translations. Judges and philosophers of the law have similarly shifted from only according literal/linguistic meaning a binding status to interpreting language against a context, actually assigning linguistic meaning a less binding status than inferred meanings regarding intentions (see Israeli Deputy to the Supreme Court President A Barak, Civil Appeal #4628/93, 1995 for Israel, and references therein to similar practices in US, England and other countries, and see Bowers, 1989 and Bix, 1998). I thank Ginat Ariel for bringing to my attention the Barak source.

context” either, so they had to divorce their semantic/literal meaning from a full truth-conditional representation (1) (see Berg, 2002). The more important goal was seen as avoiding the assumption of a massive context dependence. The result is that each of the various researchers has allowed for limited (but different) contextual enrichments, which, combined with the coded meanings, are supposed to constitute ‘what is said’, (Bach, 1994; Berg, 1993; Grice, 1975; Récanati, 1989, 2001; Searle, 1978). Each proposed “just the right formula” for combining linguistic meaning with some but not too many contextual enrichments.

The Relevance-theoretic concept of ‘what is said’, the **explicature** (see Carston, 1988, 1998a; Sperber and Wilson, 1986b/1995) is an exception. Sperber and Wilson’s explicature is a development of the linguistic meaning up to a full (truth-conditional) proposition (e.g. *don’t want too much heat there* (Du Bois, 2000, Atoms)-> ‘...too much heat for the balloons to blow up’). Note that while the grammar does not require the speaker to specify what too much heat is for, the addressee needs this information in order to be able to assess the proposition as true/false. Crucially, explicatures heavily rely on inferencing made on the basis of contextual assumptions (guided by the principle of Optimal Relevance). Thus, although explicatures are considered **explicit**, rather than implicit messages (unlike implicatures), their construction involves quite a bit of inferencing. For Relevance theoreticians, then, context reliance is not something to be avoided at all cost. Still, Relevance Theory researchers carefully draw the line between explicatures and implicatures. Implicatures are implicit inferred meanings, and they do not figure in the definition of their basic level meaning, the explicature, even though the process of recovering explicatures and implicatures is virtually the same. So, Relevance Theory also restricts the amount of contextual inferencing, even though significantly less so.

Let us consider an example, to see the differences between the coded meaning, the classical literal meaning, the explicature, and the implicature (the proposition analyzed appears in bold):

- (1) REBECCA: ... The way that your testimony is coming in,  
(PART OMITTED)  
... Because he’s disputing identity in a coup—  
in ... at least one of the cases.  
(PART OMITTED)  
**we are allowed to bring in,**  
**... prior similar conduct.** (Du Bois, 2000, Jury)<sup>2</sup>

The coded (linguistic) meaning is roughly something like (I am leaving non-ambiguous lexical items as is): ‘The speaker plus others are allowed to bring in prior behavior/management which is similar’. Grice’s (1978) ‘what is said’, the literal meaning, is a representation where references have been fixed, and ambiguities

<sup>2</sup> In the examples from Du Bois (2000), the titles refer to a specific transcript. I have somewhat simplified Du Bois’ transcription system, but left intact: New line: new intonation unit; (H): in-breath; (Hx): out-breath; ./...: pauses; @: laughter; []: overlap; X = indecipherable syllable.

resolved. Hence, it will be something like: ‘**The prosecutors** are allowed to bring in prior similar **behavior**’ (where the reference of *we* has been fixed, and *conduct* has been disambiguated). Next, Sperber and Wilson’s (1986b/1995) explicature, which has to be a full propositional form, might be something like: ‘The prosecutors are allowed **by law** to bring in **evidence about** prior behavior **of the accused**, similar **to that in the current case (exposing oneself)**’. Finally, a conversational implicature might be: ‘**You will be testifying** about prior similar conduct’.<sup>3</sup>

The main point I wish to emphasize here is that although differing as to the amount of contextual enrichments they incorporate into their enriched linguistic meaning, each of the researchers above believes that s/he has found just the right amount of enrichment so that the resulting representation constitutes a significant level of meaning on the one hand, but without incorporating ‘too many’ contextual enrichments, on the other hand (see Ariel, 2002).<sup>4</sup> As I have argued in Ariel (in press), there is no single basic level meaning for all purposes. At least three different goals inform the definition, or better, definitions of what is usually termed ‘literal meaning’: capturing (1) the coded (linguistic) meaning, (2) the most salient meaning (psycholinguistically), and (3) the ‘basic content’ meaning taken as binding the speaker. The latter, I suggest, should be context-based, and I propose to call it the **privileged interactional interpretation**. This privileged interactional interpretation is the focus of this paper.

The privileged interactional interpretation is conceptually the most basic level of communicated meaning in actual interactions. This is the meaning which the speaker is seen as minimally and necessarily committed to, i.e. the one by which s/he is judged as telling the truth or being sincere. It is also the meaning which contains the message that the addressee should take to be the relevant contribution made by the speaker. It is the information the addressee would be likely to (dis)agree with when responding with *yeah* or *no*. Note that it is not necessarily the most minimal meaning (though it can be). It is the meaning which has a significant interactional status. Hence my choice of the term **privileged** interactional interpretation. Unlike ‘what is said’ or explicatures, it is a subjective, rather than an objective meaning. It is the interpretation deemed contextually appropriate by some participant (either the speaker or the addressee), not necessarily all participants.

Which of the meanings discussed in the literature should define the privileged interactional interpretation? I will not offer one definition ‘to fit all contexts’ for privileged interactional interpretations. Rather, I will propose that there are **several**

<sup>3</sup> I do not discuss the conveyed meaning, because it simply combines the explicature with the implicature. At stake for this paper is only the question of whether the implicature can (also) count as part of the privileged interactional interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> Here are two typical examples: (1) ‘I want to capture the **linguistically specifiable** content of discourse. This is **more** than just what compositional semantics can give us, but it is **less** than the complete construction of the speaker’s intention, which in many conversational settings is impossible’ (Asher, 1999: 25, emphases added); (2) ‘... develop a... semantics for natural language that admits contextual determination of meaning **just in those cases** where aspects of context play a role (Sag, 1981: 274). See also Searle (1978), Dascal (1987), Bach (1999) and Récanati (2001) for an attempt to distinguish between a narrow and a broad context.

functional levels of meaning (as mentioned above) which can potentially serve as the basic interactional interpretation. Different contexts encourage different choices, and different individuals may choose differently, even within the same context.<sup>5</sup> The candidates I will consider for the concept of a privileged interactional interpretation are: linguistic meaning, literal meaning, explicature, and conversational implicature.

I analyze natural data in order to see whether any one of these constitutes a potential privileged interactional interpretation. I argue that explicatures are certainly a viable privileged interactional interpretation (Section 2.1), but not invariably so (Section 2.2). I discuss examples showing that even implicatures sometimes serve as part of the privileged interactional interpretation (Section 3). Moreover, irrelevant (bare linguistic) meanings (and even partial linguistic meanings) are sometimes selected as the privileged interactional interpretation (Section 4).<sup>6</sup> I argue that interlocutors do not necessarily always agree on the relevant interpretative level when engaged in discourse (Section 5). The main conclusion I draw (Section 6) is that no single formula can be offered to characterize all privileged interactional interpretations. Contextual circumstances affect people's conceptions of what the privileged interactional interpretation is in the specific case. Thus, while I agree with Récanati (1989) that the concept of 'what is said' should preserve our pre-theoretic intuitions on the matter (the Availability Principle), I argue that people's intuitions do not point to one and only one type of minimal (interactional privileged) meaning, even within the same interaction (see also Bach, 2001). However, (irrelevant) bare linguistic meanings, on the one hand, and conversational implicatures, on the other, require special circumstances in order to merit the status of privileged interactional interpretations.

## 2. Explicatures as a functional interpretative level

In Section 2, I examine the possibility that explicatures constitute privileged interactional interpretations. I support this position with attested examples in Section 2.1, but in Section 2.2 I argue that explicatures do not invariably constitute the privileged interactional interpretation. Mainly, I propose that interlocutors are not always after a full propositional meaning which they can assess for truth.

### 2.1. *Explicatures as privileged interactional interpretations*

The linguistic meaning encoded by the speaker more often than not constitutes only an incomplete proposition, i.e. not a proposition that can be assessed for truth. According to Relevance Theory, addressees, therefore, proceed to use their inferencing

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<sup>5</sup> Note that my thesis is more radical than the thesis accepted by now that conveyed meaning varies with context. My point is that in addition, privileged interactional interpretations vary because interlocutors use **different formulas** of computing these interpretations on different occasions.

<sup>6</sup> By linguistic meaning I mean the coded meaning. Bare linguistic meanings are cases where the linguistic meaning has not been enriched. Partial linguistic meanings ignore some linguistic meaning, while maintaining another (e.g. in the case of ambiguities).

abilities (guided by the principle of Relevance) to enrich the linguistically coded meaning up to a full propositional form, the explicature. Explicatures are, then, pragmatically enriched coded meanings. The hypothesis that the explicature (rather than the linguistic meaning) is an essential interpretative step for establishing the relevance of an utterance follows from the fact that Relevance is computed over full propositional forms. Sperber and Wilson (1986b/1995) propose that it is the explicature which serves as a premise for further inferencing (together with contextual assumptions), yielding the contextual effects that render the utterance conveyed Optimally Relevant. It is the explicature (rather than the literal/raw linguistic meaning) which serves as a premise for the generation of further conversational implicatures. Although developed by pragmatic/contextual processes, explicatures count as intended, **explicitly** communicated messages. In fact, “communication is successful **not** when hearers recognise **the linguistic meaning** of the utterance, but when they **infer** the speaker’s ‘meaning’ from it” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986b/1995: 23, emphases added). However, explicatures are distinguished from conversational implicatures, which are pragmatic enrichments beyond those required for completing the coded meaning. Conversational implicatures are communicated only implicitly. The ones actually generated by the addressee may not have even been intended by the speaker, or only weakly or vaguely so. Hence, they do not affect the truth conditions of the proposition expressed. Explicatures then constitute a most natural candidate for defining the privileged interactional interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

Recent experimental results strongly support the assumption that explicatures often constitute what I would call privileged interactional interpretations. According to Gibbs and Moise (1997), explicatures, but not conversational implicatures, count as ‘what is said’ (see also Glucksberg et al., 1982 re the automaticity of metaphorical, i.e. derived meanings). They also take less time to process (Hamblin and Gibbs, 2001). Gibbs and Moise’s subjects consistently preferred to view **enriched** linguistic meanings (the explicatures) as ‘what is said’ (over linguistic meanings and over conversational implicatures) within and even without contextual support. Thus, when presented with an utterance such as *She gave him her key and he opened the door*, they interpreted ‘what is said’ by it as ‘She gave him her key and **then** he opened the door’. Moreover, their last experiment shows that the type of explicature developed by addressees crucially depends on context. Thus, while in the first experiment subjects interpreted ‘what is said’ by *three* (as in *Jane has three children*) as ‘exactly three’, in the last experiment, which presented a different context, they interpreted ‘what it said’ by *three* as ‘at least three’. Nicolle and Clark (1999) also found that subjects took the explicatures as ‘what is said’ (see also Bezuidenhout and Cutting, 2002), regardless of how the experimenters referred to this meaning (e.g. X said that..., X meant that...). The experimental results pointing to the identification of a relatively rudimentary type of interpretation with explicature provide good evidence for proposing that explicatures constitute privileged interactional interpretations.

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that Relevance theoreticians consider explicature to be a technical term, not one which interlocutors necessarily have intuitions about (Carston, 1998a: 96).

The discourse examples below support the view that explicatures often constitute privileged interactional interpretations. I demonstrate that we normally do not expect the privileged interactional meaning to be the bare (unmodified, unenriched) linguistic meaning (examples 2–5), that contextually supported enrichments of linguistic meanings (explicatures) are necessary in order to view the speaker as relevant (examples 6–9), and that completions above the level of explicature (conversational implicatures, which do not contribute truth-conditional aspects of meaning to the proposition expressed), count differently, and are not taken as privileged interactional interpretations (example 10).

