

## Cancellation and Intention

### Noel Burton-Roberts

Chapter 9 in Soria, B. and Romero, E. (Eds.) *Explicit Communication: Robyn Carston's Pragmatics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Pp.138-155.

Robyn Carston (2002) has claimed that explicatures can be cancelled. I argue that *cancellation* of explicature is logically impossible and empirically incorrect. Instead, it should be thought of as *clarification* of speaker's intended explicature.

However – even in respect of implicatures – it may be asked: What exactly is cancellation? Is 'cancellation', as distinct from clarification, actually possible?

While Carston aligns cancellability with what is pragmatically derived, I argue that speaker's intention is the crucial feature. Cancellation of intention – be it an intention-to-explicate or an intention-to-implicate – is impossible. What was intended *was intended*. 'Cancellation' must then mean 'cancellation without contradiction of intention', of which Paul Grice's 'cancellation without contradiction of what is said' is a special case (since what was said must have been intended).

Implicature-cancellation is viable, then, only if we can accept that implicatures can arise independently of speaker's intentions. This is impossible if – as for Grice – implicature involves intention and recognition of intention. However, I suggest that Grice's distinction between generalised and particularised implicature (GCI vs PCI) is relevant here – especially as treated by Gerald Gazdar (1979) and Stephen Levinson (2000). In the light of my more general (intention-based) notion of cancellation, I argue that GCIs are indeed cancellable but that PCIs are not. Cancellation then does not provide a test for the explicature/implicature distinction, but for different reasons from those advanced by Carston (2002).<sup>1</sup>

### 1 The Pragmatic Cancellation Principle

In *Thoughts and Utterances*, Carston articulates a general principle: 'it is pragmatic inference quite generally that is cancellable/defeasible.' (2002: 138). I'll call this 'The Pragmatic Cancellability Principle' (PCP).

It might seem that Carston is simply re-articulating an uncontroversial basic principle of pragmatic theory here. Well, it is certainly uncontroversial within Gricean pragmatics. Gricean pragmatics is about – indeed all about – the derivation of implicatures (conversational implicatures; I ignore conventional implicature here). As such, it is about what implicitly communicated. In Gricean terms, *semantics vs pragmatics* is isomorphic with *saying vs implicating* and with *explicit vs implicit*. Since the relation of implicatures to what is said is a non-truth-conditional relation, implicatures are by definition cancellable – that is, cancellable without contradiction of what is said. Hence, for Grice, cancellability is a (if not the) hall-mark of pragmatic inference. This is the Gricean PCP.

However, Carston is articulating the PCP in the post-Gricean context of relevance theory. In that context, she is absolutely right when she writes (2002: 138) that it 'alters the terms of the discussion completely.' In that context, it has dramatically different implications, which are – or should be – controversial. What I want to do first is to show that, in respect of relevance theory's notion of explicature, continued adherence to the PCP is logically questionable and empirically incorrect. Then I raise some questions about the very idea of cancellation. I will suggest that,

even within a Gricean framework, the very idea of ‘cancellation’ is problematic, and here I focus on implicature.

## 2 The problem of cancellable explicature

Relevance theory (RT) – among other pragmatic frameworks – has shown that pragmatic inference by the hearer is as much involved in his recovery of what is explicitly communicated by the utterance of a linguistic expression as in his recovery of what is implicitly communicated by it. Constitutive aspects of what is explicitly said (in some important sense of ‘said’) are not linguistically encoded but have to be pragmatically inferred. In RT terms, ‘explicatures’ as much as implicatures have to be pragmatically inferred. An extreme, though commonplace, illustration of this is Bill’s response to Ann in (1):

- (1) Ann: Have you returned that copy of *The Minimalist Program* book to the library?  
 Bill: Yes.

Clearly, Bill has explicitly communicated (‘said’, ‘explicated’) that he has returned the given copy to the given library. Equally clearly, this is not encoded by *yes* but has to be pragmatically inferred in the context of his utterance, the context constituted by Ann’s question.

Since pragmatic inference is involved in the recovery of both the explicit content of utterances (explicatures) and their implicit content (implicatures), we cannot appeal the Gricean isomorphisms to sort out – either intuitively or by test – what is explicit (explicated) and what implicit (implicated). So, if the explicit/implicit distinction has theoretical significance, it is important that some new criterion for the distinction be offered, some definition of what it is to be explicated rather than implicated.

Carston offers the following:

An assumption (proposition) communicated by an utterance is an ‘explicature’ of the utterance if and only if it is a *development* of (a) a linguistically encoded logical form of the utterance, or of (b) a sentential sub-part of a logical form (2002: 124, my emphasis).

