

Implicature

Mark Criley

Illinois Wesleyan University

10/05/2018



Implicature

When someone says “If P, then Q,” we often understand them to suggest or imply or implicate that “If not P, then not Q.”



Implicature

When someone says “If P, then Q,” we often understand them to suggest or imply or implicate that “If not P, then not Q.”

But that is not a consequence of what they have said, or part of the meaning of what they said. (They’ve uttered a conditional, not a biconditional!)



Implicature

When someone says “If P, then Q,” we often understand them to suggest or imply or implicate that “If not P, then not Q.”

But that is not a consequence of what they have said, or part of the meaning of what they said. (They’ve uttered a conditional, not a biconditional!)

Philosophers of language have a name for this sort of thing:
implicature.



Content or Implicature? Testing by Cancellation



Content or Implicature? Testing by Cancellation

Here's a test for telling whether something is a consequence of what was said or just something that you are "reading between the lines":



Content or Implicature? Testing by Cancellation

Here's a test for telling whether something is a consequence of what was said or just something that you are "reading between the lines":

Can you "cancel" the sentence without contradicting yourself?



Content or Implicature? Testing by Cancellation

Here's a test for telling whether something is a consequence of what was said or just something that you are "reading between the lines":

Can you "cancel" the sentence without contradicting yourself?

Suppose I say: "If the virus doesn't mutate, we'll be okay."



Content or Implicature? Testing by Cancellation

Here's a test for telling whether something is a consequence of what was said or just something that you are "reading between the lines":

Can you "cancel" the sentence without contradicting yourself?

Suppose I say: "If the virus doesn't mutate, we'll be okay."

And then I say: "In fact, even if it *does* mutate, we'll still *probably* be okay."



Content or Implicature? Testing by Cancellation

Here's a test for telling whether something is a consequence of what was said or just something that you are "reading between the lines":

Can you "cancel" the sentence without contradicting yourself?

Suppose I say: "If the virus doesn't mutate, we'll be okay."

And then I say: "In fact, even if it *does* mutate, we'll still *probably* be okay."

I haven't *contradicted* what I said earlier. I have just canceled an *implicature*: something that you might (reasonably) have "read between the lines."



More Implicature Cancellation

My stock broker makes money whenever *I* make money.



More Implicature Cancellation

My stock broker makes money whenever *I* make money.

- *Indeed, he makes money even when I don't.*



More Implicature Cancellation

My stock broker makes money whenever *I* make money.

- *Indeed, he makes money even when I don't.*

If you finish your dinner, you can have a cookie.



More Implicature Cancellation

My stock broker makes money whenever *I* make money.

- *Indeed, he makes money even when I don't.*

If you finish your dinner, you can have a cookie.

- *In fact, you can have a cookie even if you don't finish your dinner.*



More Implicature Cancellation

My stock broker makes money whenever *I* make money.

- *Indeed, he makes money even when I don't.*

If you finish your dinner, you can have a cookie.

- *In fact, you can have a cookie even if you don't finish your dinner.*

You can have either cake or ice cream for dessert.



More Implicature Cancellation

My stock broker makes money whenever *I* make money.

- *Indeed, he makes money even when I don't.*

If you finish your dinner, you can have a cookie.

- *In fact, you can have a cookie even if you don't finish your dinner.*

You can have either cake or ice cream for dessert.

- *In fact, if you like, you can have both!*



More Implicature Cancellation

My stock broker makes money whenever *I* make money.

- *Indeed, he makes money even when I don't.*

If you finish your dinner, you can have a cookie.

- *In fact, you can have a cookie even if you don't finish your dinner.*

You can have either cake or ice cream for dessert.

- *In fact, if you like, you can have both!*

I have three fingers on my right hand.



More Implicature Cancellation

My stock broker makes money whenever *I* make money.

- *Indeed, he makes money even when I don't.*

If you finish your dinner, you can have a cookie.

- *In fact, you can have a cookie even if you don't finish your dinner.*

You can have either cake or ice cream for dessert.

- *In fact, if you like, you can have both!*

I have three fingers on my right hand.

- *And two more, in addition to those.*



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.

- Nick and Tim went surfing.



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.

- Nick and Tim went surfing.
 - *Indeed, Nick didn't go.*



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.

- Nick and Tim went surfing.
 - *Indeed, Nick didn't go.*
- **d** is neither a cube nor a tet.



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.

- Nick and Tim went surfing.
 - *Indeed, Nick didn't go.*
- **d** is neither a cube nor a tet.
 - *Rather, it is a cube.*



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.

- Nick and Tim went surfing.
 - *Indeed, Nick didn't go.*
- **d** is neither a cube nor a tet.
 - *Rather, it is a cube.*
- **a** is larger than **b**.



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.

- Nick and Tim went surfing.
 - *Indeed, Nick didn't go.*
- **d** is neither a cube nor a tet.
 - *Rather, it is a cube.*
- **a** is larger than **b**.
 - *In fact, they are the same size.*



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.

- Nick and Tim went surfing.
 - *Indeed, Nick didn't go.*
- **d** is neither a cube nor a tet.
 - *Rather, it is a cube.*
- **a** is larger than **b**.
 - *In fact, they are the same size.*
- I have only three fingers on my right hand.



Compare with these attempts at cancellations, which *don't* work. They don't work because what we're trying to cancel really *is* part of the sentence means or entails. We can't cancel it without contradicting ourselves.

- Nick and Tim went surfing.
 - *Indeed, Nick didn't go.*
- **d** is neither a cube nor a tet.
 - *Rather, it is a cube.*
- **a** is larger than **b**.
 - *In fact, they are the same size.*
- I have only three fingers on my right hand.
 - *And two more in addition to that.*



Be careful of implicature

Implicature can mess with your head. For instance, you might read



Be careful of implicature

Implicature can mess with your head. For instance, you might read

If **a** is in back of **b**, then it is larger than **b**.



Be careful of implicature

Implicature can mess with your head. For instance, you might read

If **a** is in back of **b**, then it is larger than **b**.

Then when you find out that **a** *isn't* in back of **b**, you might assume that **a** *isn't* larger than **b**.



Be careful of implicature

Implicature can mess with your head. For instance, you might read

If **a** is in back of **b**, then it is larger than **b**.

Then when you find out that **a** *isn't* in back of **b**, you might assume that **a** *isn't* larger than **b**.

But that would be a mistake!



Be careful of implicature

Implicature can mess with your head. For instance, you might read

If **a** is in back of **b**, then it is larger than **b**.

Then when you find out that **a** *isn't* in back of **b**, you might assume that **a** *isn't* larger than **b**.

But that would be a mistake!

The conditional will still be true when the antecedent is false and the consequent is true!

