Implicitures: Cancelability and Non-detachability*

Kepa Korta
ILCLI, UPV-EHU
Donostia - San Sebastián

Grice's so-called 'theory of conversation' (Grice 1967a) establishes a basic distinction between two aspects of utterance meaning: *what is said* and *what is implicated.* Some authors (Carston (1988), Recanati (1989), Sperber and Wilson (1986)) have criticized this distinction and, particularly, its application to the pragmatic analysis of several linguistic phenomena, giving rise to an interesting debate on the delimitation of the different aspects of utterance meaning. Bach (1994) enters the discussion with a proposal of revision of Grice's original distinction, including a new category: *what is implicited.* The aim of this paper is to participate in this debate paying attention to some questions concerning the Gricean 'tests' of cancelability and non-detachability for the different aspects of utterance meaning. More specifically, our claim is that these tests support Bach's (1994) triple distinction among *what is said, impliciture, and implicature,* because we can establish the following results:

	cancelable	non-detachable
what is said	-	+
impliciture	+	-
implicature	+	$+^1$

If this is right, many problems posed in the debate get solved and some of the criteria for the delimitation of pragmatically determined aspects of *what is said* considered—and rejected by some authors—are shown to be valid. Thus, the most important part of the paper will be devoted to explaining the arguments in favor of this thesis. But before doing that we shall introduce the main lines of the debate on the different aspects of utterance meaning.[2] We will begin
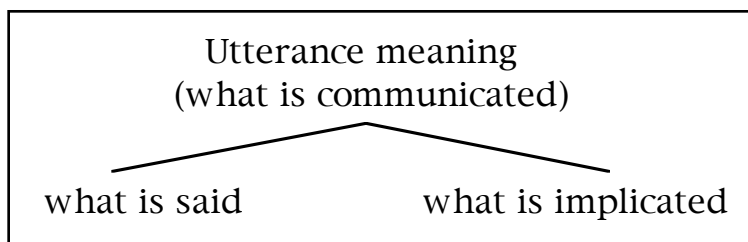
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[1] Except the implicatures that exploit Grice's maxims of manner, which are detachable.
[2] See also Vicente (forthcoming).

by briefly expounding Grice's distinction and the critiques by Carston (1988) and Recanati (1989). Then we will sum up Bach's proposal on *conversational impliciture* and, finally, we will defend our own position.

1. Grice's original distinction.

Grice's (1967a) distinction between *what is said* and *what is implicated* as the two basic elements of utterance meaning does not need a long explanation. The picture below

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│        Utterance meaning             │
│      (what is communicated)          │
│                                      │
│     what is said    what is implicated │
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and the reconsideration of his first example will serve our purpose. Two people, A and B, are talking about their mutual friend, C, who is now working in a bank:
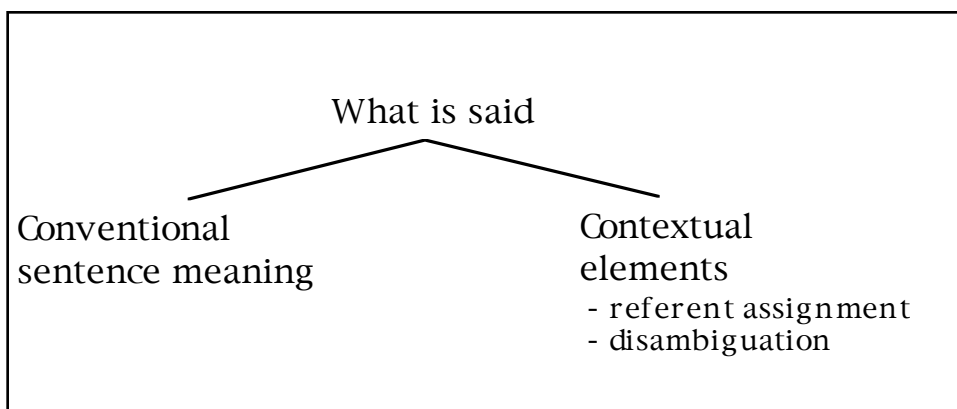
A: How is C getting on in his job?
B: He hasn't been to prison yet.

