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Grice's circle, thought experiments, and plausible argumentation

Abstract

One of the quandaries of current pragmatic research is 'Grice's circle'. Namely, in Grice's seminal essay on logic and conversation the relation between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated' seems to be viciously circular: 'what is said' – i.e. truth-conditional meaning – is the input to 'what is implicated', and 'what is implicated' is the input to 'what is said'. The aim of the present paper is to examine whether the thought experiments which in the current pragmatic literature are used to introduce possible accounts of the relation between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated' indeed fail because they lead to circularity; and if they are not circular and do not fail in this respect, how they succeed in avoiding circularity. The framework which serves reaching this aim is Kertész & Rákosi's (2012) p-model of plausible argumentation.

Keywords: pragmatics, Grice's circle, plausible argumentation, fallacies, circular argumentation

1 Introduction

As we all know, thought experiments have played a pivotal role in the development of pragmatics. However, besides triggering this development, they have also been accused of failing in particular respects. Among others, a thought experiment may fail if it leads to *circular argumentation* (see e.g. Sorensen 1992, Peijnenburg & Atkinson 2003, Kertész 2016, Brown & Fehige 2014). In discussing the question of whether in pragmatics a thought experiment which seems to result in circularity does indeed fail, we will use Grice's (1989) thought experiments as a point of departure.

Although Grice's line of argumentation as well as his tenets have been criticized from many different points of view, one of the most influential criticisms is the charge of being viciously circular. 'Grice's circle' emerges as a consequence of the thought experiment which he uses in *Logic and Conversation* to motivate the introduction of the notion of implicature.

Grice discusses several problems in his seminal essay, one of which is this:

- (1) What are the general conditions of conversation?

In order to arrive at a solution to this problem, Grice carries out the following often cited thought experiment:¹

- (2) (a) "Suppose that A and B are talking about a mutual friend, C, who is now working in a bank. A asks B how C is getting on his job, and B replies, *Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn't been to prison yet.* At this point, A might well inquire what B was implying, what he was suggesting, or even what he meant by saying that C had not yet been to prison. The answer might be any one of such things as that C is the sort of person likely to yield to the temptation provided by his occupation; that C's colleagues are really very unpleasant and treacherous people, and so forth. It might, of course, be quite unnecessary for A to make such an inquiry of B, the answer to it being, in the context, clear in advance.
- (b) It is clear that whatever B implied, suggested, meant in this example, is distinct from what B said, which was simply that C had not been to prison yet.
- (c) I wish to introduce, as terms of art, the verb *implicate* and the related nouns *implicature* (cf. *implying*) and *implicatum* (cf. *what is implied*). [...]" (Grice 1989: 24.)

(2)(a) tells a story, which is interpreted in (2)(b). (2)(c) makes a statement, which has been motivated by (2)(a) and (b). It is a stage setting thought experiment in the sense of Thomason (1991). Namely,

¹ We will divide the quotations into smaller units which makes it easier to refer to parts of the quotation to be analyzed. The units do not necessarily correspond to paragraphs in the original text.

(2) is the first step in the argumentation process starting with the section entitled *Implicature* in Grice's essay in that it distinguishes between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated'. It aims at convincing the reader that this distinction and the introduction of the notion of implicature are well motivated. It is expected to be supplemented by further steps in later stages of the argumentation process which partly continue the argumentation initiated by the thought experiment, and partly modify its outcome.

As a result of (2) and further thought experiments, Grice seems to have obtained the following solution to (1):²

- (3) There are general conditions that apply to conversation as such: If the thought experiment in (2) is given, then the general conditions of conversation comprise, among others, implicature which is, in turn, rooted in the Cooperation Principle and the maxims of conversation.

However, this solution to (1) seems to be circular. Levinson defines 'Grice's circle' as follows:

- (4) (a) "Grice's account makes implicature dependent on a prior determination of 'the said'. The said in turn depends on disambiguation, indexical resolution, reference fixing, not to mention ellipsis unpacking and generally narrowing. But each of these processes, which are prerequisites to determining the propositions expressed, may themselves depend crucially on processes that look indistinguishable from implicatures.
- (b) Thus, what is said seems both to determine and to be determined by implicature. Let us call this *Grice's circle*.
- (c) It should be clear that this is not a minor point in Gricean exegesis. It is a circle that equally afflicts any theory that seeks to make a semantics/pragmatics distinction play a crucial role in the general theory of meaning. The 'said' can be taken to be truth-conditional content – the proposition expressed, the output of the process of semantic interpretation; the proper domain of a theory of linguistic