The problem with this and other definitions of ‘explicature’ that depend on the notion of ‘development’ is that no definition of ‘development’ is anywhere given. In Burton-Roberts (2005) I tried interpreting ‘development’ in terms of entailment, a line of enquiry suggested by Carston (1988).<sup>2</sup> I won’t pursue that here because it yields inconsistent results and poses other problems (see my (2005)). So I’ll ignore ‘development’ in what follows. In trying to pin-point what an ‘explicature’ is, I’ll rely on Carston’s informal, intuitive remarks about it.

Carston – and RT in general – avoids Grice’s term ‘what is said’ for the very good reason that it is so slippery. In ordinary parlance, there are two distinct senses of ‘saying’ which Grice fails to distinguish.<sup>3</sup> In explaining the problem in my teaching, I refer to these as ‘**A-saying**’ and ‘**B-saying**’. To report what someone has ‘A-said’ we must quote their very utterance: in respect of (1) above, for example, we will report Bill as having (A-)said ‘Yes’. Here we report on a [**saying-of-‘E’**], where E is some expression. By contrast, reporting what Bill has thereby ‘B-said’ involves

an assessment of the thought he intended to explicitly communicate. Here we report on a [saying-that-P] and will report Bill as having said that he had returned that copy of *The Minimalist Program* to the given library. (See Lewis (1980/98: 41) for a comparable distinction.)

‘Explicature’ seems to reconstruct ‘What is B-said’. This is indicated by Carston’s discussion of ‘explicating’ in terms of ‘expressing [...] commitment’ (2002: 123) and her gloss of ‘communicating [...] the proposition expressed’ (that is, explicating) as ‘overtly endorsing’ it (2002: 124). This captures what Bill is doing in (1) with regard to the thought that he has returned that copy to that library.<sup>4</sup>

So understood (as what is B-said), ‘explicature’ is a minor improvement on Grice’s ‘what is said’; it at least pins down one sense of ‘what is said’. I’m not suggesting that any of this provides a definition of explicature, since it depends on notions which, while intuitive enough, are not formally defined. I’m merely trying to get at the intuitive idea behind ‘explicature’.

Here’s the problem with the PCP, then. Explicatures are not linguistically encoded but have to be pragmatically inferred. So, according to the PCP, they should be cancellable. Carston (2002: 138) explicitly argues that they are cancellable. I shall deal first with a problem of principle in this connection and then with some empirical (or at least intuitively manifest) facts.

The problem of principle is this. Cancellation, as noted, is generally taken to be *cancellation without contradiction of what is said*. The question is: which sense of ‘said’ is involved in ‘cancellation without contradiction of what is said’ – A-said or B-said? I don’t see that it can be either.

It can’t be A-saying because ‘what is A-said’ amounts to ‘what is linguistically encoded’ and RT insists that what is linguistically encoded does not yield a truth-evaluable proposition. Pragmatic processes – disambiguation, reference assignment, and the supplying of elliptical or otherwise unarticulated constituents – are required for a truth-evaluable proposition to be derived. So, since what is linguistically encoded is not a truth-evaluable proposition, nothing could possibly contradict what is A-said. Contradiction is a truth-theoretic (logical) relation holding between truth-evaluable propositions.

So ‘without contradiction of what is said’ must mean ‘without contradiction of what is B-said’. But if ‘cancellation’ is ‘cancellation without contradiction of what is B-said’ – and if ‘explicature’ reconstructs ‘what is B-said’ – then cancellation of explicature is clearly impossible as well. To allow that explicatures are cancellable would be to allow that an explicature can be cancelled without contradicting that explicature (that what is B-said can be cancelled without contradicting what is B-said). This looks straightforwardly contradictory. Furthermore, assuming a normal understanding of what it is to be ‘committed’ to a proposition, what it is to ‘overtly endorse’ it and to ‘express commitment’ to it (Carston’s informal accounts of what it is to explicate), it is clearly impossible for a speaker to cancel what she has explicated without contradicting herself.

In illustration, consider a putative explicature-cancellation that Carston (202: 138) offers:

(2) She’s ready – but Karen isn’t ready to leave for the airport.

It is true that (2) is not contradictory. But it couldn’t possibly be: *She’s ready* and *Karen isn’t ready to leave for the airport* are merely (non-propositional) linguistic encodings. Consider also (3).

(3) She's ready but she's not ready.

This can't be assessed for contradiction until we have ascertained the intended reference of each occurrence of *she*, made good what's not articulated in each clause (ready for what?), and decided what concept of 'readiness' the speaker has in mind. Someone can be ready to leave for the airport in having bags packed and coat on (say, READY<sub>[213]</sub>), yet not ready in the sense of being mentally prepared to leave (say, READY<sub>[218]</sub>). The song *Leaving on a jet plane* offers a clear example.