First, note that, as Sperber and Wilson (1986b/1995) argue, we often expect **not** to be interpreted literally. When asked about our salary by a friend (as opposed to being asked by the tax clerk) we should, in fact, answer by rounding the number off, expecting the person not to think that that sum exactly is our salary. In the examples below, the linguistic (and literal) meanings are more marked than the inferred meanings they give rise to. This is why if it is the linguistic (rather than enriched) meaning we intend, we need to mark this explicitly, by using *literally*:

- (2) Radio announcer: You can win a piano **or** you can win X. And **actually**, **literally**, according to the rule, you can win **both** (Reconstructed from memory, KUSC Public Radio subscription drive, 2.1.2000).

Note that the radio announcer above feels that he has to explicitly inform his audience that they can win both prizes, even though the linguistic meaning of disjunctions is assumed to include this option. Moreover, his use of *actually* signals that the linguistic (or literal) meaning he intends constitutes a repair of the original meaning extracted from his first utterance (the enriched meaning). If a linguistic meaning is seen as a repair of the enriched meaning, it makes sense to assume that the enriched meaning is at least sometimes the privileged interactional interpretation automatically opted for by addressees. The following example makes much the same point:

- (3) Woman at the library: D'you have a minute?  
 Librarian: **Literally**, one minute (10.21.1999).

Note that the librarian feels she must indicate that the literal meaning of *a minute* is intended by her, rather than the contextually appropriate interpretation 'short period of time'.

But speakers do not aim for linguistic/literal meanings very often, and accordingly, addressees don't interpret them that way. I only found one reference to literality in 29 transcripts of the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (half of which constitutes Du Bois, 2000). Indeed, when Bill Clinton's televised testimony was broadcast, the CNN moderator announced that it was broadcast "literally all over the world" (9.2.1998). First, this means that with expressions like *all over the world* (when modifying broadcasts, at least) we do not even expect a literal meaning. But, more interestingly, note that even when the moderator modified the expression with *literally*, we still do not expect each and every place in the world to

have had Clinton's testimony broadcast. In other words, even the modifier *literally* does not force an absolutely linguistic/literal interpretation necessarily (see Laser-sohn, 1999 about *exactly*). This is why *literally* naturally develops other uses (see Israel, 2002). In the following, it indicates an unexpected (rather than a literal) interpretation, which the speaker intends anyway:

- (4) **Literally** fifty seven languages will be taught in this building (Y. Diensteyn, 6.3.1999).

Similarly, in the following, *literally* does not cancel the idiomatic interpretation of *on the line* in favor of a literal (compositional) interpretation:

- (5) X's [inaudible] job was **on the line**,  
**literally**.  
He got fired (6.1.2000).

The next set of examples demonstrate that it is only reasonable to assume that the incomplete propositional forms coded by the linguistic meaning are enriched into a full proposition (the explicature). Note that without the added materials, the utterances are simply not relevant enough. The first two examples are cases where obligatory arguments are missing. The third is missing conceptually required arguments, but no grammatical principle can account for their recoverability. I have supplied the necessary completions in bold in brackets:

- (6) a. M: R, tell me, that one who is working in connection with women's affairs, so that they should keep files for women too? (i.e., 'the one advocating women's rights, so that the income tax keeps files for married women separate from their husbands')  
10 TURNS OMITTED  
S: ... I didn't know that she is working on keeping [**income tax files**] for women separately (Lotan, 1990: 3).<sup>8</sup>
- b. S: You know what, in America you want to control General Motors, buy 2% of the shares and you're in control  
R: And Haim Getzl [= John Doe-M.A.] who is a company director pretends to know that the balance sheet is going to be good so he starts buying [**shares**] (Lotan, 1990: 16).
- c. R: He's a doctor, no?  
S: He's a doctor and she is worse [**than him in being harder to get along with**], he's a head surgeon (Lotan, 1990: 2).

It is only the enriched meanings in 6(a–c) which make a relevant contribution to the discourse. Their literal meanings are simply too uninformative.

<sup>8</sup> Lotan (1990) is a transcript of a Hebrew conversation between a businessman and a few income tax clerks. Note that the grammaticality status of S's utterance in Hebrew is identical to its status in English.

The relation between a head and a possessive NP, for example, is routinely left unspecified. However, an examination of all non-pronominal possessive NPs (70, e.g. *Matt's employer*– Du Bois, 2000, Bank) in 10 natural conversations (Du Bois, 2000) revealed that practically all the relations between the possessor and the head NP were contextually inferable. Speakers know they can count on the addressee to draw these inferences. In fact, when they are not sure, they can make a repair, as B does in the following, once she realizes the inference required is not easy enough:

- (7) A: I hope you manage to do some work today.  
 B: Oh, I **HAVE** been working. I'm working on **Sandy's talk**. I mean, my talk in Sandy's class (Telephone conversation, 1.10.2000).

Below is an example where the addressee (M) did not understand the speaker (S1), no doubt because he couldn't construct a proper explicature. Interestingly though, even when S2 tries to help him out, all he adds is an ambiguous third person masculine dative pronoun, expecting the addressee to infer that the Nobel prize should (ironically) be awarded to the builder (or the architect?) who managed to squeeze in 3.5 rooms into such a small space:

- (8) M: So there they [impersonal] put three and a half rooms in a space of 70 and something meters  
 S1: **They** [impersonal] **should give a Nobel prize**  
 M: What?  
 S2: They should give **him** a Nobel prize, did he put it in with a shoehorn?  
 (Lotan, 1990: 5).

The failure to appropriately enrich the linguistic meaning of (8) translates into a failure to grasp its Relevance.<sup>9</sup>

Next, consider the 'strengthening' cases noted by Sperber and Wilson (1986b/1995), where enrichment is required, even though the linguistic meaning does constitute a complete proposition, which could potentially be the explicature (recall that enrichments are supposed to generate a complete proposition). Carston (1987) discusses utterances such as *It'll take us **some time** to get to the park* (originally, Sperber and Wilson, 1986b/1995: 189). It seems that this speaker will be misleading if it turns out that it only takes 2 minutes to get there. Even though she spoke truly in terms of her linguistic meaning, in terms a common privileged interactional interpretation, her utterance is quite incompatible with a state of affairs in which it takes 2 minutes to get to the park. Completions of trivially true propositions ('it takes a certain amount of time to get to the park') must, then, be included in 'what is said' (Carston, 1987).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> As Francisco Yus notes, newspaper headlines are sometimes so elliptical that they may lead to unintended and **irrelevant** inferred completions, as in the British headline, "Clinton wins budget: More (noun/modifier) lies (verb/noun) ahead" (Yus's e-mail message to the Relevance list, 5.7.2001).

<sup>10</sup> Gibbs and Moise (1997) corroborated this claim in laboratory experiments. Note, however, that this added meaning is not invariably generated in all contexts.

(9) Are attested examples where I believe we must enrich the linguistic meaning even though they represent complete propositions, in order to reach a different, more relevant proposition. Note that grammatically speaking, *understand* can take NP arguments (such as the topicalized *Nimrodi*), but I doubt this is what S means. Similarly, despite the fact that *we don't have laborers* (in (b)) is a complete proposition, it must be enriched to something like 'we don't have **enough laborers to build a whole project on our own**':

- (9) a. S: Gad Zeevi<sub>i</sub> I've been told that he<sub>i</sub> is more or less King of Kenya.  
Nimrodi till this day I can't understand (I can't understand [**how come Nimrodi is so rich, unlike the Gad Zeevi case**, which I do understand])  
(Lotan, 1990: 17).
- b. M: You don't build by yourselves.  
S: No, **we don't have laborers**, we have 10, 15 laborers (Lotan, 1990: 7).

Zeevi and Nimrodi [in (a)] are both Israelis who have made a lot of money outside Israel. What S does not understand is not the person Nimrodi, but how Nimrodi made all this money, or rather, how his wealth could be legal. Hence, for the coherence of the conversation at hand, the complete proposition 'I can't understand Nimrodi' must be developed into a different proposition 'I can't understand how come Nimrodi is so rich'. The case is even stronger for (b), where, without the enrichment, S is blatantly contradicting himself.

Contextual enrichments into specific explicatures are not limited to informal conversations (and experiments). Courts routinely consider them relevant (see the references cited in note 1 again). For example, a judge recently ruled that *a three year experience* has to refer to the three years **immediately preceding** the bidding time, and not just any three years of experience (which is the linguistic meaning, *Haaretz* 11.30.1998). This judge narrowed down the linguistic meaning into an explicature, which he then relied on in his ruling.

In all the examples up to now, an inherent ingredient would be missing from the speaker's contribution to the discourse if we did not complete the 'missing' piece of information by inferential enrichment. This was the intuition behind Sperber and Wilson's explicature. Note the following exchanges which involve conversational implicatures ('**You** are the girl I love'... in a; 'that's great for you' in b):

- 10.a. JEFF: .. Who's—  
(H) **Who's the girl that .. I love?**
- JEFF: Who's the girl that I'll do anything for? (Du Bois 2000: Cutipie)
- b. REBECCA: So you can testify to two of [em].  
RICKIE: [Yeah].  
Part Omitted  
REBECCA: ... **that's great**.  
RICKIE: Yeah.

- REBECCA: (H) Um,  
           I mean not for you,  
 REBECCA:           but,  
                           for us, (Du Bois, 2000: Jury, transcript shortened and  
                           simplified).

Clearly, we do not want to assign the implicatures in (10) the same status as the explicatures above. Even though Rebecca hastens to cancel the potential implicature from *that's great*, it does not mean that it was actually generated by Rickie, and certainly not taken as a privileged interactional interpretation. Implicatures are too open-ended very often (see Hamblin and Gibbs, 2001 on how subjects are aware of the variety of meanings intended by the implicating speaker). They therefore do not have the privileged status that explicatures enjoy. The next example shows that people are also interested in highly enriched types of meaning, ones not seen as 'missing' from the explicit content, and ones not even considered potential implicatures. But at the same time, they also realize that the interpretations involved do not constitute privileged interactional interpretations:

- (11) FOSTER:       (H) **What does righteousness of God mean.**  
                       (H) Righteousness of God means,  
                       (H) God is holy.  
                       (H) And I'm a sinner.  
                       ... And I can never stand in his presence.  
                       (H) And the gulf between us can never be bridged,  
                       .. and he's gonna cast me into Hell,  
                       because of my sin. (Du Bois, 2000: Luther)

The very fact that the speaker needs to elaborate as much as he does testifies that he cannot take the privileged interactional interpretation of *the righteousness of God* (by itself) to contextually mean all the descriptions he later specifies. Rather, these are offered as his personal view, one which the audience could not have gotten on their own, had he simply referred to *the righteousness of God*.

In the following examples it is not clear whether we are entitled to enrich the linguistic meaning up to a (different) full proposition. Consider Clark's (1991: 263) sentence: "I might use *scholar* for a type of object, *eminent* for a type of state, *think* for a type of process, and *Garner* or *he* for a particular man". Since the readers of the article are aware that it appears in a collection of essays in honor of Wendell R. Garner, it is not unlikely that Clark's choice of examples indirectly conveys that he 'thinks' 'Garner' is an 'eminent' 'scholar'. But, can we be sure of Clark's communicated commitment to this speculative interpretation? I doubt it.

In another case, protestors complained to Nokia about the following ad:

- (12) To each what they deserve (Ad for Nokia phones; originally, sign at the gate of Buchenwald camp, *Haaretz*, 6.14.1998).

The protestors felt that the original implicature ('Jews deserve to be treated as subhuman') has become part of the meaning of the sentence, so that the compositional meaning does not count anymore. The Nokia spokesperson disagreed.