² "I shall, therefore, inquire into the general conditions that, in one way or another, apply to conversation as such, irrespective of its subject matter. I begin with a characterization of the notion of 'implicature'." (Grice 1989: 24)

meaning. The ‘implicated’ can be taken more generally than I am taking it here, to include all the processes of pragmatic inference; it is the proper domain of a theory of communication.” (Levinson 2000: 186; emphasis as in the original)

According to (4)(b), Grice states that ‘what is said’ – i.e. truth-conditional meaning – is the input to ‘what is implicated’, and he also states that ‘what is implicated’ is the input to ‘what is said’. Nevertheless, Levinson goes further in (4)(c) where he raises the general problem of the relationship between truth-conditional semantics and pragmatics. Since the propositional content of utterances is the domain of truth-conditional semantics as a field of research, while implicature belongs to the domain of pragmatic theorizing as another field of research, the circular relation between scientific statements on semantics and those on pragmatics is at stake, too. Thus, one of the problems which contemporary pragmatics centers around is as follows:

- (5) How can the vicious circularity be resolved
 - (a) between statements on ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’,
 - and
 - (b) between statements on semantics and statements on pragmatics?

The fundamental relevance of the circle cannot be overlooked. It undermines Grice’s (1989) solution of the problem that he raised in (1). The reason why the circle undermines the solution of Grice’s problem is that “the pragmatic enterprise that concedes that pragmatics intrudes into semantics (read: truth-conditional content or propositional forms) is circular, hence a *definitionally impossible enterprise*” (Capone 2006: 650; emphasis added). Thus, if the circle cannot be resolved, then the thought experiment in Grice (1989) fails in precisely the sense in which the literature deems the emergence of circularity as the failure of thought experimentation in general.

The aim of the present paper is to examine whether the thought experiments which in the *current pragmatic literature* are used to introduce possible accounts of the relation between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’ indeed fail because they lead to circularity; and if

they are not circular and do not fail in this respect, how they succeed in avoiding circularity.

The framework which serves reaching this aim is Kertész & Rákosi's (2012) p-model of plausible argumentation. In the present paper we presuppose familiarity with the basic notions and tenets of the p-model; see also concise summaries e.g. in Kertész & Rákosi (2014) and Kertész (2016). Nevertheless, Section 2.1 will mention some of the tools of the p-model in a considerably simplified way also dispensing with the notation system.

In Section 2 we will show how this framework defines fallacious and circular argumentation. In Section 3 we will apply our definition of circularity to four contemporary attempts at the solution of (1). Finally, we will draw the conclusions which our survey yields in Section 4.

2 On the metatheoretical framework

2.1 On the p-model

Most of the statements which linguists maintain about the linguistic phenomena they investigate – sentences, conversations, morphemes, grammaticality judgments or whatever – are not true with certainty but merely plausible to a certain extent. Such statements are called *plausible statements*. Plausible statements consist of an information content and a plausibility value. The plausibility value of a statement depends on the reliability of its source. There are two kinds of sources. Direct sources are, for example, corpora, experiments, grammaticality judgments, historical manuscripts, papers, books etc. Indirect sources of the plausibility value of statements are inferences.

Plausible statements can be used as premises of inferences in pragmatic argumentation. Inferences whose conclusion is a plausible statement are called *plausible inferences*. There are three types of plausible inferences. In the first type, the structure of the inference corresponds to the structure of deductively valid inferences, but since it includes at least one premise that is merely plausible instead of being true, its conclusion is not true either, but plausible. This type includes for example 'plausible *modus ponens*', 'plausible *modus tollens*' etc. The main feature of the second type is that its structure is not valid, because at least one premise that would be needed in order to make the conclusion true is missing. Therefore, such inferences –

which are called *enthymematic* – may be supplemented by latent background assumptions. The third type is the combination of the first two types: the inference includes at least one plausible statement as a premise and is enthymematic. See Kertész & Rákosi (2012) and (2014) for the detailed introduction and exemplification of these notions.

Both plausible statements and plausible inferences are context-dependent. Here, and in what follows, ‘context’ refers to the plausible statements, the sources of their plausibility values as well as the methodological principles of the theory, which govern the interpretation of a given claim. The p-model distinguishes this notion from the usual sense in which ‘context’ is meant in pragmatics by the prefix ‘p-’, i.e. ‘*p-context*’.