In short, contradiction can only be assessed in respect of propositions, and thus at the level of explicature. So, assume that the explicature of the utterance of the second clause of (2) is (4).

(4) KAREN<sub>[K]</sub> IS NOT READY<sub>[218]</sub> AT TIME<sub>[U]</sub> TO LEAVE FOR THE AIRPORT<sub>[A]</sub>.

Clearly, in order to know whether (4), as the explicature of the second clause in (2), is cancelling the explicature of the utterance of *She's ready* in (2), we need to know what the explicature of that utterance of *She's ready* was. Here are four possible candidates:

- (5) a. PAT<sub>[P]</sub> IS READY<sub>[213]</sub> AT TIME<sub>[U]</sub> TO LEAVE FOR THE AIRPORT<sub>[A]</sub>.
- b. KAREN<sub>[K]</sub> IS READY<sub>[319]</sub> AT TIME<sub>[U]</sub> FOR BREAKFAST.
- c. KAREN<sub>[K]</sub> IS READY<sub>[213]</sub> AT TIME<sub>[U]</sub> TO LEAVE FOR THE AIRPORT<sub>[A]</sub>.
- d. KAREN<sub>[K]</sub> IS READY<sub>[218]</sub> AT TIME<sub>[U]</sub> TO LEAVE FOR THE AIRPORT<sub>[A]</sub>.

(4) contradicts none of (5a)-(5c). However, it doesn't cancel them either. The only candidate explicature that could be regarded as cancelled by (4) is (5d). But it is precisely (5d) that is contradicted by (4). In conclusion: either (5d) *was* the explicature of the utterance of the first clause of (2) but is *not cancellable* without contradiction, or it was *not the explicature* in the first place.

Take another example discussed in my (2005):

- (6) Ann-i: That fellow's playing is lamentable.
- Bill: Too right. Cruelty to cellos, I call it.
- Ann-ii: Not the cellist – the trombonist!

To derive the explicature of Ann's first utterance we need to assign reference to Ann's 'that fellow'. This reference must be pragmatically inferred by Bill. According to the PCP, then, the reference, and thus the explicature, of Ann's first utterance should be cancellable. But is this really how we are to analyse what Ann is doing by her second utterance – cancelling the explicature of her first utterance? This seems just wrong. It requires us to assume that Ann *was* in fact explicating that the cellist's playing was lamentable. You can't cancel an explicature unless there *was* an explicature to cancel in the first place. But she clearly wasn't explicating any such thing. Her second utterance makes it abundantly clear that she was explicating it was the *trombonist's* playing that was lamentable.

The assumption that Ann's second utterance is an explicature-cancellation would require us to accept that what a speaker explicates is entirely in the hearer's (in this case, Bill's) gift – his decision and only his. This is what might be suggested by saying that explicature is 'pragmatically determined'. But, although it is true that a

hearer has to engage in pragmatic inference in ‘determining’ reference and thus explicature – ‘determining’ here means ‘ascertaining’. In another more relevant sense of ‘determine’, reference and thus explicature is not determined pragmatically and not by the hearer. It is determined by speakers and their intentions. The hearer and his pragmatic inferences are involved only in his attempt to ascertain the speaker’s intention.<sup>5</sup> Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber themselves acknowledge (2004) that for RT – as for Grice – pragmatics is all about intention (that is, *speaker’s* intention) and recognition of intention. Recognition of speakers’ intention may be successful or, as in the case of (6) above, unsuccessful. Similarly with ambiguity, as in (7), where Ann’s second utterance is surely not a case of explicature-cancellation.

- (7) Ann-i: I suggested to Jim that he turn it down.  
 Bill: Well, he’s taken no notice. It’s as loud as it ever was.  
 Ann-ii: That job offer! I suggested he decline it.

Generally, an intention actually executed in the act of utterance – particularly an intention-to-explicate (or B-say) so executed – cannot be cancelled. As we all know to our cost, what’s been said cannot be unsaid.

In the most obvious and uncontroversial cases of pragmatically inferred explicature – cases involving disambiguation, reference assignment, and the supplying of elliptical or otherwise unarticulated constituents, as in (2), (6) and (7) – it seems clear to me that what is going on is not *cancellation*, but *clarification*, of the speaker’s (necessarily intended) explicature, given the hearer’s failure to identify it.

Treating the relevant phenomenon as clarification rather than cancellation seems an obvious solution to an otherwise serious problem of principle with explicature. If we allow that explicatures can be cancelled, we are going to have to abandon Carston’s intuitive account of explicature in terms of expressing commitment to and endorsement of a proposition. This would leave us without even an intuitive, pretheoretical account of what explicature is.