The last examples (originally in Hebrew) are 'special'. Here it is not clear what either the explicatures, or the privileged interactional interpretations are. The interpretation of the (i) examples requires considering also other, phonologically similar but semantically different sentences (ii):

- (13)a.i Yosi shel xaver  
 Yossi (nickname for Joseph) of a friend (a line from a song 'Yossi, Yossi') <->
- ii Yofi shel xaver.  
 A beauty of a friend (what a beautiful friend).
- b.i Yesh lexa for al axerim  
 You have (a) Ford over others. <->
- ii Yesh lexa for al axerim  
 You have an advantage over others (car sticker, Tel Aviv, 1999).

I suggest that in these examples, the interpretations shift between the original proposition (which is not quite meaningful/grammatical) and the created proposition (hence the use of <-> above), incorporating both perhaps. In other words, it is not as if the initial, linguistic/literal meaning (in i) is developed (into ii) and then suppressed in favor of this derived explicature. To the extent that there is a truth-conditional meaning in these cases, it probably includes both the explicit and the inferred constituents (e.g. 'Yossi is a **beauty** of a friend', 'you have a **Ford** and (therefore) an **advantage** over others'). Does that mean these combined interpretations are explicated? I don't presume to have the answer.

Summing up, I have argued that explicatures seem to often constitute the privileged interactional interpretations in actual discourse. Enrichments (up to an explicature) are often required for viewing the speaker's contribution as relevant. Linguistic meanings (less than explicatures) are in fact seen as more marked than explicatures. I also presented a few examples where I think people are discussing a level of interpretation which is above the enrichments required for generating an explicature, and indeed, such interpretations are not taken as the privileged interactional interpretations. Finally, I also argued that sometimes it is hard to determine what the privileged interactional interpretation (as well as the explicature) is.

## 2.2. Full propositionality and truth verifiability in interaction: cases where explicatures are not necessary

The following is a modern version of the classical externalist definition of semantics, the view typically behind assuming the necessity for a truth-conditional level of meaning:<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Externalist approaches to semantics analyze sentences as products against reality. Internalist semantics analyses meaning as a cognitive phenomenon, where the world is not (directly) involved (see Carston, 1999).

Semantics is the study of linguistic meaning, of the **relationships** that hold **between expressions of language and things in the world** (Barwise and Perry, 1983: 27, emphases added).

Specifying truth conditions was actually seen as a good way to tap speakers' grasp on meaning:

Obviously, if truthful assertions were not an important part of our life, and if **we did not possess a fairly good ability to recognize them, utterances would not carry information for us, and so language would not be meaningful**. This is why semantics focuses on truth conditions, as a way of understanding linguistic meaning (Barwise and Perry, 1983: 18 emphases added).

Although a fair number of researchers no longer equate truth-conditional meaning with linguistic meaning (e.g. Bach, 1994; Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet, 1990; Sperber and Wilson, 1986b/1995), many do share Bach's (1994: 127) conviction that speakers necessarily convey a complete (verifiable) proposition (for indicative sentences).<sup>12</sup> The recognition of the underdeterminacy of the linguistic code has led researchers to simply shift the burden of the enrichments previously considered (linguistic) semantic to the product of pragmatic inferencing (Bach's, 1994 and onwards implicatures; Récanati's, 1989 'what is said'; and Sperber and Wilson's, 1986b/1995 explicatures).

Thus, Sperber and Wilson's concept of explicature requires enrichments up to full propositional form. However, one may agree that enrichments of linguistic meanings are performed, without necessarily assuming that addressees aim for a full proposition (every time). We should first remind ourselves, that often, not just coded meanings, but rather, plausibly enriched coded meanings (explicatures) are simply too vague to be taken as a specification of truth conditions actually applicable to reality. Although in principle, one could assume that the addressee establishes a precise reading out of the vague one asserted by the speaker, it is not reasonable for researchers to assume that addressees always actually do this, if the researchers' goal of full propositionality is taken seriously. It is not at all clear how complete a complete propositional form must be. It is no trivial matter to determine what enrichments are absolutely needed for truth assessments. In fact, very many unenriched propositional forms are truth-evaluable nonetheless, except that they are trivially true (or false). For example, *I've had breakfast* is almost always trivially true, since I must have had breakfast at least once in my life. Hence, no enrichments seem to be required for developing a proposition. Second, I believe that sometimes, speakers don't mind using utterances whose complete (and nontrivial) propositions cannot actually be computed by inferencing, since the context lacks the relevant information which would serve as a basis for inferences. If so, explicatures do not always constitute the privileged interactional interpretation. Note that, in fact, language contains quite a few expressions whose function is specifically to mark the proposition as vague:

<sup>12</sup> Cognitive Linguists (Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 1987) are even more extreme in their rejection of the externalist semantic position. The researchers above only reject the externalist approach as applied to linguistic meanings.

- (14) S: Gad Zeevi, I've been told that he<sub>i</sub> is **more or less** King of Kenya. Nimrodi till this day I can't understand (Lotan, 1990: 17).

How can one assess what it means truth conditionally to be 'more or less King of Kenya'? Is it reasonable to assume that S's interlocutors tried to determine how close to being the King of Kenya Gad Zeevi is, especially given the fact that S does not really linger on Zeevi as the discourse topic, immediately switching to the next topic (Nimrodi)?

In some of the following too, the addressee is simply unable to enrich the linguistic meaning up to truth verifiability. I have marked in bold those parts of the utterances I imagine the addressee would find hard to establish a precise meaning or reference for, and therefore would have a difficult time constructing a verifiable proposition:

- (15) PAMELA: look **where I've come from**.  
 ... (H) I mean,  
 .. (Hx) ... (H) this chapter on heaven an hell,  
 it's **really interesting**.
- DARRYL: ... Why,  
 PAMELA: I used to have this,  
 .. **sort of**,  
 .. **standard line**,  
 that,  
 ... there were two things I got out of .. my marriage.  
 One was a name that was easy to spell,  
 and one was a,  
 .. (H) a child.  
 (Hx) ... That,  
 ... really **got me grounded**.  
 But,  
 (H) the fact of the matter is,  
 ... (H) that the marriage itself,  
 I mean as **hellish** as it was,  
 ... .. it's **like it pulled me under**,  
**like a giant octopus**,  
 or a **giant**,  
 ... **giant shark**.  
 (H) And it **pulled me all the way under**.  
 And then,  
 (H) ... and **there I was**,  
 it was **like the silent scream**,  
 and then,  
 .. then I found that .. I was **on my own two feet** again.  
 And it really was—  
 (H) .. (Hx) ... .. (Hx) (H) (TSK)  
 S- **what was hell in that .. that marriage** became,  
 ... became a **way out** for me (Du Bois, 2000: Death).

First, one is struck by the amount of figurative language. But labeling these inexplicit meanings figurative does not solve the problem. As Sperber and Wilson (1986a) have argued, figurative speech (or, ‘loose talk’, as they call it) commonly occurs in natural ordinary conversations. Moreover, note that it is not only the figurative meanings which are not easily pinned down (see *where I’ve come from, really interesting, got me grounded*). Here is a similar example (what is the referent of *society*, of *what society has done*, of *the rules for us?*):

- (16) LARRY: ... (H) I don’t think that would’ve been the first choice I’d’ve picked.  
 JOHN: @@@@  
 [God no].  
 LARRY: [And it’s not to say that I’m] ashamed of being gay,  
 JOHN: [2No2].  
 LARRY: [2What it is2] is that,  
 .. because of **what society has done**,  
 or has (H) laid **the rules for us**, (Du Bois, P.C.: He Knows).

Inability is not the only reason for not enriching an incomplete linguistic meaning up to full propositionality. There are cases where the speaker simply does not count on the addressee to inferentially complete the linguistic meanings. Barwise and Perry (1983: 38) and Du Bois (1998) have argued against the tendency of semanticists to impose on the semantic meaning actually coded by the speaker all the elements necessary for that meaning to mesh with reality, so it can yield all the logical entailments that necessarily follow from statements about such states of affairs. Communicators, I claim, are not necessarily committed to such a logical level of information even at the pragmatically enriched level of interpretation (see also Ariel, 2002).<sup>13</sup> In the next example, one could identify the referent of the specific though indefinite NP *some woman’s womb*, but clearly, this is not the intention of the speaker, who could have said *my mother’s womb*:

- (17) Pamela: and I was constructed,  
 ... inside of some woman’s womb, (Du Bois, 2000: Death).

Thus, even though we can determine the objectively true reference for *some woman* here, this cannot be the communicative intention of the speaker.

As has been emphasized by cognitive linguists, “an expression’s meaning cannot be reduced to an objective characterization of the situation described: equally important for linguistic semantics is how **the conceptualizer chooses to construe the situation** and portray it **for expressive purposes**” (Langacker, 1991b: 315, emphases added, and see also Langacker, 1987, 1991a,b; Lakoff, 1987). States of affairs in the

<sup>13</sup> Consider how Récanati (1993: 259/60) justifies including some inferred meanings as part of the proposition expressed: “This unarticulated feature is part of the truth-conditions of the utterance, **part of the situation**” (emphasis added).

world (and the mind) are extremely rich in detail, but every utterance actually reflects a speaker's choice to present certain aspects of reality (thought, emotion), but not others, because s/he wishes to focus on them. It is therefore possible for the speaker to **not** explicitly refer to certain details relevant for full propositionality.<sup>14</sup> This is so even if the ignored details actually **have** to be true in reality for the proposition expressed to be true. Thus, completions so as to correspond to a script may not be what the speaker has in mind. Carston (1998a: 161/2) has proposed that pragmatic enrichments are Relevance-oriented. Thus, necessarily true background assumptions (e.g. that, all things being equal, when a speaker utters *she ate*, the eating referred to is the conventional one rather than a forced intravenous feeding, for example), do not form part of the explicature, unless specifically relevant to the current discourse. I agree with her.

In the following example, I suggest that it does not make sense that we enrich the incomplete linguistic meaning of S3 into a complete propositional form:<sup>15</sup>

- (18) R: After all, I have a Chinese at home my daughter and my son-in-law studied Chinese and met each other there in Jerusalem  
 S1: Seriously I didn't know  
 M: They've been to China  
 S2: They've been to China already  
 R: No no  
 S3: You know what soon **they** will need [people] like these... (Lotan, 1990: 18).

Linguistically, impersonal 'they' (a zero subject in Hebrew) means 'the proper party'.<sup>16</sup> But who may these be? The foreign ministry? Business people? Publishers? The context does not contain enough common ground between S and R for R to figure it out. And, what is more crucial, it does not matter. S is only trying to make R feel good, that his children's studies will turn out to be useful. Similarly, we have analyzed the contribution by CB below as conveying sympathy for BG more than actually suggesting alternative activities for her (see Ball and Ariel, 1978: 42):

- (19) BG: I'm so tired.  
 CB: Why don't you lie down, or go to a movie, or something? (7.1978).

Ono and Thompson 1996 discuss the following example, where G agrees with D<sub>1</sub>, before D has had a chance to complete his utterance (see D<sub>2</sub>):

<sup>14</sup> Ignoring the full realistic details of the reality depicted is often achieved with the help of grammar itself. For instance, choosing an intransitive rather than transitive usage of a verb e.g. *drive*, *eat* is in fact a decision to not refer (or to not profile) the vehicle used/the type of food or meal eaten. Thompson and Hopper (2001) argue that intransitivity is in fact the most frequent pattern in everyday interactions.

<sup>15</sup> See also (9) in Ariel (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Sandra A Thompson comments that in fact, impersonals may not even code that much meaning ('the relevant party'). If so, the utterance codes an even less complete propositional form.

(20) D<sub>1</sub> .. she [always was,  
you know].

G: [Yeah.  
exactly].

D<sub>2</sub>: ... pretty much uh,  
... able to do anything that I wanted to do. (Car sales).

Again, propositional content is not the most relevant in this conversation. Sympathy is.