In Kertész & Rákosi (2012) the notion of plausible argumentation has been introduced. Plausible argumentation is a process which

- (a) consist of chains of plausible inferences,
- (b) is cyclic
- (c) is prismatic in that it evaluates information from changing perspectives,
- (d) re-evaluates information accepted earlier retrospectively
- (e) is a heuristic tool that aims at least at the temporary solution of a particular problem that has been raised.

2.2 *On circular argumentation*³

According to the classical logical literature, circularity is one of the fallacies. It was Hamblin’s (1970) seminal work that subsumed this tradition under the definition which says that “a fallacious argument, as almost every account from Aristotle onwards tells us, is one that *seems to be valid but is not so*” (Hamblin 1970: 12; emphasis as in the original).⁴

Since the publication of Hamblin’s work a great number of ideas have been put forward that question the classical view and consider alternatives. For example, several approaches realize that inferences which have been considered to be fallacies in the light of Hamblin’s

³ See also Kertész & Rákosi (2009) on the suggestions put forward here.

⁴ The literature uses the term ‘argument’ in the sense of ‘inference’. We will use ‘inference’ and distinguish it from ‘argumentation’ which we consider to be a cyclic and prismatic process including a series of inferences. See our remark below.

definition are inductive, analogical, abductive, defeasible, presumptive etc. inferences as subtypes of plausible inferences.⁵ They are frequently used tools, both in everyday communication and scientific reasoning.

As regards circularity, the classical view obviously fails. Namely, accounts which accept the classical view evaluate inferences such as (6)(a) or (6)(b) as fallacious:⁶

- (6) (a) A & B, therefore A.
- (b) A, therefore A.

However, these are trivially valid deductive inferences, and should not be evaluated as fallacious according to the very same classical view. Consequently, if one accepts the classical view, such inferences turn out to be both *fallacious and non-fallacious*.

We may conclude that both the classical view of fallacies in general and of circularity in particular are problematic. Thus, our next task is to examine if the p-model can offer an alternative account and if so, what it should be like. The answer to this question follows immediately from the basic tenets of the p-model:

- (7) Fallacies *prevent* a given stage or the whole of the argumentation process from fulfilling its heuristic function, namely from reaching a solution of the problem at hand.

Thus, plausible argumentation leads to a solution of a problem by comparing plausibility values of alternative statements and thus deciding between them, whereas fallacies block the argumentation process and do not allow plausibility considerations to lead to proper problem solutions.

One main characteristic of fallacies in the sense of (7) is that they are not isolated inferences but integral parts of the argumentation process and thus may affect many of its components. For example, fallacies may be related to the preference of a less plausible statement against a more plausible one, the insufficiency of the control of consistency, involving irrelevant information, the disregarding of

⁵ See, for example, Woods & Walton (1989: 43ff.), Walton (1995: 14f.), Walton (2001: 164), Woods (2004: XXV) etc.

⁶ For a brief overview, see Woods & Walton (1989: 29ff.)

relevant sources or statements, the overestimation of the plausibility of the conclusion, the overestimation of the reliability of a source etc.

The above characterization of fallacies also suggests a possible explication of the notion of ‘circular argumentation’. Thereby, the point of departure is its contrast to cyclic argumentation in the sense of the p-model. With cyclic argumentation, “one indeed returns to ‘the same point’ but does so at a different cognitive level” (Rescher 1976: 119; emphasis added). Thereby, through the return, one reaches a qualitatively modified p-context which has been prismatically re-evaluated. Accordingly, cyclic argumentation is *heuristically effective* in that it leads to the solution of the problem at issue. However, the argumentation process is *heuristically ineffective* if it returns to the starting point without retrospectively and prismatically re-evaluating it. In sum, the difference between fallacious and plausible argumentation is *not structural but heuristic*.

In the light of these considerations, we obtain the following characterization of circular argumentation:

- (8) Circular argumentation is a specific kind of fallacy whereby the argumentation process returns to an earlier stage without retrospectively re-evaluating the p-context.

There is a series of p-contexts in which circular argumentation typically arises. For example, in such p-contexts relevant data are systematically ignored and their ignorance leads to circularity because their inclusion could have significantly contributed to the retrospective re-evaluation of the plausibility of hypotheses.⁷ Or, the argumentation process does not consider potential counterexamples because the sources do not legitimize the high plausibility value of certain statements. The ignorance of counterexamples also prevents the argumentation process from the cyclic re-evaluation of such statements. Another example is that in the p-context rival hypotheses or data supported by alternative sources are not considered and therefore the argumentation process cannot re-evaluate previously accepted statements, even though with respect to the heuristic aim of the process this would be reasonable.