Insisting that explicature can only be clarified, not cancelled, means abandoning the PCP, the principle that anything pragmatically inferred is cancellable. This seems to me both inevitable and entirely unproblematic. Although possibly coherent in Gricean terms – or possibly not, see below – the PCP makes little sense in a post-Gricean context.

Furthermore, abandoning the PCP is anyway indicated on empirical grounds. Take Kent Bach’s (1994) famous example, (8a).

- (8) a. Ann: You won’t die! (said to little Billy, who’s just cut his finger).  
 b-i. Billy won’t die FROM THAT CUT.  
 b-ii. Billy is immortal.  
 c. !You won’t die – but you will/might die from that cut.

It is intuitively manifest that, in uttering (8a), Ann has said – B-said, explicitly expressed and endorsed (explicated) – what is represented in (8b-i), not (8b-ii). This explicature has to be pragmatically inferred. But it has not been generally noticed that it is not cancellable without contradiction. (8c), in which the pragmatically derived aspect of the explicature is cancelled, is clearly contradictory. Similarly for another famous example, (9a): the pragmatically derived aspect of the explicature (9b) is not cancellable without contradiction, as (9c) clearly shows.

- (9) a. I haven't had breakfast.  
 b. I haven't had breakfast TODAY.  
 c. !I haven't had breakfast – but I have had breakfast today.

Furthermore – should it be thought that uncancellability of pragmatically inferred explicature arises only with negative examples – it clearly goes for example (1) above as well:

- (1) Ann: Have you returned that copy of *The Minimalist Program* to the library?  
 Bill: !Yes – but I haven't returned it.

### 3 Cancellation – the very idea

The idea of clarification renders appeal to 'cancellation' actually unnecessary. In respect of the examples considered so far, I see no reason why Carston shouldn't simply agree with this conclusion. However, a problem remains, for RT at least. As is well known, RT (and Carston) analyses at least some (all?) of Grice's GCIs as explicatures. Since we independently know that GCIs are cancellable, RT is empirically committed to cancellation of explicature:

- (10) a. He shrugged and left.  
 b. He shrugged and THEN left.  
 c. He shrugged and left – but not in that order.  
 (11) a. He has three kids.  
 b. He has EXACTLY three kids.  
 c. He has three kids – and in fact he has four.

If I am right in claiming that explicature is not cancellable but may be subject to clarification, it might seem we have a simple choice here.

**Either (i):** allow that (10b)/(11b) indeed *are explicated* by utterances of (10a)/(11a) and thus insist that what is going in (10c)/(11c) is not cancellation but *clarification* (of intended explicature).  
**Or (ii):** accept that that (10c)/(11c) are genuine cases of *cancellation* and thus insist that (10b)/(11b) are *not explicated* – but implicated – by the utterance of (10a)/(11a).

As regards option (i), I find it difficult, intuitively, to think of what is going in (10c)/(11c) as clarification (of explicature) rather than as a genuine cancellation – and thus as cancellation *of implicature*. So, for me, option (ii) is indicated. But there's a problem with option (ii). This brings me to the point of the paper.

I have been assuming that we know what cancellation is – or at least know enough about it to know that clarification and cancellation are distinct. But is there in fact any distinction between clarification and cancellation? Could it be that what we have been calling 'cancellation' was in fact clarification all along, namely, that 'cancellation' *generally* – not just cancellation of explicature – doesn't pick out a real phenomenon but is a misnomer?

In respect of explicature, I have rejected cancellation in favour of clarification because, in part, an explicature must have been *intended*, and an intention actually implemented in an act of utterance can't be undone (cancelled). On this showing

alone – leaving aside questions of commitment/endorsement in connection with explicature – I suggest it is, more generally, *implemented intentions* that can't be cancelled, or undone.

But pragmatic theory's concern with intention and its recognition is not limited to explicature. Implicature, as much as explicature, is intended. An implicature is, by definition, a communicated assumption that is intended as such by the speaker and recognised as thus intended by the hearer.

How then is it possible even for an *implicature* to be cancelled? As with explicature so with implicature: EITHER the speaker intended by her utterance to implicate that P – and therefore did implicate that P – in which case she cannot undo (or 'cancel') that, OR she did not so intend, in which case there is no implicature to cancel in the first place.

My point is very simple. For Grice at least, there is no such thing as an *unintended* implicature and from this it should follow that there's no such thing as *cancellation* of implicature.

#### 4 Intention, cancellation and the GCI/PCI distinction

If we want to maintain cancellation as a coherent notion – and I do – then cancellation cannot just be 'cancellation without contradiction of what is said'. It must, more generally, be 'CANCELLATION WITHOUT CONTRADICTION OF WHAT IS INTENDED'. Cancellation-without-contradiction-of-what-is-said is just a special case of cancellation-without-contradiction-of-what-is-intended, since what was said must have been *intended* to be said.