In the next example one could assume that the linguistic meaning is ‘strengthened’ up to a different full proposition, because the additional information is truth conditional and definitely known to the interlocutors. But judging by the anti-women’s rights tone of the conversation, I suggest it is implausible that they actually perform the ‘strengthening’:<sup>17</sup>

(21) M: R, tell me, that one who is working in connection with women’s affairs that they should keep [income tax] files for **women** too? (Lotan, 1990: 3).

At stake here is the question of whether to introduce separate income tax files for **married** women, and not for women in general (unmarried women have their own income tax files). M, an income tax clerk, knows this full well, as do his addressees. But I still think that we should not assume here an enrichment of *women* to ‘married women’ as the **privileged interactional interpretation**, because the dismissive tone of the interaction at that point is clearly directed towards **women**’s (in general) equality, and not at all specifically towards **married** women. Thus, although in terms of facts in the world, the women mentioned must be married women, it would be a mistake to assign such an enrichment a privileged interactional interpretation (and in fact, not even an implicature status).<sup>18</sup>

The next example (22a), slightly different from Lasersohn’s (1999) example 3, which I quote as (22b), also shows that speakers’ intended meanings are sometimes not even compatible with their own assessment of the states of affairs in the world they refer to:

(22) a All the girls wear make-up (Maya, eleven, 12.1.1999).  
b The townspeople are asleep.

Following Lasersohn, I claim that when a speaker utters the above, she may very well semantically/linguistically mean that indeed ‘**all** the girls wear make-up’/‘all the

<sup>17</sup> I deduce the dismissive tone about women’s rights from the participants’ comments: “in connection with women’s affairs” (rather than ‘for women’s equal rights’); the reference to the activist lawyer as “that one” and the general consensus among the male interlocutors present that “women’s equality and everything that is connected with it is bullshit” (Lotan 1990: 4).

<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, if we do add representations of such inferred entities to the explicature, we should assign them a different status, perhaps in the spirit of Langacker’s (1987) nonprofiled entities of the presupposed base.

townspeople are asleep' (for Lasersohn), even though she may be aware that some (irrelevant) subset of the girls/townspeople may not wear make-up/be asleep).<sup>19</sup> Support for claiming that this is what she means, rather than the more realistic claim that 'more or less all the girls/ townspeople...', comes from the fact that the following utterance, even without *all* (Lasersohn's ex. 6) sounds contradictory (in most contexts):

(23) Although the townspeople are asleep, some of them are awake.

Note that if (22b) and the first clause in (23) were routinely intended to be linguistically interpreted as the more realistic claim that 'more or less all the townspeople/ girls...', there would be no reason for (23) to sound contradictory. But it does. I maintain that Maya intends to convey the concept of 'all', even though the reality may very well be different. And this intended interpretation contradicts the second clause. This is a case, then, where I suggest we do not 'loosen up' the linguistic meaning for the privileged interactional interpretation, even though it does not make sense realistically.

Lasersohn (1999) argues that every linguistic form comes with what he calls 'a pragmatic halo', expressions like *exactly* included. The conveyed meaning according to him is, then, the more realistic value of linguistic items (e.g. *three o'clock* → 'relevantly close to three o'clock'). I am not sure that each concept adaptation (modifying the concept coded to fit the context) is actually part of the communicated meaning, although it is certainly necessary for a truth-conditional semantic representation, when addressees do assess propositions against realities. The reason that, in some cases, researchers have tended to assume hidden variables (linguistically specified niches to be filled with information derived from context, see Stanley, 2000; Taylor, 2001, but see Bach, 2000, 2001) is that they attribute the gap between the actual **realities** referred to by utterances and the **linguistic meanings** of these utterances to 'loose talk' (see Lasersohn, 1999; Sperber and Wilson, 1986b/1995). We do often enough talk 'loosely' (i.e. when we do not mean what we say literally), as when we refer to the customer who ordered a ham sandwich as *the ham sandwich*. However, I think that at least sometimes, we simply **think** 'loosely' (and only **therefore** talk 'loosely'). In other words, I believe that often enough when we say *empty*, or when my eleven-year-old daughter tells me that *All the girls wear makeup*, the concept we wish to convey is 'completely void' and 'each and every girl' respectively, without even specifying to ourselves what the relevant domain of application is (see again note 19).

Researchers (even those who do not assume hidden variables, e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1986 and onwards, Bach, 2000) have taken such utterances as examples of loose **talk**, because semanticists have been trained to compare the meaning of utterances with the realities they refer to, presupposing a correspondence between objective reality and our thoughts. However, what we should be comparing utterances to are people's **spontaneous** thoughts and **communicated** perceptions of reality, rather

<sup>19</sup> This is what psychologist Pipher (1994: 60) says about such statements by adolescent girls: "They'll believe that because the girl next door gets a ride to school, **every girl in the universe** gets a ride to school. They are not being manipulative as much as they earnestly believe that one case represents the whole." (emphasis added). I believe such beliefs are not restricted to adolescent girls [see the contradiction in 30(a)].

than reality as it is, or as we perceive it when we think about it very carefully. Sometimes people don't think their ideas through. I find that what are 'loose' in the cases above are not the words, but the concepts (I doubt my daughter could enumerate the precise set of girls which is relevant to her claim, for example). If this is true, it is a mistake to assume that (all) such enrichments form part of the privileged interactional interpretation.

Note that advertisers in the US are allowed to use 'baseless' superlatives, and claim that their product is the **best**, or cleans **the most**, etc, despite the restriction dictating 'truth in advertisement'. Now, we cannot argue that all we need to do here is restrict the domain of application of *best* etc, for what would that domain be? I believe this wording is allowed because being *the best* is taken as a vague expression, rather than as an expression which forces a comparison between all relevant members. Indeed, advertisers are not allowed to claim that their product is better than another specific product (unless they have proof for that). But it seems that 'truth in advertisement' does not block the unsupported claim that a specific product is 'the best'. One could argue that the superlative has now acquired another, less extreme meaning, but even if it has, it probably resulted from uses which did not force enrichments up to full propositionality.

Section 2 has argued that explicatures can certainly be what interlocutors take as the privileged interactional interpretation. However, although enrichments are probably always required, stipulating that full propositionality is always the speaker's intended meaning (and the addressee's privileged interactional interpretation) is not justified in every case. I have discussed examples where enrichments up to full propositionality seem rather impossible or irrelevant, which means that at least sometimes, the privileged interactional interpretation, while enriched, is less than an explicature.

### 3. Conversational implicatures as privileged interactional interpretations

Recall that, for Grice (1975), conversational implicatures were precisely the complement of 'what is said'. Whatever is inferred cannot be 'what is said' (except for reference and ambiguity resolutions). However, according to Relevance Theory, 'what is said', the explicature, does contain inferred portions. Can conversational implicatures then also be understood as 'what is said'? Sperber and Wilson do not think so, and this is what we have seen in Section 2.1. But interlocutors' intuitions and even more, their interactional responses, suggest that this is not always the case. Consider the following conversation fragment:

- (24) Lewinsky: ... see my mom's big fear is that he's [President Clinton—MA] going to **send somebody out to kill me**.  
 PART OMITTED  
 Tripp: Oh, my God. Don't even say such an asinine thing. **He's not that stupid**. He's an arrogant . . . but **he's not that stupid**.  
 Lewinsky: Well, you know, **accidents happen** (20 November 1997: *New York Times*, 10.3.1998, emphases added)

It is quite clear that when Lewinsky expresses a fear that President Clinton will have her killed, Tripp is conveying to her that ‘he will not have her killed’. This is a conversational implicature, based on her saying that killing Lewinsky is stupid, and that Clinton is not stupid enough to do it. Indeed, Lewinsky does not address herself to Clinton’s intelligence (the explicit material) when she responds with ‘accidents happen’. She is also relying on a conversational implicature to convey her disagreement with Tripp about the possibility of Clinton sending someone to kill her (‘my death may be made to look like an accident’).

Note that the conversational implicatures above are the main import of the exchange. The explicit information conveyed is quite irrelevant, except as it serves as a basis for generating conversational implicatures. It is the conversational implicatures which render the exchange coherent. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986b/1995), such implicatures are fully determinate, in that the speaker cannot be seen as observing the principle of Relevance without expecting such implicatures. The speaker therefore takes as much responsibility for the truth of such implicatures as if they were expressed explicitly.<sup>20</sup> I propose that conversational implicatures can (but, of course, need not) be selected as the privileged interactional interpretation when they actually replace the explicit content, i.e. when the explicit content is rejected as the speaker’s potential contribution, either because it is totally irrelevant (‘Clinton is not a fool’, and ‘so he has a mother-in-law’ in (25) and ‘I have a mother’ in (26) below), or because it is patently false (as in metaphoric and ironical cases).

(25) Is another example where only the conversational implicature makes a relevant contribution to the interaction:

- (25) R: And Haim Getzl (= John Doe) who is a company director pretends to know that the balance sheet is going to be good so he starts buying  
 S: OK that’s a criminal offense  
 R: Eh...  
 S: It’s a bit of a criminal offense  
 R: **So he has a mother-in-law**  
 S: For **this** you go to jail (Lotan, 1990: 16).

The implicature which must be generated from R’s last turn is that Haim Gezl would illegally buy shares under his mother-in-law’s name. Otherwise, R’s turn is totally irrelevant, and S’s *this* would refer to ‘having a mother-in-law’, entailing that one goes to jail for having a mother-in-law. Note that this conversational implicature even passes Erteschik-Shir and Lappin’s (1979) test for **Dominant** information, in that S addresses the implicature (rather than the explicature) in his response

<sup>20</sup> Note, however, that Sperber and Wilson do not claim that such implicatures actually form part of the explicit message (the explicature). Also, if false, they claim that these implicatures render the message misleading (rather than a lie). Vicente (1998), however, argues that maybe these implicatures do form part of the explicit message. She cites Groefsema (1995) in support.

(but note that Erteschik-Shir and Lappin did not consider the possibility that an implicit message could be Dominant).<sup>21</sup>

Experimentally, while Gibbs and Moise (1997) found that conversational implicatures do not constitute ‘what is said’, Nicolle and Clark (1999) have argued that given enough impetus, conversational implicatures can be taken as ‘what is said’. I agree with Nicolle and Clark (1999: 351) that people “try to work out the overall communicative intention behind the utterance”, even when instructed to find a paraphrase for what was said. I also agree with their explanation for their findings, namely that subjects choose to understand the speaker’s words as having certain contextual implications that render them relevant in the conversation, and hence they are willing to choose a conversational implicature if it best captures these implications. Bezuidenhout and Cutting (2002) similarly found that subjects often chose conversational implicatures of various kinds (over 70% of the time) as best reflecting ‘what the speaker said’. In fact, strong implicatures (when the intention to communicate them is highly manifest) were the most popular choice among their subjects. Noveck (2001) also supports the proposal that interlocutors sometimes take the implicature as the explicit message. Only 35% of the adult subjects who were asked whether it is right to say that *there might be a parrot in the box* when in fact there **must** be a parrot in the box said it was right. This means that the majority of subjects (65%) took the (scalar) implicature generated by *there might...*, i.e. ‘there does **not have** to be...’ as central enough in the interpretation to justify claiming that the statement above is not right, even though it is true, logically speaking.

Consider further the following finding. Twenty-seven students of ‘Introduction to pragmatics’ (Tel Aviv University, March 1999) were told about the true reported dialogue below. They were also told that the H.D., the job candidate, thought she lied, but that I (the professor teaching the course) was not sure that was the case:

(26)Boss: You have small children. How will you manage the long hours of the job?  
H.D.:**I have a mother** (originally Hebrew 6.14.1996).

H.D.’s reply implicates that her mother will take care of her children when she has to work long hours. However, although she has a mother (the explicit proposition is therefore true), H.D. reported to her audience that her mother actually never helped her take care of her children (the implicature is therefore false). Fifteen students (55.5%) agreed with H.D.’s judgment that a false conversational implicature renders the speaker a liar. This is strong evidence for considering some privileged interactional interpretations as comprising of conversational implicatures, rather than being restricted to explicit materials.