It is clear that, in its appropriate context, B communicates to A not only what she says but also something else, namely, that C may have stolen some money, for example. Whatever B has suggested or implied, she has not said that. This communicated but unsaid material is what Grice called *conversational implicature.*

Grice's so-called *theory of conversation* is essentially a *theory of implicature,* which explains not only how implicatures are generated in cases like this,[3] but also some persistent problems where semanticists tended to postulate ambiguities like the distinction between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions or the different interpretations of natural language conjunction and

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[3] We will not deal here neither with "conventional" implicatures nor with the distinction between generalized and particularized conversational implicatures.

disjunction. Besides, Grice's distinction has been construed as offering a clear demarcation criterion for semantics and pragmatics, according to which the former would be responsible for the determination of what is said and the latter would explain the presence of additional content—implicatures—within utterance meaning. However, Grice himself clearly says that what is said is not limited to the conventional meaning of the sentence uttered, but that the (pragmatic) determination of certain contextual elements such as disambiguation and referent assignment is necessary. That is,

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                    What is said


Conventional                    Contextual
sentence meaning                elements
                                 - referent assignment
                                 - disambiguation
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2. The discrepancies.

Carston, Recanati, and Sperber and Wilson transform Grice's distinction to include under the category of what is said other elements, besides disambiguation and referent assignment, whose determination is pragmatic. Following them, many things taken as implicatures in the Gricean framework are better explained if taken as pragmatically determined aspects of what is said. Now we will try to present their arguments as briefly and clearly as possible. In examples like the one above or the following

(1) I haven't had breakfast today

the difference between what the speaker has said and what she has implicated is intuitively very clear. She has said that she has not had breakfast that day (the day of utterance) and she has implicated that she would like something to eat. Starting with the conventional meaning of the sentence used, together with the assignment of referents for the personal pronoun and the temporal adverb and the

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time of utterance, we determine what is said. And from what is said, taking into account the cooperative principle and the conversational maxims as well as some background information, we determine the implicature that she also intends to communicate. Nobody would say that in this case the speaker *said* that she wanted something to eat, but that she suggested, meant or implied it by saying that she hasn't had breakfast that day. So far, so good. But when we consider examples like

(2) They got married and they had many children
(3) It will take us some time to get there
(4) I have had breakfast

things are not yet so clear. Contrast (2) with (5),

(5) They had many children and they got married.

The difference between the utterance meanings of (2) and (5) is clear: it is a difference concerning the temporal order of the events described. Instead of explaining it by postulating a semantic ambiguity of 'and', the Gricean framework situates the difference at the level of implicatures. Concerning what is said, an utterance of (2) and an utterance of (5), *ceteris paribus,* do say the same thing, namely, that—say—Mary and John had many children and got married or that John and Mary got married and had many children; the change in order does not affect what is said: the (truth-conditional) meaning of the natural language conjunction 'and' is simply identical to the meaning of the logical conjunction '∧'. The difference is then at the level of implicatures, in which the submaxim of order would generate different implicatures for (2) and (5).

Carston (1988) gives another explanation: To determine what is said it is necessary not only to pragmatically assign referents to the personal pronoun 'they' but also temporal referents to the verbs 'got married' and 'had'. Thus, what is said would have a representation like 'John and Mary got married at t and had many children at $t + n$." That is, there is no need to postulate an ambiguity at the semantic level of sentence meaning, but, instead of explaining the different meanings by different conversational implicatures, they are properly explained as differences in what is said.

Let us consider now an utterance of (3). In normal circumstances, what a speaker communicates by such utterance is that her and, probably, her addressee's or someone else's going to a certain place will take more time than, for instance, they could expect in principle. However, following Grice, determining what is said would give us a simple analytic truth, since any movement requires some time. In the Gricean framework the remaining information communicated must be explained by means of implicatures. Sperber and Wilson, Carston, and Recanati's alternative proposes to consider it as a pragmatically determined aspect of what is said.

Let us take (4). Once the speaker's identity and the time of utterance are fixed, we obtain the proposition that the speaker has had breakfast at least once before the time of utterance. Obviously, this proposition would be true even if the speaker's last breakfast was thirty years ago. According to Grice's critics, this proposition does not correspond with what the speaker means, and says, when she utters (4). The Gricean explanation in terms of conversational implicatures is not right. Within Sperber and Wilson's framework the passing from sentence meaning to what is said requires a further process besides disambiguation and referent assignment: a process called 'enrichment'.[4] Thus, in normal circumstances what the speaker says by uttering (4) is not (4'), i.e., the product of the conventional meaning of the sentence used plus reference assignment, but (4''), which is the product of (4') plus its enrichment (strengthening or expansion).

(4) I have had breakfast
(4') I, Kepa, have had breakfast some time before 12:00 p.m., 19 December 1997.
(4'') I, Kepa, have had breakfast this morning some time before 12:00 p.m., 19 December 1997.