In the light of this, if we want to allow that implicature-cancellation is a real phenomenon – and I do in respect of (10) and (11), for example – we are going to have to entertain the idea that an 'implicature' (in some sense) can 'arise' (in some sense) independently of speakers' intentions.

Let me stress here that I'm not defending a notion of 'unintended implicature'. The idea of an *actual* implicature being *unintended* is pretty much a contradiction in terms. In defending the idea that *implicatures can arise independently of speakers' intentions*, then, we need a more modal notion both of 'implicature' and of 'arise'. I don't deny that this is still contrary to Gricean intention-based pragmatic theory. But so also, surely, is the very idea of 'cancellation' (the notion I seek to defend).

How to resolve this paradox? In connection with the more modal notion of 'implicature' and 'arise' that I have in mind (as needed to support the very idea of implicature-cancellation), I am going to appeal to Grice's own distinction between generalised and particularised conversational implicature (GCI vs PCI). Sperber and Wilson (1987: 748) have suggested 'there is no evidence that [Grice] saw the distinction as theoretically significant'. Against this, Grice (1981: 185) wrote that GCIs – in contradistinction to PCIs – 'are the ones that seem to me more controversial and at the same time more valuable for philosophical purposes'. This suggests he did attach importance to the distinction. Julia Hirschberg has claimed the distinction 'is a false one, an artefact of the inventiveness of analysts' (1985: 42, quoted by Levinson (2000: 380)). But there is a clear distinction between them. Both GCIs and PCIs are context-dependent in that they are – or are supposed to be – cancellable in, and by, the context of utterance. The crucial difference between them lies in the fact that GCIs are context-dependent only in that (negative) respect. PCIs, by contrast, are context-dependent in the further (positive) respect that they depend

on a particular context to arise in the first place. In other words: with GCIs, context plays only a destructive (filtering, cancelling) role whereas, with PCIs, the particular context also plays a constructive role. That's what makes them 'particularised'. Withdrawn from any context of utterance, PCIs simply don't arise. By contrast, even when – in fact especially when – an utterance giving rise to a GCI is de-contextualised, the GCI does still 'arise', in some intuitive sense.

In the light of this, if we want to defend a notion of intention-independent implicature, I suggest that GCI – in contradistinction to PCI – is the place to look. I suggest that the distinction between GCI and PCI is no mere 'artefact' but correlates non-accidentally with a distinction between (i) and (ii):

- (i) implicatures that can arise *independently* of any intention of the speaker (GCI)
- (ii) implicatures that arise only *in virtue of* the speaker's intention to implicate (PCI).

In the light of my contention that 'cancellation' must, at its most general, be 'intention-based' rather than (more specifically) 'saying-based' – by which I mean construed as 'cancellation without contradiction of intention' – I want to show that only GCIs, not PCIs, are cancellable. There are two ideas to be defended here: (i) GCI as implicature that can arise independently of intention (and hence cancellable); (ii) PCI as uncancellable implicature.

#### 4.1 GCI as intention-independent implicature

This is not such a new idea, in fact, but a new slant on ideas already available. Neither Gazdar (1979) nor Levinson (2000) actually discuss intention or the lack of it in their treatments of GCI, as against PCI. Nevertheless, intention (and the lack of it) correlates well with their treatments of GCI as against PCI.

Gazdar highlights what I am calling the 'modal' character of GCI. Recall that, in modelling GCI, he posited 'potential implicatures' ('im-dash-implicatures'). 'Potential implicatures' are assigned – generatively and thus *automatically* – to linguistic expressions, purely on the basis of their semantic representation. 'Automatically' can be construed as 'independently of any intention-to-implicate'. These 'potential implicatures' only become actual implicatures – that is, get to be actually implicated by a speaker – when the relevant expressions are uttered, and then only if consistent with the context of utterance. If and only if they are not consistent, they are cancelled. Presumably, inconsistency with the context of actual utterance – and thus cancellation – means they cannot have been intended. A 'potential implicature', then, is an implicature that arises independently of speaker-intention. If not intended, it is cancelled. That is, it only becomes an actual implicature through not being cancelled. Assuming the speaker has as good a representation of the context of utterance as the hearer does (more strongly, that the context of utterance is mutually manifest), the hearer's best evidence that the (potential) implicature was *not* intended is its inconsistency with the context of utterance.