It is important to remark that in many cases it is only sophisticated metatheoretical reflection that might reveal whether a given ar-

⁷ The p-model defines data as plausible statements with a positive plausibility value stemming from a direct source (Kertész & Rákosi 2012).

gumentation process is cyclic or circular. One reason for the difficulty of identifying circularity is that an overall cyclic and prismatic argumentation process may include circular phases. Moreover, in order to decide whether a phase is indeed circular, it is not sufficient to analyze this particular phase, but rather, the argumentation process should be followed up to the final p-context.

Against this background, in the next section we will illustrate the argumentation structure of solutions to Grice's circle.⁸ Rather than going into the details, we will focus on how the particular solutions, making use of thought experiments, turn Grice's circle into the retrospective re-evaluation of information in the course of the plausible argumentation process.

3 Possible resolutions of Grice's circle via new thought experiments

3.1 *Mutual parallel adjustment*

One of the solutions to Grice's circle has been offered by Relevance Theory (see e.g. Carston 2002a, 2002b, 2004). The solution is based on the term *mutual parallel adjustment*:

- (9) "Interpretive hypotheses are made rapidly, on-line, and in parallel. The mechanism that mediates the inferences from logical form to communicated propositions is one of '*mutual parallel adjustment*' of explicatures and implicatures, constrained by the comprehension strategy. The result should consist of (sets of) premises and conclusions making up valid arguments, but the important point is that the *process need not progress strictly logically* from the accessing of premises to the drawing of conclusions. For instance, a particular conclusion, or type of conclusion, might be expected on the basis of considerations of relevance and, via a backwards inference process, premises constructed (explicatures and implicatures) which will make for a sound inference to the conclusion. The process may involve *several backwards and forwards adjustments of content before an equilibrium is achieved* which meets the system's

⁸ For surveys of the different standpoints, see e.g. Ariel (2008: 261-308), Jaszczolt (2012) and Buchanan (2010).

current ‘expectation’ of relevance.” (Carston 2002a: 139; emphasis added)

The starting p-context of the plausible argumentation process includes the retrospective re-evaluation of Grice’s problem we have mentioned in (1). The retrospective re-evaluation of (1) is obtained by introducing new pieces of information into the starting p-context. Thus, the re-evaluated question can be reconstructed roughly as follows:

- (1_{MPA}) What are the general conditions of conversation, if the p-context is extended to include, among others, the thought experiment in (10)?

In order to illustrate how the mutual parallel adjustment of explicature and implicature works, Carston (2002a: 139) discusses the following thought experiment:

- (10) “Ann: Shall we play tennis?
 Bob: It’s raining.
 Explicature: IT’S RAINING AT LOCATION_{A/B}
 Implicated premise: IF IT’S RAINING IN LOCATION_x THEN IT IS UNLIKELY THAT PEOPLE WILL PLAY TENNIS AT LOCATION_x
 Implicated conclusion: ANN AND BOB WON’T PLAY TENNIS AT LOCATION_{A/B}”

The starting p-context of the thought experimental report includes the following thought experimental data, among others (cf. Carston 2002a: 140):⁹

- (11) (a) The output of linguistic decoding is that Bob has uttered a sentence with the logical form: *it is raining*.
 (b) The presumption of relevance is that Bob’s utterance is optimally relevant to Ann.
 (c) The standard expectation created by the asking of a yes-no question is that Bob’s utterance will achieve relevance

⁹ Experimental data are data (in the sense of the p-model) whose plausibility value is rooted in a real experiment. Analogously, thought experimental data are data whose plausibility value is rooted in thought experiments.

by providing an affirmative or negative answer to Ann's question.

We reconstruct Carston's analysis of (10) as consisting of three enthymematic plausible inferences:

(12) Premises:¹⁰

- (a) [If it is raining in a particular location, then it is not likely that one can play tennis in that location.]
- (b) It is raining at Ann and Bob's location.

Conclusion:

- (c) Ann and Bob can't play tennis at their location.

(13) Premises:¹¹

- (a) [If it is raining in a particular location, then it is not likely that one can play tennis in that location.]
- (b) It is raining at Ann and Bob's location.

Conclusion:

- (c) Ann and Bob will have to find some other entertainment.