These cases of conversational implicatures are not the only ones where the explicit meaning is cancelled in favor of a derived meaning. Interactionally, does it make

<sup>21</sup> Wilson and Sperber, 1993 suggest the possibility that in some cases (different from the ones above) the speaker may be seen as making two assertions at the same time and it is possible that intuitions re the truth conditions of the utterance are based on the more relevant assertion of the two, in our case, the implicature.

sense that the speaker ‘said’ *x* (e.g. ‘A fine friend’), when *x* was intended to be taken ironically, (as ‘A horrible friend’)? Cappelen and Lepore (1997) believe that a report of what the speaker said ironically is incorrect when literal, i.e. ignoring the irony. Wilson (1995) and Carston (1996) make the same point about metaphorical cases. Thus, when one says that *Paul is a lion*, intending the nonliterally conveyed proposition, ‘Paul is courageous’, this nonliteral (implicated) interpretation is at least sometimes taken as explicated (rather than implicated) (see Carston, 1998a: Chapter 6). Indeed, Davidson’s (1978) position, according to which all metaphors are false just because their linguistic meaning would constitute a false proposition, is counter-intuitive in that it conceals the fact that it may be true or false that ‘Paul is courageous’.

Finally, here is a more controversial case, where a weak implicature (from Israeli Cabinet Minister Hanegby’s words) seems to have been taken as part of ‘what he said’ by all the ministers of the Israeli government:<sup>22</sup>

- (27) Minister Kahalani: Is the appointment acceptable to the prime minister?  
 Minister Hanegby: Yes. I also informed **the president of the supreme court** of it and of course also the legal advisor to the government, who **gave his blessing** and he will help him with the required overlapping period (originally Hebrew, Israeli Government minutes, as cited in *Haaretz* 2.14.1997).

When it was discovered that the president of the supreme court was in fact critical of the proposed appointment, Minister Livnat accused Minister Hanegby of misleading the government: “To the best of my understanding your words imply that the president of the supreme court gives his blessing to the appointment too”. Even after she read the minutes (cited above), she found that “from the connection between the facts... it was only understandable that the president of the supreme court approves of the appointment” (2.14.1997). Prime Minister Netanyahu’s lawyer also paraphrased Hanegby’s words as: “his [Netanyahu’s] minister of Justice tells him that the candidate ... has all the... recommendations- including the blessing of the president of the supreme court...” (*Haaretz* 2.24.1997). Finally, Yoel Marcus, a journalist, says that “Hanegby misled the government and **did not tell the truth...**” (*Haaretz* 2.28.1997, emphasis added). Marcus then accuses Hanegby of lying when in reality, the ‘lie’ is barely a conversational implicature. This is a case, then, when a weak implicature was taken as part of the privileged interactional interpretation, so that when it was discovered to be false, Hanegby was even accused of lying.

While I have argued that conversational implicatures should sometimes count as the privileged interactional interpretation, I wish to emphasize that this is not a frequent phenomenon. It is probably restricted to cases where the implicatures are strong, mostly when they actually replace the explicit content as the speaker’s relevant contribution. This is why Nicolle and Clark (1999) and Bezuidenhout and

<sup>22</sup> I view the following as a weak conversational implicature, because it is dubious that grammatically, one can take the relative clause ‘who gave his blessing’ as modifying ‘the president of the supreme court’ as its head.

Cutting (2002) (see their Table 3) found a difference between weak and strong implicatures counting as ‘what is said’. This is also why in some cases it is not so clear if the implicature actually forms part of the privileged interactional interpretation, as in the Hanegby case above [see also Section 5]. Finally, even scalar implicatures do not always form part of the privileged interactional interpretation, even though they have been argued to be generalized, i.e. default, conversational implicatures, generated automatically, unless context explicitly cancels them (see Horn, 1984; Levinson, 1988). I think the assumption that so-called generalized implicatures always get through (unless specifically cancelled) stems from the fact that researchers have tended to conflate what has to be true in the world, given a speaker’s utterance, and what the speaker actually wants to communicate on that occasion (see again Section 2.2). Thus, as Carston (1988, 1990) has argued, while sometimes the negation of a stronger statement is highly relevant and reasonably seen as intended by the speaker as part of ‘what is said’ (28a,b), it is not invariably so (28c) (see also Hirschberg, 1985):<sup>23</sup>

- (28) a. LYNNE: so it was kinda review for us.  
 (H) well it was a review for **some** people,  
 depend on what time of the year you took it.  
 You know.  
 (H) if it was a review or not. (Blacksmithing)
- b. M: And are [you] **selling** [apartments] there?  
 S: Where, in Borochov? This week there was **some awakening** last week  
 but I had four months of total quiet (Lotan, 1990: 6).
- c. We have continued to make **many of our shoes** in the United States...  
 We believe that **most consumers** think that “Made in USA” means that...  
 (‘New Balance’ shoe label, April 2000).

When Lynne says *some people* it is a correction of *a review for us* which implicates ‘all of us’. It should therefore be understood as ‘some but not all’. Similarly, when M asks about apartment sales (28b) and S reports about some recent ‘awakening’, but total quiet for 4 months, it is reasonable for M to infer that ‘awakening’ implies not enough sales to justify saying “Yes, we are selling” in response to M’s question. In this context, where M asks about a stronger proposition (‘selling’), the weaker statement (“some awakening”) encourages the generation of a scalar implicature, negating the stronger claim. The opposite is true for (c). No doubt New Balance intentionally chose nonmaximal quantity expressions, because they are not in a position to assert the stronger claim about ‘all of our shoes’ and ‘all consumers’ respectively. Nonetheless,

<sup>23</sup> Note that researchers have limited their discussion of scalar implicatures to items forming a Horn scale. A Horn scale requires that the ordered items on it be alternatives of the same grammatical category and length, but differing in informativity, such that stronger items entail weaker ones (e.g. *some*, *all*). *Selling* and *some awakening* in (b) below do not qualify for a Horn scale, but such scales are pragmatically constructed ad hoc anyway.

it is hard to imagine that their **communicative intent** was to convey that ‘not all of our shoes are made in the United States’, and that ‘not all consumers think that “Made in USA” means...’. These interpretations are valid, and may be generated by the skeptic, but they certainly are not what New Balance wants us to have as a take-home message. While the Neo-Griceans have proposed that the scalar implicatures are automatically added on, Carston (1988, 1990) has argued that we decide ad hoc whether the ‘generalized implicature’ is generated at all. Even if it is, it may constitute a conversational implicature or part of the explicature. I believe it is (part of the) privileged interactional interpretation in (a,b) but not in (28c), even though it is objectively true in (c) as well.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, I have argued that linguistic usage, as well as experimental data, show that interlocutors sometimes take conversational implicatures as constituting the speaker’s privileged interactional interpretation. This, however, is restricted to cases in which the whole purpose of uttering the explicit message is that the addressee take it as a premise (since it is irrelevant in itself), add contextual assumptions to it, and infer a relevant conversational implicature. Such implicatures are strongly suggested in the given context, and the speaker is (often) seen as totally responsible for their truth. In cases where they are not true, the speaker may be seen as a liar. However, in the end, I argued that what the Neo-Griceans have considered strong implicatures (in that they are generated by default) are actually not necessarily automatically considered part of the privileged interactional interpretation. Last, while I have no real examples for this, I am convinced that even in the strong cases of conversational implicatures (e.g. the *So he has a mother-in-law* case), there could be an addressee who would treat the explicit message (*For this you go to jail*) as the proper privileged interactional interpretation (asking, *why would one go to jail for having a mother-in-law?*). My conviction is based on similar, attested wise-guy interpretations, which I discuss in the next section.

#### 4. Linguistic and/or literal meaning as a privileged interactional interpretation

Sperber and Wilson (1986b/1995) have challenged the equation between the inferred and the implicit. Recall that they have argued that there are many aspects of meaning which are arrived at by inferencing, but are nonetheless part of the explicit content. Bach (1994), on the other hand, defends the Gricean position. While conceding that many inferential enrichments of the coded meaning are required in order to arrive at a full proposition, Bach retains the status of implicit information for information thus derived (and calls the product **implicature**). He reminds us that accordingly, these enrichments are cancellable (Bach, 2001). The examples below all have one thing in

<sup>24</sup> However, while many generalized implicatures may not be generated automatically, some generalized implicatures may be undergoing grammaticization (see Levinson, 1995). Also, the fact that some “generalized” implicatures are not generated even in the absence of explicit canceling devices [as in (28c)] does not mean that they were not initially accessed by addressees nonetheless. Only psycholinguistic experimentation can decide this issue.

common. The speaker or the addressee ignores some inference based on the relevant context, which is necessary for the interpretation of the utterance. They adhere to the irrelevant **bare linguistic meaning** (Section 4.1), or parts of it (Section 4.2). The interesting fact is that these (sometimes) totally out-of-place interpretations are not so easily dismissible: The linguistic code serves as a very solid basis for interpretation, much more so than contextual inferencing. This is why Bach's (1994) insistence on the notion of implicature (rather than explicature) may have some justification. In Section 4.3 I briefly exemplify the problematicity of the concept 'linguistic meaning'.

#### 4.1. Linguistic meaning as privileged interactional interpretations<sup>25</sup>

While we have seen above that people routinely augment the linguistic meaning when interpreting others, they do not always do that. On some occasions, the addressee can refuse to enrich the linguistic meaning (or the speaker might deny that s/he meant anything but the linguistic meaning of the utterance). Most of these **wise-guy** examples are characterized by lack of attention to the (reasonable) speaker's intention, supposedly justified by adhering **only** to the coded meaning. While wise-guy interpretations are uncooperative, they cannot be easily dismissed, just because interlocutors find that coded meanings have a special and strong status, even when discursively quite implausible.

The first example features an overly literally-minded hotel telephone operator:

- (29) M.A. (San Francisco): I'd like to leave a message for X  
 Hotel Operator (New York): I'll connect you to their room.  
 M.A.: No, no. I don't want to wake them up. **It's midnight** in New York!  
 Operator: No, **it's not**.  
 M.A.: What time is it there?  
 Operator: **It's 11:53** (10.13.1998).

Note that the operator here insists on the linguistic meaning of *midnight* ('12 a.m. '), rejecting the more contextually appropriate inferred meaning, 'about midnight, too late for calling people'.

Indirect speech acts are not fully explicit. They may therefore be excluded from the privileged interactional interpretation sometimes. For example, when left activist Ehud Spiegel complained to the police in Israel about threats from ultra-right Kach activists, who said to him: "Someone like you is better off committing suicide", while pointing to the ground, the police said they would not investigate "because the words 'you'd better commit suicide' are a **suggestion**, not a threat" (originally

<sup>25</sup> Technically speaking, all the interpretations discussed in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 (if fully propositional) could count as explicatures, except that they were constructed without regard for the speaker's 'real' intention. After all, not every linguistic meaning must be enriched, and bare linguistic meanings can be intended explicatures. I have chosen to refer to them as linguistic meanings rather than (uncooperative) explicatures, because, as I later show, the only reason they are not easily dismissed is that they comprise the coded meaning.

Hebrew, *Haaretz* 10.25.1988). The police preferred a wise-guy interpretation in this case. They ignored the rather transparent indirect threat conveyed, because the coded illocutionary force of the Hebrew ‘had better’ is that of a suggestion.

The following pair of examples shows how we can select either maximally or minimally contextualized interpretations for the same expression, *empty*. (30a) shows that normally, even when modified by *completely*, *empty* is compatible with “there was hardly anybody there” in reality, and see again Section 2.2 above). However, (b) is an example where a city official insists on a linguistic (wise-guy), supposedly absolutely referential, interpretation of *empty*:

(30) a. ALINA: ... (H) But there was hardly anybody there.