Comparable ideas are developed in Levinson's (2000) account of GCI as a *default* inference and as arising from 'utterance types' rather than 'utterance tokens'. This too can be cashed out in terms of intention and the lack of it. GCIs are 'default' inferences in the sense that they will be assumed to be intended in default of



evidence that they are not intended. Evidence that they are not intended – that is, any mutually manifest inconsistency with the context of utterance – cancels them. They ‘arise’ (in the relevant modal sense) from ‘utterance types’ rather than from ‘utterance tokens’. Since an ‘utterance type’ is not an act, it can have no particular context. By contrast, an ‘utterance token’ – that is, an actual utterance – by definition does have a particular context. Utterance types have – and, as types, can *only* have – what Gazdar called ‘potential implicatures’. In short, Gazdar’s ‘potential implicatures’ and Levinson’s ‘utterance-type implicatures’ – that is, generalised conversational implicatures – are implicatures that arise independently of the intentions of the speaker.

In the relevant modal sense, then, the existence of a generalised implicature is ontologically prior to the issue of intention. The speaker’s intention – her responsibility for the implicature – engages only in the act of utterance and only in the matter of whether an antecedently assigned (potential) ‘implicature’ is intended or not. At that point, it is a matter wholly of (as it were, *post hoc*) cancellation.

If this antecedently assigned (potential, utterance-type) ‘implicature’ *is* intended, there is nothing further the speaker need do: it will be communicated. If it is *not* intended, and if the existing context anyway makes manifest that it is not intended, the existing context will of itself cancel the implicature – that is, the potential implicature will fail to become an actual implicature. Again, there is nothing for the speaker to do. In these two cases, (non-)cancellation is a matter of logical/contextual *fact* (assuming the context is mutually manifest). It is not an *act*.<sup>6 7</sup>

Cancellation as an *act* occurs when the potential implicature is not intended but the existing context does *not* make manifest that it is not intended. In that case, the speaker herself must take steps (that is, act) to *get* it cancelled – by contributing to the context an assumption inconsistent with the (potential) implicature. This is what would be going on in (10c)/(11c) above.

- (10)        c. He has three kids – and in fact he has four  
 (11)        c. He shrugged and left – but not in that order

In thus cancelling the implicature, the speaker herself intentionally makes manifest that it was not intended – in other words, makes manifest that the (potential) implicature assigned (independently of her intention) to the *expression* she uttered is not to be assigned to her *utterance* of that expression.

I suggest that it is only in respect of such modal (potential) implicatures – and thus generalised implicature – that the notion of cancellation can be made consistent with the Gricean idea that an *actual* implicature must be *intended*.

At this point it might be objected that the speaker’s very choice of expression – *some* (*vs all*), *P&Q* (*vs Q&P*), *three* (*vs four*) and so on – commits her to actually implicating the potential implicature (which should not be cancellable, therefore). While there is some justice to this, it has to be squared with the general agreement that assumptions thus communicated are cancellable. It is worth noting, incidentally, that the scalar implicature from *three* is much more easily cancelled in (12) than in (13).

- (12)        Ann: Do you have three children?  
               Bill: Yes – and in fact I have four.  
 (13)        Ann: How many children do you have?  
               Bill: Three – ?and in fact I have four.

In (12) Bill's utterance trades on another speaker's use of *three* and the potential implicature arises from the need to give a positive answer to Ann's question and thus independently of Bill's own intentions. In (13) by contrast, having himself chosen to utter *three*, Bill is more clearly committed to having implicated 'not more than three' and the implicature is much less readily cancelled.

Compare also when *P&Q* reports a single occasion (with a single sequence of events), as in (14), with when it reports what is habitually the case (with no single habitual sequence), as in (15).

- (14) Ann: What did you do before 7.00 am today?  
 Bill: I had coffee and got dressed – ?but not in that order.
- (15) Ann: What do you generally do before 7.00am?  
 Bill: I have coffee and get dressed – but not always in that order.

In (15) Bill had no choice but to utter the conjunction in one order or the other, despite the fact that no single utterance order corresponds to what is habitually the case. Here the potential implicature arises independently of any intention to (actually) implicate an order of reported events and so is readily cancellable. In (14) by contrast, only one of the utterance orders does correspond to the order of reported events. Since it was open to Bill to choose that order – and thereby actually implicate the potential implicature – this is not so readily cancellable.

The intuitive data in (12)-(15) are consistent with my general contention that GCIs can arise independently of the intentions of speakers and are cancellable for that reason. Perhaps, though, we need to modify the contention and say that, *to the extent* they arise independently of the intentions of the speaker, *to that extent* they are cancellable (for that reason).