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[4] Recanati distinguishes two types of enrichment: first, "saturation" or the process of contextually filling up the gaps for the utterance to express a complete proposition (hence, it includes reference assignment), and "strengthening", a process whose input is a complete proposition and its output is a proposition also complete but richer, that is, which (logically) implies the former. This notions are criticized by Bach (1994) and substituted by the notions of "completion" and "expansion".

Hence, according to these authors, the explanation by means of conversational implicatures of the fact that when a speaker says "I have had breakfast" she refers to the morning of the day of utterance is not correct, because it assumes that what the speaker has really said is (4'), and this is absolutely counterintuitive. Their alternative would correspond with our intuitions that when someone utters (2), (3) or (4), what she says is[5]

(2') They (Mary and John) got married and {then} had many children.
(3') It will take (you and me) some time {more than expected} to get there.
(4') I (Kepa) have had breakfast {this morning}.

On the other hand, this solution fits well with the intuition that, like in most examples given by Grice (1967a), the implicature is something more independent from the propositional content of the sentence uttered than these added elements, considered by these authors as pragmatically determined ingredients of what is said. In other words, according to our intuitions, (6) below is a clear conversational implicature of (4) while (4') is not:

(6) I don't want anything to eat.

3. Criteria and intuitions.

Leaving aside, for the moment, our trust in intuitions as criteria for choosing the best of these two explanations for this type of phenomena,[6] the one by Carston, Recanati, and Sperber and Wilson faces the following problem: in spite of the fact that, contra Grice, they propose to assimilate to the category of what is said an important part of what has been traditionally considered as conversational implicature, they do not abandon this category and, therefore, they must answer the following question:

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[5] Following Bach's (1994) notation, the brackets, [], indicate that that material is the result of a process of completion while the curly brackets, {}, that it is the result of a process of expansion. The parentheses, our notation, indicate that it is material filled (or to be filled) by reference assignment. See the preceding note.
[6] See Recanati (1989), sections 3, 4 and 7.

When is a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning (or what is communicated) part of what is said and when a conversational implicature? Recanati (1989) devotes his paper to studying some possible criteria. One of them, the minimalist principle, is rejected by everybody, so we will not comment on it here. The functional independence principle defended by Carston (1988) states approximately the following (in Recanati's words, (1989) p. 316, who rightly says that it should be better called the "logical independence principle"):

> *Conversational implicatures are functionally independent of what is said; this means in particular that they do not entail, and are not entailed by, what is said. When an alleged implicature does not meet this condition, it must be considered as part of what is said.*

Recanati (1989) claims that this criterion should be rejected. He gives some (counter)examples showing how a conversational implicature can entail what is said and still not lose its being an implicature.[7]

Carston (1988) introduces another criterion that both she and Recanati (1989) are forced to abandon: it is called the 'linguistic (or grammatical) direction principle' (formulated in the following way by Recanati (1993, p. 255)):

> *A pragmatically determined aspect of meaning is part of what is said if and only if its contextual determination is triggered by the grammar, that is, if the sentence itself sets up a slot to be contextually filled.*

It is not difficult to see why these authors are obliged to abandon this principle. It is true that in utterances like

(2) They got married and {then} had many children
(4) I have had breakfast {this morning}

it can be maintained that the material in curly brackets is the result of contextually determining the slots triggered by the grammar. In fact, this is Carston's (1988) proposal for (2), as we have seen above. As for (4) we could say that the grammar not only generates a slot for

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[7] See Recanati (1989), section 5 and, against him, Vicente (forthcoming).

the reference of "I" but also another one, in such a way that the conventional meaning of the sentence would be something like

(*) (___the speaker) have had breakfast (____time-period to which the speaker refers).

This depends on the grammatical analysis we adopt, but an analysis like this seems plausible. But, anyway, the linguistic direction principle cannot explain other cases like

(3) It will take us some time {more than expected} to get there.