(14) Premises:¹²

- (a) [If it is raining in a particular location, then it is not likely that one can play tennis in that location.]
- (b) It is raining at Ann and Bob's location.
- (c) Ann and Bob can't play tennis at their location.

Conclusion:

- (d) They can't play tennis at their location because it is raining.

The final p-context of Carston's argumentation resolves the circle by concluding that the relation between explicature and implicature is

¹⁰ (12)(a) is, according to Carston (2002a: 140), "a highly accessible assumption which might help to answer Ann's question". Thus, it works as a latent background assumption in the plausible inference in (12). According to the notation of the p-model, latent background assumptions are put within square brackets. (12)(b) is "the first accessible enrichment of Bob's utterance which could combine with (a) to yield an answer to Ann's question" (ibid.). (12)(c) is the implicature of Bob's utterance and it satisfies (11)(c).

¹¹ Carston considers (13)(c) a weaker implicature.

¹² (14)(d) satisfies the expectation in (11)(b).

not sequential. Obviously, if there is no sequentiality, then relevance theory's argumentation is not circular. Accordingly, relevance theory's solution to the problem (1_{MPA}) is as follows:

- (15) There are general conditions that apply to conversation as such:
 "Interpretive hypotheses about aspects of explicit and implicit content are made on-line and adjusted in parallel until both the hearer's expectation of relevance is met and a final stable state of sound inference is achieved." (Carston 2002a: 140)

In sum, relevance theory's solution to (5) is:

- (16) If (15) holds, neither the relation between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated' nor that between statements on semantics and statements on pragmatics is circular.

In order to avoid the repetition of argumentation patterns that we have already exemplified, we will dispense with their detailed reconstruction and focus on the basic insights they yield in an informal manner.

3.2 *Impliciture*

Bach introduced the notion of 'impliciture' and elaborated on it in a series of papers (see e.g. Bach 1994, 1999, 2001, 2007). In Bach (1994: 269) the starting point is the following thought experiment:

- (17) (a) "Imagine a child, upset about a cut finger, whose mother assures him, 'You're not going to die, Peter.' The budding philosopher replies, 'You mean I'm going to live forever, Mom?'
 (b) Was Mrs. Unger stretching the truth? In a way, yes. She could have said, 'You're not going to die from this cut,' which would have been more to the point, but she didn't. She didn't bother saying that because she saw no reason to spell out what she meant. She wasn't being obscure and she didn't expect Peter to be so obtuse. Surely any normal boy would have taken her to mean that he wouldn't die from that cut and would never have consid-

- ered, at least not consciously, the possibility that what she meant was that he wouldn't die at all.
- (c) But Peter was annoyingly right: what she meant was not what she said, at least not exactly. She was not speaking literally."

Bach introduces the notion of implicature that is intended to capture the middle ground between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated': "Implicatures go beyond what is said, but unlike implicatures, which are additional propositions external to what is said, implicatures are built on what is said" (Bach 1994: 273). Basically, there are two kinds of implicature. One is what Bach calls 'expansion'. For example, in (17)(a), the mother of the boy, who has cut his finger may tell him:

- (18) You're not going to die, Peter.

On the one hand, the utterance in (18) is used non-literally, because the mother certainly has not meant (see (17)(b)):

- (19) You're going to live forever.

But rather:

- (20) You're not going to die *from this cut*.

The utterance in (18) expresses a proposition, but the speaker communicates another proposition (see (17)(c)).

On the other hand, none of the *constituents* of (18) are used non-literally. What is communicated is an expansion of this minimal proposition, because it can be supplemented by the phrase 'from this wound'.

Another kind of implicature is 'completion'. For example:

- (21) Andrew isn't strong enough.

Here the utterance does not express a complete proposition, and therefore needs completion so that a complete proposition can be produced. In order to understand (21), one has to know what it is that Andrew is not strong enough to do. The complete proposition would be one which includes this information as well, for example:

(22) Andrew isn't strong enough to *master the Athens Marathon*.

In Grice's approach, expansion and completion would count as implicatures. In both cases, the speaker indeed intends the hearer to understand something which has not been expressed explicitly in the utterance. However, for Bach, although implicatures go beyond what is said, they do so by being built out of what is said. Bach argues that the utterer neither communicates the minimal proposition that is restricted solely to 'You're not going to die' that is, to what is explicitly stated, nor does he communicate an implicature which would be an additional proposition external to what is said. In this sense, implicatures are the middle course between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated'.

