

Local Pragmatics and ‘Embedded Implicature’

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Abstract:

Here are two cases of the phenomenon of so-called ‘embedded implicature’:

1. a. Jo ate some of the grapes.
b. Jo either ate a mango or some of the grapes.
2. Sam: What’s making all that noise in the attic?
Lou: a. Oh, there’s a nest up there.
b. I’m not sure. But if there’s a nest up there, we’ll have a big mess to clean up.

According to standard pragmatic analyses, in each of the (a) utterances, the speaker may communicate a conversational implicature: for (1a), the generalised (scalar) implicature that Jo didn’t eat all of the grapes; for (2a), the particularised implicature that the nest is occupied by birds. A problem arises when the sentence in each of the (a) utterances is embedded in the scope of a logical operator, as in the (b) utterances (disjunction in (1b); conditional in (2b)): the implicature seems to fall in the scope of the operator and so to be a component of the semantic (truth-conditional) content of the utterance.

In this talk, I’ll compare three approaches to various cases of such ‘embedded pragmatic effects’: (a) conventionalist accounts (whether grammatical or lexical); (b) a Gricean account given as a rational reconstruction of global pragmatic reasoning; (c) a relevance-theoretic ‘localist’ pragmatic account.