or

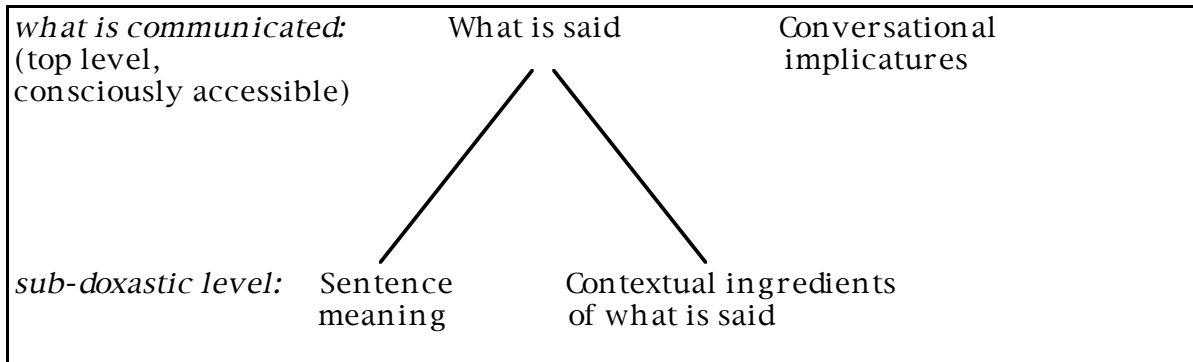(7) You are not going to die {from this cut}.

where the added material does not seem at all to be the result of contextual filling triggered by the grammar. Since, in spite of this, Carston and Recanati want to consider this material as pragmatically determined aspects of what is said, the linguistic direction principle is for them useless for the delimitation of what is said and implicatures.

The only criterion that Recanati defends with clarity and strength in his arguments is what he calls the "availability principle" (Recanati (1989), p. 310):[8]

> *In deciding whether a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning is part of what is said, that is, in making a decision concerning what is said, we should always preserve our pre-theoric intuitions on the matter.*

It may seem a poor achievement for so long a journey. However, it is well justified by Recanati. According to him, this principle expresses the fact that what is said and what is implicated are accessible to consciousness at the same level as what is communicated; and they are accessible as distinct elements of what is communicated. Let us borrow his figure

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[8] We should note that Recanati (1989) also proposes the "scope principle" (p. 325): *A pragmatically determined aspect of meaning is part of what is said (and, therefore, not a conversational implicature) if—and, perhaps, only if—it falls within the scope of logical operators such as negations and conditionals.* However, he proposes it tentatively and, anyhow, its discussion would lead us beyond the limits of this paper.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ what is communicated:        What is said        Conversational          │
│ (top level,                        ╱╲            implicatures             │
│ consciously accessible)           ╱  ╲                                    │
│                                  ╱    ╲                                   │
│                                 ╱      ╲                                  │
│                                ╱        ╲                                 │
│ sub-doxastic level:     Sentence        Contextual ingredients           │
│                         meaning         of what is said                  │
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(Recanati (1989), p. 312.)

and his words:

> "If we really have conscious access to what is said, then as theorists we have a very simple criterion for telling when a pragmatically determined aspect of meaning is part of what is said and when it is not: we merely have to check the proposal against our intuitions. This, I believe, is what most theorists have always done. Why, for example, do Sperber and Wilson claim that the proposition that the speaker has had breakfast at least one in his life is not the proposition actually expressed—what is said—by the speaker who utters (2) [(4)]? Because *everybody knows* that this is not what the speaker says, under ordinary circumstances, when he utters (2) [(4)]. The appeal to common sense is perfectly justified once the availability hypothesis is made." (Recanati (1989), pp. 312-313.)

But Recanati's appeal to intuitions and common sense, I believe, turns finally against him. Even if our intuitions on the distinction between what is said and conversational implicatures are pretty clear, it is also true that our intuitions seem to distinguish between what is explicit and what is implicit in utterance meaning. I think most of us would say that (4) and (8) do not say the same:
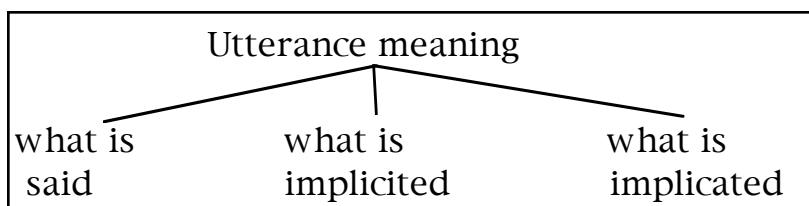
(4) I have had breakfast.
(8) I have had breakfast this morning.

Or, at least, that if they do say the same, (4) says it implicitly and (8) does it explicitly. Thus, it seems that Carston, Recanati, and Sperber and Wilson have given us good reasons for not considering as conversational implicatures some elements of utterance meaning that are not strictly part of Grice's notion of what is said. But their solution implies considering as part of what is explicit (the explicature) what intuitively has not been explicitly said, whereas their most important principle is to preserve our pre-theoric intuitions.