In the starting p-context of Bach's argumentation process, (1) is retrospectively re-evaluated as follows:

(1) What are the general conditions of conversation, if the p-context is extended to include, among others, the thought experiment in (17)?

In the final p-context of the plausible argumentation process, Bach's approach boils down to a possible solution of the problem raised in (1):

(23) There are general conditions that apply to conversation as such: These conditions pertain to 'what is said', 'what is implicated' and implicature.

The direct source of the plausibility value of the statement in (23) is the thought experiment in (17) – together with a series of indirect sources which we have not reconstructed here.

Since, instead of two phenomena whose relation might be circular, there are three, (23) avoids circularity. Accordingly, (5)(a) seems to have been solved.

Another component of Bach's approach concerns the relation between semantics and pragmatics (see (5)(b)):

(24) "The semantics-pragmatics distinction is not fit to be blurred. What lies on either side of the distinction, the semantic and the pragmatic, may each be messy in various ways, but that doesn't blur the distinction itself. Taken as properties of

sentences, semantic properties are on a par with syntactic and phonological properties: they are linguistic properties. Pragmatic properties, on the other hand, belong to acts of uttering sentences in the course of communicating. Sentences have the properties they have independently of anybody's act of uttering them. Speakers' intentions do not endow them with new semantic properties (here I mean sentence types, not tokens). Acts of uttering sentence types (producing sentence tokens) have pragmatic properties. The fact that a given sentence means what it does entails nothing about what a speaker means in uttering it. A speaker could mean precisely what it means, no more and no less, but nothing about its meaning guarantees this. The speaker might mean something else, something more, or nothing at all." Bach (2004: 27)

(24) exemplifies that, although implicatures lie between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated', they do not lie between semantics and pragmatics. Implicatures are pragmatic, but in a different way than implicatures.

If semantics and pragmatics are strictly kept apart, then there is no risk of circular argumentation. Therefore, the circle is resolved with respect to (5)(b), as well.

What is more, the task of semantics is not to provide truth conditions:

(25) "The semantic-pragmatic distinction is a well-defined and theoretically warranted distinction. Maintaining it requires recognizing the limitations of semantics and the reach of pragmatics. Semantics concerns the meanings of sentences, but these often fail to determine complete propositions, even modulo ambiguity, vagueness, and indexicality. As long as it is not assumed that the job of semantics is to give truth conditions of (declarative) sentences, *there is no reason to suppose that pragmatics needs to intrude on semantics*. This is to be expected, since pragmatics is concerned with utterances of sentences, not with sentences themselves. The fact that a speaker utters a sentence plays a key role in what he can reasonably expect to communicate in uttering it and in what the listener can reasonably take him to be communicating. When a sentence is uttered, it does not encode the fact that it

is uttered. This is essentially a pragmatic fact.” (Bach 2004: 42; emphasis added)

This quotation bears witness to the fact that Bach does not accept the assumption advocated, for instance, by relevance theorists or Recanati that if a sentence cannot be analyzed in terms of truth conditions, then pragmatics intrudes upon semantics by providing the missing information through the use of inferences. Since there is no risk of pragmatic intrusion upon semantics, the circular relation between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’ does not arise in this respect, either.

Via (23), (5) has been solved in the final p-context of Bach’s argumentation process:

(26) If (23) holds, neither the relation between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’ nor that between the statements on semantics and the statements on pragmatics is circular.

(23) and (26) are in accordance with the definitions of ‘fallacy’ and ‘circularity’ we have introduced in (7) and (8), because Bach’s introduction of the term ‘implicature’ does not prevent the plausible argumentation process from the retrospective re-evaluation of information, but rather, furthers it.

3.3 Truth-Conditional Pragmatics

One of the most influential resolutions of Grice’s circle is Recanati’s, which the author put forward in many publications (e.g. Recanati 1989, 2001, 2004, 2010 etc.). Recanati starts from a threefold distinction between sentence meaning, ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’. In Recanati (2001: 75), he introduces this distinction with the help of the following thought experiment:

(27) (a) “First, there is the distinction between the linguistic meaning of a sentence-type, and what is said (the proposition expressed) by an utterance of the sentence. For example, the English sentence ‘I am French’ has a certain meaning which, qua meaning of a sentence type, is not affected by changes in the context of utterance. This context-independent meaning contrasts with the

- context-dependent propositions which the sentence expresses with respect to particular contexts. Thus 'I am French', said by me, expresses the proposition that I am French; if you utter the sentence, it expresses a different proposition, even though its linguistic meaning remains the same across contexts of use.
- (b) Second, we have the distinction between what is actually said and what is merely 'conveyed' by the utterance. My utterance of 'I am French' expresses the proposition that I am French, but there are contexts in which it conveys much more. Suppose that, having been asked whether I can cook, I reply: 'I am French'. Clearly my utterance (in this context) provides an affirmative answer to the question. The meaning of the utterance in such a case includes more than what is literally said; it also includes what the utterance 'implicates'."