(2 LINES OMITTED)

the place was **completely empty** (Du Bois, 2000: Cuz)

b. “A municipal regulation determines that a piece of property which remains **empty** is exempt from city tax for six months. A, a lawyer who has moved into a new office, was astonished when city hall inspectors refused to declare his old office as **empty** because of a few chairs left behind. ‘What is **empty**’, he wondered, when the floor tiles have been pulled out?”... The director of the city income department explained... [that] **formally, empty is empty**, and it’s possible to say that even if there is a rag in the office, it is considered **full**.” (Originally Hebrew, reported in the magazine *Tel Aviv* 5.14.1993).

Thus, whereas 30(a) is the more common usage of *empty*, 30(b) shows that interlocutors can sometimes insist on unenriched linguistic meanings. We sometimes choose how literal our interpretations are. Here is an example where Monica Lewinsky even thinks that Tripp’s changing the referring expression (from *he* to *the president*) is unwarranted, although she herself says that referential meaning is preserved:

(31) Lewinsky: You know, he [Vernon Jordan-MA] asked me point-blank if I, you know, had a thing with **him**.

Tripp: He asked you point-blank. No, he didn’t.

Lewinsky: Yes, he did.

Tripp: What did he say?

Lewinsky: He said, “Did you have an affair with **him**?”

Tripp: He said, “Did you have an affair with **the President**?” You’re kidding.

Lewinsky: **Not “the P,”** but with **him**. I mean, obviously **that’s what he meant, he just didn’t say the name** (Oct. 16, 1997, *New York Times*, 10.4.1998).

In this case, then, Lewinsky finds that literal faithfulness requires more than referential faithfulness. The privileged interactional interpretation, according to her, must retain the referential ambiguity, just because this is the original linguistic meaning. This is probably a rare case, but the crucial point is that it **can** be so.

(Incidentally, note that Lewinsky here finds the classical literal meaning (cf. Ariel, in press), as too enriched).

We have seen a city official and the police adopt wise-guy interpretations. The last example to be cited is a wise-guy interpretation adopted by a judge. The case involves a couple who sued a car company for supplying them with a burgundy instead of a red car. The car company “‘claimed that the plaintiffs indicated ‘red’ without specifying a certain shade of red, and therefore they cannot complain’. As support they quoted the ... dictionary definition..., according to which ‘burgundy is a dark red’. The judge... accepted these arguments and rejected the claim” (*Maariv* 7.15.1992). This judge seems to have clung to the linguistic meaning of *red*, which he takes to be the invariant, general meaning (compatible with all shades of red), and therefore including burgundy. He ignored the relevance of the context-specific meaning of *red* (prototypical to red cars). This example naturally leads us to the next section, where we examine cases where interlocutors adopt interpretations which are more minimal than the invariant, general linguistic meaning.

#### 4.2. Partial linguistic meanings as privileged interactional interpretations

Interlocutors can refuse to cooperate with each other by selecting as their privileged interactional interpretation a contextually **in**appropriate interpretation which is a **sub-part** of the linguistic meaning. In these cases, the contextually relevant linguistic meaning is skipped over in favor of a linguistically irrelevant meaning. For example, when President Clinton said he did not have sex with Monica Lewinsky, he chose to refer to the culturally **prototypical instance** of sex (i.e. heterosexual intercourse), rather than to the invariant, general sense of *sex* (see Tripp’s definition below). His lawyers quoted various dictionaries where sexual relations are defined as ‘intercourse’. Since Clinton had oral sex, but not intercourse with Lewinsky, he and his lawyers were able to claim that he did not lie (*Haaretz* 12.11.1998). Monica Lewinsky seems to have been of the same opinion, restricting *sex* to its prototypical meaning:

- (32) Lewinsky: ... I never came close to sleeping with him  
 Tripp: Why, because you were standing up?  
 Lewinsky: We **didn’t have sex**, Linda.  
 Tripp: Well, what do you call it?  
 Lewinsky: We fooled around  
 Tripp: Oh, I don’t know. I think... if you get to orgasm, that’s **having sex**.  
 Lewinsky: No, **it’s not**.  
 Tripp: Yes, **it is**.  
 Lewinsky: **Having sex is having intercourse**. (*Los Angeles Times* 10.3.1998).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> On another occasion, Tripp asks Lewinsky to define sex, and indeed, she says “intercourse”, and since she did not have intercourse with the president, she “did not have a sexual relationship” with him (*New York Times* 10.4.1998).

Following is another court case, but unlike the ‘red car’ case, here it is the narrowed down, prototypical meaning which was thought relevant. A Jerusalem judge recently ruled that a certain Samuel Sheinbein be extradited to the US where he should stand trial. Now, by law, Israelis are not extraditable, and the defendant’s lawyer proved that legally, Sheinbein was an Israeli citizen to the judge’s satisfaction. However, the judge wrote that his ‘linguistic intuition’ (*Haaretz* 9.11.1998) told him that the defendant should be extradited nonetheless, because although legally, he is an Israeli, he was born and raised in the US, he is a US citizen, he does not speak Hebrew, and when he visited Israel, he used an American (rather than an Israeli) passport. The defendant therefore did not have ‘sufficient linkage’ to the state of Israel in the judge’s opinion. In other words, although Sheinbein was proven Israeli (in the invariant, general, linguistic sense of the word), he was deemed a non-prototypical Israeli (this is my interpretation of the judge’s notion of not having ‘sufficient linkage’). That was enough to not apply to him a law applicable to (all) Israelis.

Prototypical meaning is not the only case in which people opt for a more minimal interpretation than linguistic meaning can offer. One way people can select too narrow a linguistic meaning is by ignoring one linguistic meaning, when more than one is available (due to ambiguity). They then stick to the contextually inappropriate linguistic meaning (see also example (19) in Ariel, 2002). Idiomatic meaning (e.g. *burn oil*) can be ignored, with the component expressions receiving a compositional (literal) reading only. “When selling your own car, it’s a fine line between ‘honest’ and ‘legally correct’”, reads the bottom of a cartoon, which features the following:

(33) Car Buyer: So, does it burn oil?

Car Seller: (Thought balloon): Does it “burn oil”? “Burn” would mean flames. And I’ve never seen **actual** flames. (Talk balloon): Nope (*Los Angeles Times* 11.21.1998).<sup>27</sup>

The following example from Harold Pinter’s *The dumb waiter* similarly illustrates how people (Gus) can be too literal (accepting only the compositional meaning), ignoring the contextually appropriate idiomatic meaning:

- (34) Ben: Go and **light** it.  
 Gus: Light what?  
 Ben: **The kettle**.  
 Gus: You mean the gas.  
 PART OMITTED  
 Ben: (*his eyes narrowing*) What do you mean I mean the gas?  
 Gus: Well, that’s what you mean, don’t you? The gas.  
 Ben: (*powerfully*) If I say go **light the kettle** I mean go and light the kettle.  
 Gus: How can you light the kettle?  
 Ben: It’s a figure of speech! Light the kettle. It’s a figure of speech!

<sup>27</sup> And see the Amelia Bedelia example (10) quoted in Ariel (2002).

- Gus: I've never heard it.  
 Ben: Light the kettle! It's common usage! (quoted from Yus Ramos, 1998: 96-97).

The next example demonstrates how people sometimes strip down speakers' meanings even though they recognize that this is not what the speaker intends them to do. Montoyo here is after the 'real meaning' of Jesse Jackson's *minorities*, and in this case, he deems it **less** than its linguistic meaning, actually referring to blacks only:

- (35) MONTOMOYO: if .. one looks at what,  
 uh,  
 Jesse Jackson is doing,  
 vis a vis (H) .. who.  
 ... The major league?  
 ... Baseball teams and all that?  
 PART OMITTED  
 .. What's his criticism.  
 ... That there're not ... sufficient numbers of .. what?  
 FRANK: ... **Blacks.**  
 MONTOMOYO: .. Well **he says minorities.**  
 .. He's smart.  
**He's talks about minorities.**  
**But he's really talking about African-Americans.**  
 PART OMITTED  
 MONTOMOYO: (Hx) Have you heard <X of a Latino X> say this?  
 ... Or would a XXX Jesse Jackson have said that about  
 Latinos?  
 ... Hm?  
 ... No.(Du Bois, 2000: Amerden).

Summing up, while Bach (1994: 135) and Asher (1999: 25) dismiss interpretations I call wise-guy, labeling them "obtuse" and "smacks of a legalistic defense" (respectively), I have argued that such steps are sometimes taken by speakers/addressees, judges included. Native speakers presented with wise-guy interpretations (I have presented these examples to my 'Introduction to Pragmatics' class every year since the early 90's) invariably laugh. They confirm that the wise-guy interpretation is totally irrelevant and unjustified in terms of the interactional situation, but at the same time, that it cannot be discounted.

#### 4.3. *Complication: what is linguistic meaning?*

##### 4.3.1. *Coded, grammatically triggered and conceptually triggered meanings*

I have argued that linguistic meaning, even when contextually inappropriate, can constitute the privileged interactional interpretation insisted on by addressees (as well as speakers). But, as is well known, it is not always clear what one should count as the coded linguistic contribution to meaning, as opposed to the inferential contribution

(see Ariel, 1998; Carston, 1998a). Thus, I have taken linguistic meaning (e.g. of *red*, *sex*, *Israeli*) to be the invariant general sense of these words, but perhaps they are better seen as polysemous between various narrower meanings. It is also hard to distinguish between inferences grammatically triggered versus inferences which are conceptually triggered.<sup>28</sup> Wise-guy interpretations can then help us distinguish between the coded linguistic meaning and grammatically or conceptually triggered inferences. Only the former can constitute wise-guy (irrelevant) privileged interactional interpretations.

For instance, there has been considerable debate in the literature about the linguistic (semantic) meaning of numbers (see inter alia Carston, 1990, 1998b; Hirschberg, 1985; Horn, 1992). Does *five*, to pick an example, mean ‘at least five’, ‘at most five’, ‘exactly five’, or is it polysemous between all of these readings? The disagreements in the field do not concern the actual contextual interpretations of numbers (the conveyed meaning), said to be any one of the above. Rather, they concern what aspect(s) of the actual interpretation should be assigned semantic (i.e. coded, linguistic) status, and what aspect(s) should be assigned pragmatic status (i.e. inferred, whether as conversational implicature or as part of the explicature). The classical semantic position favored an ‘at least’ semantic meaning (the ‘exactly’ reading derived via a conversational implicature—see Horn, 1972, 1989; Levinson, 1995, or as a pragmatically enriched part of ‘what is said’, see Récanati, 1989). In contrast, Carston (1990) has convincingly argued for a weaker, invariant general-sense semantic meaning, ‘five’, which is neutral between the senses above, and pragmatically (and differently) narrowed down in specific contexts. In Carston (1998b), however, she maintains that it is hard to decide whether to prefer a semantic general meaning or an ‘exact’ meaning. The following, originally Hebrew, examples indeed support attributing a special status to the ‘exactly’ meaning. They certainly argue against an ‘at least’ meaning as the semantic meaning:

- (36) a. “A young couple went into the Allegro record store and offered to sell two CD’s. The store manager offered the couple 40 sheqels. The guy, who looked like a kibbutznik, said that in the store across the street he can get **50 sheqels**. The manager of the store said that not on his life will he get **such a sum**. They took a bet... The guy... sold the CDs and got **55 sheqels** for them. He took a receipt and went back to Allegro. Sorry, said the manager, you lost. I said you won’t get **50 sheqels**, and indeed, you did not get **such a sum**. I got more, explained the astonished kibbutznik, but the sales woman laughed him in the face” (Reported in the magazine *Ha’ir* 3.9.1990).

b Mom: You are big kids now, 11 and 9.

Maya: I am big. I am 11 and a half. But Iddo is not. He’s only 9.

<sup>28</sup> Grammatically triggered inferences are those specifically required by the grammar. Conceptually triggered inferences are needed in order to reach a full proposition, even though they are not grammatically required.

Iddo: Maya, if anything then I'm more 9 and a half than you are 11 and a half.

Maya: **You're not 9 and a half.**

Mom: Maya, he's right!

[Calculations follow, and it turns out that Maya is just above 11;5 and

Iddo is 9;9]

Maya: Well, I said he's not 9 and a half, because he's more!