#### 4.2 PCI as uncancellable implicature

Gazdar's treatment of implicature was only intended to – and could only – apply to GCIs, not PCIs. His is a model of the *filtering* of that species of implicature (modally) assignable independently of intentional acts of utterance and their contexts. PCI has no such predictability-in-principle. It's not a modal phenomenon in the way the GCI is. It arises only from actual utterances in their actual contexts (Levinson's 'utterance tokens'). There is no question, with PCI, of the implicature in any sense 'arising' independently of the speaker's intention. In short, a PCI is only ever an *actual* implicature.

My claim is, then, that PCIs (as *actual*) must be interpreted as *intended* and so cannot be cancelled. That is – in the more general sense of cancellability that I have argued is necessary – they cannot be cancelled without contradiction of what is intended. This correlates with an obvious intuition: the more manifest a speaker's *intention* to implicate, the less cancellable the implicature will be. Given the character of PCI – as against GCI – the *intention* to implicate is (and must be) manifest to an extent incompatible with PCIs being cancellable.

Consider an example from Wilson and Sperber (1981):

- (16) Max: Do you ever speak to Charles?  
 Ann: I never speak to plagiarists.

Assuming Ann's utterance is intended as a response to Max's question, it implicates that Charles is a plagiarist (and, taking what was said and what was implicated as premises, we deductively conclude that she never speaks to Charles). Now, if 'cancellation' means what it is generally taken to mean – 'cancellation without contradiction of what is said' – Ann's implicature should be cancellable. But how should she cancel it? Having responded as she did, could she add 'I am not suggesting that Charles is a plagiarist, mind you'?

Not possible, surely. Despite her added protestation, nothing could be more evident than her suggestion that Charles is a plagiarist. What would be the point of responding in that way except to implicate that? Having chosen to respond to the question in that way, how could she not be *committed* to having implicated that Charles was a plagiarist? Since the implicature arises from and only from her actual utterance in that context – that is, it is a PCI – she has sole responsibility for it and must have intended it. And the one thing that is not cancellable, I am suggesting, is an intention manifestly executed in and by the act of utterance. Consider also

- (17)       A: There's no milk!  
               B: The milkman's ill.  
                   PCI: There is no milk because the milkman is ill.  
                   !! The milkman is ill. There's no milk because his milk-float is  
                   in for repairs.
- (18)       A: I'm out of petrol.  
               B: There's a garage round the corner.  
                   PCI: You can get petrol at the garage round the corner.  
                   !! There's a garage round the corner – unfortunately, it closed  
                   down last year.

When I present the plagiarist example to students, they often object that it is not cancellable. My response has been to explain, again, the Gricean notion of 'cancellation' – namely 'cancellation without contradiction of what is said'. This, I now believe, is an inadequate response. If the notion of cancellation is to be coherent, we need a notion of 'cancellation without contradiction of what is intended' (of which 'cancellation without contradiction of what is said' is a special case). In that sense PCIs are uncancellable.

## 5 Conclusion

I have suggested that cancellation of explicatures is inconsistent both with the general (intention-based) and with the specific (said-based) notions of cancellation. Here clarification rather than cancellation is indicated. Cancellation of actual/intended implicature is also impossible. Since PCI is only ever actual and thus (by definition) intended, PCI-cancellation is impossible. If cancellation is possible at all, it is possible only with GCI: it is only with GCI that it might make sense to talk of potential (and thus potentially non-actual) implicature, arising independently of any intention to implicate.

It follows from this revised picture that cancellability cannot be used as a test of the distinction between the explicit (/explicature) and the implicit (/implicature). A communicated assumption may be uncancellable either because it is an explicature or because it is a PCI. Carston, too, argues that cancellability provides no such test – but on radically different grounds: (a) because, she claims, explicatures can be cancelled

and (b) because certain implicatures cannot be cancelled. As regards (a), I have rejected this. As regards (b), Carston proposes to treat the utterance of (19a) as implicating – rather than explicating – (19b).

- (19)       a. I've invited my father.  
              b. I've invited a man.

Now if (19b) is an implicature of (19a), it is clearly an uncancellable implicature. I questioned this proposal in Burton-Roberts (2005). The GCI/PCI distinction gives us a further reason for questioning it. If (19b) is an implicature of (19a), it is surely a GCI, and thus should be cancellable. However, Carston (1988, 2002) has sought to disband the very idea of GCI. So, as an implicature of (19a), (19b) would have to be what (outside of RT) is regarded as a *particularised* implicature. This seems obviously wrong. We don't need to know anything about the context of utterance of (19a) to know that it implies (19b). It is uncancellable, I suggest, not because it is a PCI but because it is – and, for all the reasons presented in my (2005), must be – an explicature of (19a).