Basically, Recanati considers two operations. He calls the process along which variables of the kind exemplified in (27)(a) are assigned particular values 'saturation'. Saturation is obligatory, it turns the sentence meaning into 'what is said' and supplies it with truth-conditional content. In this way pragmatics plays a particular role in the determination of 'what is said' but its role is guided by the sentence meaning.

While saturation is a bottom-up process, there are top-down operations as well, which are not restricted by linguistic structure but work purely pragmatically. Recanati calls them 'free pragmatic processes' or 'modulation' (Recanati 2010). They are semantically optional. The effect of free pragmatic processes may be, for example, implicatures.

Recanati's main claim is that the notion of 'what is said' involves those contextual elements which stem from free pragmatic processes also called 'modulation'. For example, in Bach's thought experiment in (17), the implicature that 'The wound is not serious' can be worked out only if the boy understands that he will not 'die from the cut'. Consequently, Recanati (2001: 79) assumes that "there are two competing notions of 'what is said': One is the minimalist notion – that which is standardly appealed to in semantics. The other is the notion we need in order to capture the input to Gricean reasoning – 'what is said' as opposed to what is implied by saying it." This second notion of 'what is said' is pragmatic.

Accordingly, he rejects ‘minimalism’, which maintains the commonly held view that the only role of pragmatics in content determination is saturation. Instead, he advocates *truth-conditional pragmatics* which maintains that truth-conditions are also determined by free pragmatic enrichment. He rejects the assumption that semantics and pragmatics are two modules that do not mix and do not interfere in the determination of semantic content. Contrary to this view, he argues that semantics and pragmatics do mix.¹³

Against this background, the retrospectively re-evaluated version of (1) might be reconstructed roughly like this:

- (1_{TCP}) What are the general conditions of conversation, if the p-context is extended to include, among others, the thought experiment in (27)?

We summarize the solution of (1_{TCP}) that seems to follow from Recanati’s conception:

- (28) There are general conditions that apply to conversation as such:
- (a) These conditions cannot be explained if semantics and pragmatics are assumed to constitute distinct modules.
 - (b) Minimalism is not acceptable.
 - (c) Truth-conditional content may be affected not only by saturation (as when an indexical is assigned a contextual value) but also by free pragmatic processes.

Since “there is no such thing as ‘what the sentence says’ (in the standard sense in which that phrase is generally used)” (Recanati 2001: 87), and the notion of ‘what is said’ advocated by Recanati is pragmatic in that it incorporates optional contextual elements, Grice’s circle does not arise. In this framework, it cannot be the case that ‘what is said’ – i.e. truth-conditional meaning – is the input to ‘what is implicated’, and ‘what is implicated’ is the input to ‘what is said’.

We also obtain the solution to (5):

¹³ “[...] various contextual processes come into play in the determination of an utterance’s truth conditions; not merely saturation – the contextual assignment of values to indexicals and free variables in the logical form of the sentence – but also free enrichment and other processes which are not linguistically triggered but are pragmatic through and through.” (Recanati 2004: 21)

- (29) If (28) holds, neither the relation between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated' nor that between the statements on semantics and the statements on pragmatics is circular.

3.4 Generalized conversational implicature

Levinson's approach presupposes two kinds of distinctions. The first distinction is made between generalized conversational implicature (GCI) and particularized conversational implicature (PCI). Consider the following thought experiment (Levinson 2000: 17):

- (30) "A: Where is John?
B: Some of the guests are already leaving.
GCI: Not all of the guests are already leaving.
PCI: Perhaps John has already left."

Here the PCI of B's response is triggered by the particular context of A's utterance and is specific to this context. As opposed to this, the GCI seems to arise independently of contexts and is based on a default interpretation of 'some': "any statement of the form 'some x are G' will, other things being equal, have the default interpretation 'Not all x are G'" (Levinson 2000: 17). Nevertheless, in certain cases it can be cancelled.