(Originally Hebrew, 2.26.2000).

In the above examples, the contextually relevant interpretation of the numbers (*fifty* and *9 and a half* respectively) is the 'at least' reading. Thus, if the kibbutznik received 55 sheqels for the CDs, and if Iddo is 9:9, then the shop manager and Maya are supposed to be wrong (respectively). However, the two cling to their claim that they are right. Now, they can only be right if the interpretations of the numbers here are 'exactly fifty/9 and a half' (respectively). But the 'exactly' interpretation is obviously not contextually appropriate. I claim that they can still insist that they are right in their respective arguments because the 'exactly' reading is the salient, i.e., prototypical, most immediately accessible (see Ariel, 2002; Giora, 1997) interpretation of the numbers. Note that while Maya and the store manager are certainly being 'wise-guys', we cannot simply dismiss their interpretations. Their claim does not come across as an outright lie. It is not as if Maya had said that Iddo is 7, for example. In support of this, compare the following (contrived) attempt at a 'wise-guy' interpretation, which is not as successful:<sup>29</sup>

(37) Income tax clerk: How much money did you make last year?

Tax payer: **\$10,000.**

Income tax clerk: I have evidence that you made \$15,897!

Tax payer: ?? That's what I meant. I meant that I made **at least \$10,000**, and possibly more.

In this case, the tax payer's statement about earning \$10,000 is taken to be deceptive. Given the context at hand, an 'exactly' interpretation is called for, and I maintain that this 'wise-guy' attempt at insisting on a contextually inappropriate interpretation ('at least') is unsuccessful, because the 'at least' reading is not as entrenched as the 'exactly' one (see below). It cannot, therefore, be imposed when contextually inappropriate.

When an interpretation has some standing even when contextually inappropriate, it must have a more entrenched status. Sadock (1984) and Koenig (1991) believe that the 'exactly' reading is actually the coded meaning of the numbers. Indeed, Gibbs and Moise (1997) found that even without any context, subjects choose the 'exactly' interpretation for numbers. Similarly, Bezuidenhout and Cutting (2002) found that subjects took less time interpreting numbers as 'exactly' than as 'at least'. Note the following, where despite the contextual support for an 'at least' reading, and despite the tendency for economy in the language of road signs, *2 or more* is used, rather than just *2*:

<sup>29</sup> The dozen people consulted on the last three examples agreed that there is a difference between the tax payer, on the one hand, and Maya and the store manager, on the other.

- (38) HIGHWAY SIGN: Carpool is **2 or more** persons per vehicle (CA. USA 101, 4.7.2000).

The nonprototypical meaning ('at least') is more in need of modifiers.<sup>30</sup> An examination of 2 SB CSAE conversations (Atoms and Amerden, Du Bois, 2000, about 10,000 words) revealed that the 'exactly' reading is indeed highly frequent, but also that the numbers have yet another interpretation in addition to 'at least', 'exactly' and 'at most': a vague 'about' interpretation (e.g. where *five* is interpreted as 'about five').<sup>31</sup> 60/71 (84.5%) of the unmodified numbers seemed to me to have an 'exactly' interpretation in their contexts. But the rest (15.5%) seemed to have an 'about' interpretation. It is because of this 'non-exactly' interpretation that I lean towards a general-sense meaning for the numbers, rather than assuming a linguistic meaning of 'exactly *x*'. This general sense, if left unenriched by the specific context (into e.g., an 'about' or an 'at least' reading), will result in a reading equivalent to the 'exactly' reading.<sup>32</sup>

Note that in fact, the problem runs deeper. It is not clear that all the numbers should receive a uniform analysis. Smaller and nonround numbers tend to be interpreted in an 'exactly' manner more than larger, and round numbers in general (cf. *seventeen vs. a thousand*). Thus, 56/60 (93%) of the numbers I interpreted as 'exactly' in the 2 SB CSAE conversations are small numbers (1-9). In fact, *one* is even different from the other small numbers, probably because of the availability of the article *a*, which is more amenable to a vague reading: all 17 occurrences of *one* were interpreted (by me) as 'exactly one'. The librarian's preference of *one* over *a* in the following example is probably not accidental, therefore:

- (39) Woman at the library: D'you have **a** minute?  
 Librarian: Literally, **one** minute (10.21.1999).<sup>33</sup>

Only 3 of the 11 numbers interpreted vaguely (having an 'about' reading) were small numbers. Mostly (73%) they were very high numbers (e.g. *three hundred thousand people*–Amerden).

<sup>30</sup> Of course people do use *exactly* and *only* with numbers, but probably when the number referred to is unexpected.

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, none of the numbers were interpreted as 'at least' or 'at most' (although they are attested elsewhere). There were a few cases where I could not even determine whether an 'exactly' or an 'about' interpretation was intended by the speaker. A few others induced either an 'exactly' or 'about' readings due to their modifiers (*only*, *exactly*, *about* or a disjunction of numbers, such as *two or three*).

<sup>32</sup> I agree with Lasersohn (1999: 522) that the difference between *x* and *exactly x* (his example is *three o'clock*) is that there is 'less slack' (rather than 'no slack') in determining what *x* is for *exactly x*.

<sup>33</sup> Note the following, where the speaker denies *a couple* but asserts *two*, supporting the assumption that numbers, especially small ones, are routinely interpreted as 'exactly':

- M: Where can I find a photocopying shop?  
 Guard: XX [inaudible] blocks up.  
 M: **A couple** of blocks up?  
 Guard: **No. Two!** (5.4.2000).

In view of the usage of numbers in the ‘about’ interpretation, I believe that Carston’s (1990) general-sense solution should be preferred as the linguistic meaning of the numbers. This is the only meaning compatible with all the contextual interpretations. However, in view of the high frequency, and the interactional priority of the ‘exactly’ interpretation (see again Maya, the kibbutznik, and the experiments in Bezuidenhout and Cutting, 2002 and in Gibbs and Moise, 1997), I suggest that we view it as the *salient* interpretation (cf. Giora, 1997), which explains why it, but not other interpretations, can be imposed even when contextually inappropriate. This follows naturally from the general sense, which if unmodified by the specific context, results in an interpretation equivalent to ‘exactly’. I leave the question of the difference between small and large numbers to future research.

Carston’s (1990) analysis of the numbers can be extended to other linguistic expressions. Consider (30b) again. Recall that the director adopted Bach’s (1994) minimal meaning, whereby *empty* means ‘absolutely nothing’. The lawyer, on the other hand, opts for the contextually modified referential meaning, ‘relevantly empty for an office’. Now, in order to account for the contextually appropriate interpretation one can analyze *empty* (quantifiers, and other linguistic expressions) as containing a hidden variable to be instantiated by context [i.e. a grammatically triggered inference, see Stanley, (2000), Taylor, (2001)]. I am not convinced that this is actually necessary for as many cases as it was proposed in the literature (see Bach, 2001, Ariel, 2002 about the bias towards full propositionality in determining which inferences are grammatically triggered). I think that the City official is right in the semantic respect that *empty* is ‘empty’, in the same manner that *three* is ‘three’. In fact, just as *a chair* is ‘a chair’. All lexical items have invariant, general/underdetermined (rather than Bach’s minimal) meanings, which routinely undergo some modification when used. Every context prompts the creation of a somewhat different ad hoc concept (see Carston, 1998a) from the linguistic expression (e.g. compare Récanati’s, 1995 *he eats rabbit* with *he wears rabbit*, and see the different contextual meanings of *open a restaurant* in Ariel, 2002). Why don’t grammarians claim that these contextual modifications entail that every expression comes with a linguistic indicator pointing the interpreter to the context? I am not sure what the difference is between the contextual adaptation of *rabbit* (no hidden variables are proposed) and of *empty*, or *everyone* (hidden variables are proposed). In other words, I do not always see a difference between what have been called grammatically triggered inferences (for quantifiers) and conceptually triggered inferences (for concept adaptation, e.g. *rabbit*).

In sum, I have argued that linguists should be cautious before they impose their high expectations (for full propositionality) on linguistic meanings. I believe that attested wise-guy interpretations can tip us off as to linguistic (and salient) meanings, since only they are interactionally legitimate (though certainly uncooperative) when contextually inappropriate.

#### 4.3.2. Linguistic meanings and wise-guy meanings

While linguistic meaning can indeed be identified via wise-guy interpretations, we should note that speakers’ perception of what constitutes a linguistic meaning depends on their ‘theory of language’. This can be seen in the history of translation

philosophies, for example. Translation theorists distinguish between word-for-word, literal, and free translations (Catford, 1965; Robinson, 1998; Shen, 1995). Word-for-word translations (practiced till the 15th century) ignore collocational and idiomatic meanings, as well as grammatical requirements (e.g. translating *It's raining cats and dogs* into French *Il pleut chats et chiens*). Literal translations add grammatically obligatory elements (e.g., *des* for both *chiens* and *chats* above). A faithful translation (*Il pleut à verse*) is actually considered a free translation. According to Shen (1995: 571), this classification stems from “treating language as a repertoire (mass) of words instead of as a patterned system”.

A similar outdated view of language guides lay persons' treatment of language. Thus, while I have argued above (Sections 4.1 and 4.2) that discourse data containing wise-guy interpretations can help us establish what linguistic meanings are, this is not equally true for all types of meanings. While as speakers, we are well aware of many linguistic meanings, other meanings elude us. Obviously, the only linguistic meanings people can **intentionally** use as stated, privileged, interactional wise-guy interpretations are meanings they are conscious of. For example, in a folk theory of language, etymological meanings are ‘the real’ meanings of words. Accordingly, here is an example where the compositional linguistic meaning in Greek counts as the literal meaning in English:

- (40) The term *schizophrenia* comes from Greek, *schizo* or ‘splitting’ and *phrenia*, meaning ‘of the mind’. **Hence**, schizophrenia **literally** means suffering from a *split mind* (Tsuang and Faraone, 1999: 5).

The next example also shows that the linguistic meaning chosen by interlocutors depends on their ‘linguistic theory’:

- (41) Ben: What are you doing, criticizing me?  
 Gus: No, I was just. . .  
 Ben: You'll get a swipe round your earhole if you don't watch your step.  
 Gus: **Now look here**, Ben. . .  
 Ben: **I'm not looking anywhere!** (Pinter, *The dumb waiter*, pp. 15–16, quoted from Yus Ramos, 1998, p. 87).

*Now look here*, in the intonation it must have in this context, can only be an idiomatic expression (a discourse marker), and not a suggestion to physically look anywhere. But Ben treats it that way, because according to his folk theory of language, ‘intonation does not count as linguistic meaning’.<sup>34</sup> It can therefore be ignored for the production of a wise-guy interpretation.

Summing up, while wise-guy interpretations point to linguistic meanings, these do not necessarily include all the linguistic meanings analyzed by linguists. Silverstein (1985) convincingly argues that speakers are sensitive to referential meanings, but

<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in the movie ‘The road to El Dorado’, when one of the heroes tells the other: “Come on!”, the other responds: “I'm not coming on.”.

not to pragmatic functions. Indeed, we have seen interlocutors ignore a less conscious pragmatic function (of the discourse marker *now look here*), but I found no wise-guy example ignoring a referential meaning in favor of a pragmatic function (a procedural meaning). Moreover, folk theory opinions (about etymology, intonation) allow for wise-guy interpretations which diverge from the linguistic meanings linguists would attribute to native speakers. Thus, while attested wise-guy interpretations can help us identify some linguistic meanings, they cannot do this for all meanings equally well. Conceptual/referential meanings are more available to speakers than pragmatic/procedural meanings are, and hence, only they serve as a source for wise-guy interpretations.