## References

- Bach, K. (1994) 'Conversational Implicature'. *Mind and Language* 9: 124-62.
- Burton-Roberts, N. (1994) 'Ambiguity, Sentence and Utterance'. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 92.2: 179-213.
- Burton-Roberts, N. (2005) 'Robyn Carston on Semantics, Pragmatics and 'Encoding''. *Journal of Linguistics* 41: 389-407.
- Carston, R. (1988) 'Implicature, Explicature and Truth-theoretic Semantics'. In S. Davis (ed.) 1991, *Pragmatics: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 33-51.
- Carston, R. (2002) *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gazdar, G. (1979) *Pragmatics: Implicature, Presupposition and Logical Form*. New York: Academic Press.
- Grice, H. P. (1981) 'Presupposition and Conversational Implicature'. In P. Cole (ed.), *Radical Pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press, pp. 183-98.
- Grice, H. P. (1989) *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hirschberg, J. (1985) 'A Theory of Scalar Implicature'. *Moore School of Electrical Engineering, University of Pennsylvania, Technical Report MS-CIS-85-56*.
- Levinson, S. C. (2000) *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lewis, D. (1980) 'Index, Context and Content'. In S. Kanger and S. Öhman (eds), *Philosophy and Grammar*. Dordrecht: Reidel, pp. 79-100. Reprinted in D. Lewis, 1998, *Papers in Philosophical Logic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 21-44.
- Recanati, F. (1989) 'The Pragmatics of What is Said'. *Mind and Language* 4: 295-329. Reprinted in S. Davis (ed.), *Pragmatics: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, pp. 97-120.
- Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1981) 'On Grice's Theory of Conversation'. In P. Werth (ed.), *Conversation and Discourse*. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 155-78.

- Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1987) 'Presumptions of Relevance'. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 10.4: 736-54.
- Wilson, D. and Sperber, D. (2004) 'Relevance Theory'. In L. Horn and G. Ward (eds), *Handbook of Pragmatics*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 607-32.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for responses from audiences at the Granada Workshop on Explicit Communication and the Newcastle 2006 LAGB conference, particularly Luiz Carlos Baptista, Robyn Carston, Thorstein Fretheim and Begoña Vicente.

<sup>2</sup> Recall that Carston there analysed most of Grice's Generalised Conversational Implicatures (GCIs) as *entailing* what is linguistically encoded (mistakenly, I believe – see Recanati (1989: note 11)) and on that basis argued that they could/should not be analysed as implicated. Now, if Gricean GCIs are communicated but not implicated – and if explicature vs implicature is a mutually exclusive and exhaustive division of communicated assumptions (as in RT, where an implicature is a communicated assumption that is not explicated) – it follows that a communicated assumption that entails what is linguistically encoded must be an explicature. It is this that suggested 'development' might be cashed out in terms of entailment.

<sup>3</sup> But see Grice (1989: 25, 118) for passing comments that effectively acknowledge the distinction.

<sup>4</sup> Although this identification of 'explicating' with 'B-saying' works for Carston's informal account of 'explicature', RT's positing of 'higher level explicatures' does rather obscure the picture.

<sup>5</sup> This (speaker/hearer) ambiguity of 'determine' correlates with a (speaker/hearer) ambiguity of 'what is said'. For the speaker, 'what is said' is a free relative clause ('That which is said'). For the hearer, by contrast, it is an interrogative clause ('What (on earth) was said?'). Inference is used in 'determining' the answer to that interrogative but it does not thereby determine 'That which is said'. See Burton-Roberts (1994).

<sup>6</sup> Examples of cancellation in this sense would be:

- (i) *Kim and Phil went up the hill and met at the top.*
- (ii) *With Kim's help, Phil can shift that table for us.*

I assume the italicised clause in each case carries a potential/generalised implicature: in (i), that they went up *together*; in (ii), that Phil is capable of shifting it *by himself*. Clearly, though, an utterer of (i) or (ii) is not implicating either of these. So the implicature is cancelled, but I don't think it right to say that the speaker has engaged in an act of cancellation. Other acts (uttering 'and met at the top'/'With Kim's help...') have had the effect of cancelling the implicature.

<sup>7</sup> Gazdar's model encounters a problem in (i)

- (i) Some of the boys came and some didn't come.

Each clause in (i) has the content of the other clause as a potential implicature. Since the potential implicature of each clause is *consistent* with (equivalent to) the context constituted by the other, neither will be cancelled. So both will become actual implicatures. But the content of each clause has been *said*. So the utterer of (i) is modelled as having both said and implicated (i). This can be avoided by reference to intention-based (as against said-based) cancellation. An intention-to-say-that-p is

---

inconsistent with an intention-to-*implicate*-that-p (since what is implicated is not said, and conversely). It seems reasonable, then, that an executed intention to *say* that p cancels any potential implicature that p. Someone actually *saying* that p is clearly not intending to *implicate* that p.