Moreover, Levinson's approach makes a distinction between sentence meaning, utterance-type meaning and utterance-token meaning. Sentence meaning ('what is said') is basically assumed to be conventional and semantically underdetermined. Utterance-token meanings are calculated on the basis of particularized conversational implicatures which are highly context-dependent and may include encyclopedic information as well. Utterance-type meanings result from inferences based on generalized conversational implicatures. In (30), 'some' is, in Levinson's terminology, 'intrusive' in so far as it enables the intrusion of the content of GCI into the truth-functional content of the utterance.

Levinson (2000) re-evaluates the problem as follows:

- (1_{GCI}) What are the general conditions of conversation, if the p-context is extended to include, among others, the thought experiment in (30)?

One might obtain the following solution to (1_{GCI}):

- (31) There are general conditions that apply to conversation as such:
- (a) Generalized conversational implicatures intrude into ‘what is said’ i.e. the truth-functional content of utterances.
 - (b) Since generalized conversational implicatures are pragmatic inferences, pragmatic inferences contribute to ‘what is said’.

Here again, in the plausible argumentation process a series of thought experiments work as direct sources of the plausibility values of the premises which lead to the conclusions eventually yielding (31).

Levinson’s approach does not offer a systematic and comprehensive solution of Grice’s circle, but rather, it is one that is restricted to the default patterns of generalized conversational implicatures.¹⁴

The claim that through the content of generalized conversational implicatures pragmatic inferences may enter into the content of ‘what is said’ avoids circularity in two respects. One is that GCIs *do* contribute to truth-functional content. Therefore, truth-functional content does not work as the input of implicature and the latter is not the input of truth-functional content: “[t]here is every reason to try and reconstrue the interaction between semantics and pragmatics as the intimate interlocking of distinct processes, rather than, as traditionally, in terms of the output of one being the input to the other” (Levinson 2000: 242; see also Huang 2010: 627). Another aspect is that the GCI contributes to the truth-functional content of the utterance *by default*. In (30), the GCI is of a pragmatic nature and it is communicatively based.

The solution to (5) is:

¹⁴ Carston (2002a) criticizes Levinson’s approach because, according to her, he does not offer an overall solution to Grice’s circle. Rather, according to Carston, he merely assumes that his approach to generalized conversational implicature, which he developed independently of the circularity issue, may soften its harmfulness. Carston also remarks that there are particularized conversational implicatures which influence propositional meaning, while others do not.

- (32) If (31) holds, neither the relation between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated', nor that between statements on semantics and statements on pragmatics is circular.

4 Conclusions

The approaches we have discussed meet the definitions in (7) and (8) and thus avoid viciously circular argumentation, in the following respects.

First, both Grice's problem as reconstructed in (1) and his solution roughly summarized in (3) have been in all four cases retrospectively re-evaluated during the plausible argumentation processes whose starting p-context included Grice's thought experiment (although none of the four approaches go into its analysis). Thereby, the elaboration of the p-context led to final p-contexts which culminated in the re-evaluated solutions.

Second, with respect to (5), that is, the relation between a particular approach's statements about the truth-conditional content of utterances and those about what they implicate, vicious circularity is avoided by

- (i) assuming the feedback mechanism of mutual parallel adjustment; or
- (ii) assuming the intrusion of generalized conversational implicatures into truth-conditional meaning; or
- (iii) assuming three levels instead of two; or
- (iv) claiming that at the outset there is basically no truth-functional content without pragmatic enrichment.

Third, the approaches we have overviewed illustrate the status of thought experiments within the overall process of plausible argumentation focusing on the relationship between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated'. Namely, all four approaches make use of numerous thought experiments in elaborating their own resolution of the circle. Nevertheless, even if one admits that they involve possible solutions to the problem of the relationship between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated', the problems they actually tackle are different, both from those raised by Grice's thought experiment and from what Levinson explicated as Grice's circle. None of them are resolutions of *the* Gricean circle, but they are solutions of prismatically and retrospectively re-evaluated versions of the latter. New thought experiments motivate, for instance, the application of 'prisms' such as the notions

‘generalized conversational implicature as default’, ‘implicature’, ‘free enrichment’, ‘explicature’, and ‘mutual parallel adjustment’, by means of which the problems are retrospectively re-evaluated.

Finally, from the mechanism of plausible argumentation it also follows that Grice’s thought experiment did not fail in some ‘absolute’ sense. What was conceived of as a failure is merely a temporarily existing problem that disappears during the later cycles, while the latter, in turn, lead to further problems triggering new thought experiments that are subject to further re-evaluations.

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