### 5. On the nonunitary nature of privileged interactional interpretations

Recall that literal meaning proponents have sought to define a single representation of meaning which would be just the right minimal meaning ('what is said', the literal meaning, see again Section 1 and Ariel, 2002). I have argued above that although explicatures can function as the privileged interactional interpretations on which interlocutors can rely (for establishing the relevance of the speaker's contribution), addressees sometimes select a variety of other interpretations as the privileged interactional interpretations. Moreover, I now wish to argue that there is no unanimity between interlocutors regarding the relevant interactional interpretation of utterances, even given a specific context. First, people, including judges, differ as to how literal-minded they are. But more crucially, people are guided by their interests when choosing their privileged interactional interpretation (see Thomas, 1995: 60–61). They each have their agenda, and therefore disagree with each other (recall the debates over *fifty, 9 and a half, empty, light the kettle, look here*, etc.).

We have seen a few cases where controversy revolves around prototypical meaning versus invariant, general linguistic meaning. Monica Lewinsky and President Clinton chose a (specified) prototypical meaning for *having sex*, but Linda Tripp and the American public polled understood *having sex* in its general (underspecified) sense (*Haaretz* 4.14.1999), which rendered Clinton a liar. The judge ruled that he lied in his testimony (accepting a general linguistic meaning of *having sex*), and held him in contempt of court for this (*Haaretz* 8.1.1999). The Israeli judge who deemed that a burgundy car counts as a red car also preferred the general linguistic meaning (see again Section 4.1), but virtually all my students (25/26 students) thought the judge was wrong, namely, that the prototypical meaning should have counted.

Another case involving disagreements about prototypical versus invariant, general linguistic meaning mentioned above concerns the concept of 'Israeli' (see Section 4.2). Recall that the district court determined that Sheinbein is not an Israeli (and should therefore be extradited to the US), because he is only an Israeli in the general linguistic sense of the word, but he is not a prototypical Israeli. However, the supreme court later reversed that decision (at a majority vote of 3 against 2). At stake was again the question of linkage to Israel (i.e. prototypical versus general linguistic meaning). The minority opinion (presented by the supreme court president

and another justice) was that immunity should only be granted to a ‘prototypical’ citizen “for whom Israel is the center of his life and he participates in its life, tying his destiny with its destiny” (*Haaretz* 2.26.99).

But there was another factor involved in the Sheinbein case. And this factor has nothing to do with type of meaning. It has to do with a specific agenda. An additional argument for not granting such an Israeli immunity according to the supreme court minority justices was that since hundreds of thousands of Israelis now live outside of Israel while maintaining their Israeli citizenship, Israel may well become a shelter country for criminals, and this will cause injustice and damage the international image of the state of Israel. Note, then, that these two highly regarded justices were willing to define the concept of ‘Israeli citizen’ more narrowly, based on practical problems of justice and positive national image. The legal advisor to the government then tried (and failed) to have the case reconsidered, based on similar practical arguments. In other words, while the actual decision taken was that the invariant, general linguistic meaning rules, in fact more prominent legal authorities thought that it should have been the prototypical meaning (4 against 3), some because they thought that the prototypical meaning is the more relevant one, some (also) because they had another agenda in mind. Non-judges are certainly no different.

The Pinter characters clearly have their interests when insisting on their wise-guy interpretations: They use language to fight for dominance over each other (see Yus Ramos, 1998). Politicians certainly have interests. No doubt one reason behind the ministers of the Israeli government (and certainly Netanyahu’s lawyer) in blaming Minister Hanegby for **saying** what he only implicated (that the president of the supreme court gave his blessing to the appointment on the agenda) was that they wanted to shirk off responsibility for an appointment that has come to be viewed as scandalous by the Israeli public. But politicians are not the only people who let their interests guide their interpretations. The store manager (and Maya) (in 36a,b) when they insisted on the prototypical but contextually inappropriate meaning of *fifty* (and *9 and a half*) were also driven by an agenda: to come out ‘right’.

Next, consider the cases of strong conversational implicatures. Recall that H.D. (26) thought she lied to the boss when her (strong) implicature was false. So did 15 of my students (55.6%), but 11 (40.7%) thought she did not lie, and 1 thought she both lied and told the truth. Intuitions vary. Indeed, Gibbs and Moise (1997), Nicolle and Clark (1999) and Bezuidenhout and Cutting (2002) never got 100% results in their experiments on ‘what is said’. Moreover, whereas Gibbs and Moise did get subjects to distinguish between explicatures and implicatures (rejecting the latter as ‘what is said’), Nicolle and Clark, as well as Bezuidenhout and Cutting, did not. Their subjects tended to accept conversational implicatures as ‘what is said’. For the most part, the differences were noted for different strengths of implicatures, but sometimes different results were received for the same experimental question.

Recall that the results presented in Noveck (2001) point that addressees often take the (scalar) implicature (of *might*, i.e. ‘not must’) as a necessary part of ‘what is said’. Note, however, that the subjects were not uniform in their choices. Over a third (35%) did ignore the implicature for the assessment of the statement as ‘right’. Then, in a second experiment, when the question was phrased differently, whether the

statement was ‘**true**’ (as opposed to ‘**right**’) many more subjects ignored the implicature (65%). Last, in a third experiment, after they had been asked these questions repeatedly, subjects shifted their judgments significantly, 94% of them now ignoring the implicature in the weaker formulation condition (as ‘right’). Thus, we seem to have different intuitions as individuals (experiment 1), vis a vis true/false versus right/wrong judgments (experiment 2) and following some ‘training’ (experiment 3, see also Nicolle and Clark, 1999 last experiment).

Obviously, context plays a crucial role in determining what meaning level (linguistic meaning, enriched linguistic meaning, implicature) is selected as the privileged interactional interpretation. Gibbs and Moise’s (1997) experimental results show that what is taken to be the ‘said’ meaning varies with context. Thus, their subjects sometimes took the explicature as ‘what is said’, but at other times, it was the minimal meaning which was taken as the ‘said’ meaning.<sup>35</sup> The same is true for Bezuidenhout and Cutting (2002: experiment 3). Context also affects how elaborate our interpretations are. Gibbs (1994: 74) reports that subjects chose to invest much more processing effort in interpreting sentences which seemed meaningless or metaphorical, if they had been informed that these sentences had been written by famous modern poets than if they were told that the sentences were produced by a computer.

Last, a mini informal experiment performed by Ball and Ariel (1978) showed that subjects’ interpretations of the privileged interactional interpretation of *go for a walk or something* varied considerably with context. Subjects were forced to decide whether various activities performed by a couple allow us to say that the phrase ‘go for a walk or something’ is true or appropriate. For example, if the assertion *They went for a walk or something*, is true, someone wins a bet. They also had to decide whether a contextually specified promise *we’ll go for a walk or something* has been fulfilled, and whether the activities following a proposal *Wanna go for a walk or something* are appropriate. The results showed that whereas all subjects confirmed the truth/appropriateness of the above when the couple actually went for a walk, they differed as to whether driving, watching a movie and bike riding made the above true or appropriate. Now, *or something* evokes a unifying property of a whole range of alternatives, suggested by the explicit disjunct (*go for a walk*, in this case). This is why other activities can be acceptable. Of course, grammatically speaking, there is no difference between the different cases, because the explicit disjunct was invariant. However, we varied two components in this experiment. First, the strength of literalness (we did not actually intend this): in the assertion case we asked the subjects to decide who **wins a bet** (if they went for a drive, for example). In the promise case we asked the subjects to decide whether the **promise was kept**, and in the proposal case we asked them to decide whether the addressee must have been **puzzled** (if, for example, taken on a 20 min drive or a bike ride)—a larger leeway in this case. We also varied the contextual function of the ‘going for a walk or something’. This was mainly crucial in the promise case, where subjects could infer that the promise was made in order to

<sup>35</sup> Note that the two different interpretations above are equally considered explicatures by Relevance theoreticians.

get the addressee entertained, since she had been complaining that she never gets out of the house.

Given these variables, we can understand why the highest ratings as appropriate for a non-walking activity were received in the promise case (14 out of our 17 subjects determined that the promise was kept when the couple in fact went to see a movie). Interestingly enough, the semantically closer ‘going on a drive’ received a lower number of confirmations (13, 10 and 7 out of 17 in the three types of experimental situations) (in the last one it was outvoted by a negative decision- by 10 subjects). In other words, in an experiment where subjects had to decide whether a certain statement is true or appropriate, given one and the same activity, they made three different decisions, two of them significantly different. The reason is that other contextual factors, most crucially the goal of the speaker in uttering the specific phrase, enter into people’s calculations of both truth and appropriateness assessments. The privileged interactional interpretation of *go for a walk or something*, therefore, varied across individuals, speech act types, and local goals.

## 6. Conclusions

A variety of levels of meaning have been discussed in the literature: linguistic meaning, literal meaning, explicature/‘what is said’/implicature, particularized conversational implicatures, and generalized conversational implicatures. Each of these is well defined (even if researchers sometimes disagree about whether specific meanings should count as linguistic, as particularized or as generalized conversational implicatures). I have argued that the classical literal meaning and ‘what is said’/ explicature are (also) an attempt to represent the content of a basic-level meaning (since linguistic meaning was seen as too incomplete and implicatures as too rich, see Berg, 2002). In an attempt to find an interactionally based minimal meaning of this kind, I examined real discourses in order to find out what types of meanings are interactionally privileged for interlocutors. I have characterized privileged interactional interpretations as those contextual meanings which are taken as binding the speaker and as constituting her relevant contribution to the ongoing discourse. Now, this characterization is far from a strict definition, but once we realize how what interlocutors take as the privileged interactional interpretation varies, I believe this vague characterization is justified.

I have argued that people certainly consider the contextually appropriate explicature as a potential privileged interactional interpretation. Bare (unenriched) linguistic meanings are routinely far too incomplete to be relevant. However, I have also suggested that it is not invariably so that interlocutors enrich the linguistic meaning precisely up to full propositionality (as is required for forming an explicature). They may do more or they may do less than that. I have tried to emphasize that no single meaning formula (i.e., explicature, literal meaning) represents what interlocutors take as the privileged interactional interpretation. Partial completions (not up to full propositionality) may be sufficient sometimes. Even (‘default’) generalized conversational implicatures are not automatically added on as ‘what is said’ or as the privileged interactional interpretation. People sometimes even select bare linguistic

meanings which are contextually irrelevant interpretations as their privileged interactional interpretations. On other occasions, however, interlocutors opt for interpretations which are more than the explicature, strongly communicated conversational implicatures. We also saw a case where a weakly communicated particularized conversational implicature was viewed as the privileged interactional interpretation.

The main driving force behind interlocutors' decisions is relevance. We try to view the speaker as being relevant to us. Relevance dictates how much we choose to develop linguistic meanings by adding contextually induced inferences to them. Relevance considerations dictate whether we adopt a bare linguistic meaning, a partially, or a fully developed linguistic meaning as the privileged interactional interpretation. Since different people find different types of information relevant, and since different contexts call for different levels of precision in understanding, the same utterance will receive differently enriched interpretations as privileged interactional interpretations. However, interlocutors (judges included) also have an agenda, which sometimes guides their choices.

Finally, I wish to emphasize that despite the seeming freedom in discursual interpretations, it is not the case that 'anything goes'. Normally, contextual appropriateness is of primary importance, and hence, contextually enriched interpretations (even if not fully propositional ones) are commonly taken as privileged interactional interpretations. Conversational implicatures constitute part of the privileged interactional interpretation only if crucial for viewing the speaker as relevant (i.e., when the explicit contribution is irrelevant). And contextually inappropriate interpretations can only be defended as privileged interactional interpretations (even if laughable) if they consist of (unenriched) linguistic meanings. However, although rare, wise-guy interpretations teach us something about the nature of communication. While various extralinguistic factors no doubt heavily and routinely influence the privileged interactional interpretations we choose, rendering enriched linguistic meanings the norm, the linguistic code has a very privileged status: Only linguistic meaning can (sometimes) be successfully insisted upon as a privileged interactional interpretation when contextually irrelevant. It seems that interlocutors have essentialized the linguistic code (or rather, its referential aspects), assigning it a privileged status, even when patently irrelevant.

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