In this context Bach (1994) introduces his notion of 'conversational impliciture.'

4. Impliciture.

Bach agrees with Carston, Sperber and Wilson, and Recanati that it is counterintuitive to consider examples like (2)-(5) above as cases of conversational implicature. But, instead of widening the limits of 'what is said' to make room for these pragmatically determined elements, he proposes an intermediate category: impliciture.

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              Utterance meaning
            /         |         \
what is          what is          what is
 said           implicited        implicated
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According to Bach,

"An implicatum is completely separated from what is said and is inferred from it (more precisely, from the saying of it). What is said is one proposition and what is communicated in addition to that is a conceptually independent proposition, a proposition with perhaps no constituent in common with what is said." (Bach (1994), p. 140.)

While,

"implicitures are build up from the explicit content of the utterance by conceptual strengthening or what Sperber and Wilson (1986) call 'enrichment'... Implicitures are, as the name suggests, implicit in what is said, whereas implicatures are implied by (the saying of) what is said." (Ibid.)

Thus, Bach wants to explain not only the intuitions that tell us that certain elements of utterance meaning are not implicatures, but also the intuitions telling us that there is a difference between what is explicitly said and what goes implicit in what is said. His proposal is tied to the linguistic direction principle. He claims that

"the constituents of what is said must correspond to the constituents of the utterance. If something does not, it is not part of what is SAID." (Ibid., p. 137.)

Accepting Bach's threefold distinction would have at least two advantages with respect to Carston, Recanati and Sperber and Wilson's proposal. On the one hand, as we have already seen, it would do justice to both the intuitions regarding implicatures and other pragmatically determined aspects of utterance meaning and the intuitions regarding the distinction between the explicit and the implicit. On the other hand, we would have a grammatical criterion for deciding what are the pragmatically determined aspects of what is said. Yet we could not distinguish between implicitures and implicatures, beyond our intuitive characterization.

However, Bach (1994, pp. 136-7) provides a hint claiming that implicitures, like implicatures that exploit the maxim of manner, are detachable. If this is so, we will have a more solid criterion for distinguishing between implicitures and most implicatures, which are non-detachable. Hence, it can be interesting to pay attention to the applicability of the 'tests' of non-detachability and cancelability of implicatures to implicitures and, why not, to the pragmatically determined aspects of what is said. Even more interesting, when noticing that both Carston (1988) and Recanati (1989, 1993) claim, without argument, that

> "The cancellability and calculability criteria apply to all pragmatically derived material, whether at the level of explicature or implicature, so cannot help us." (Carston (1988), p. 166.)

> "Grice's 'tests' for conversational implicature (cancellability, nondetachability, calculability, and so forth) test the presence of a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning, but they do not tell us whether it is a genuine implicature or a constituent of what is said." (Recanati (1989), p. 328.)

Now we will see whether this is so.[9]

5. Non-detachability.

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[9] We leave aside other 'tests' such as the calculability and indeterminacy of conversational implicatures.

Grice's 'tests' refer to the characteristics he attributes to conversational implicatures in general (Grice (1967a)), which, as he later says (1967b), should not be considered as definite tests for the presence of an alleged conversational implicature—this is why the use of scary quotes in 'test' is pretty general. Concerning non-detachability, he warns that it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the presence of a conversational implicature. But, what is it for an implicature to be non-detachable?

> "Insofar as the calculation that a particular conversational implicature is present requires, besides contextual and background information, only a knowledge of what has been said (or of the conventional commitment of the utterance), and insofar as the manner of expression plays no role in the calculation, it will not be possible to find another way of saying the same thing, which simply lacks the implicature in question, except where some special feature of the substituted version is itself relevant to the determination of an implicature (in virtue of one of the maxims of Manner)." (Grice (1967a, 1989), p. 39.)

Except the ones based in the maxim of Manner, implicatures depend on the content said and not on the particular way of saying it, so that an implicature is non-detachable if we cannot find another way of saying what is said that simply lacks the implicature. Now the point is that, following Bach, implicitures do not have this property, that is, if we alter the way of saying what is said the impliciture in the first version will not be present in the new version. Let us use Bach's example (Bach (1994), pp. 136-7):

(9) I haven't eaten breakfast.

If Bach's threefold distinction is accepted, what is said by an utterance of (9) is that the speaker hasn't eaten breakfast before the time of utterance, and probably there is also an impliciture to the effect that she hasn't eaten breakfast the morning of that day. Now, had the utterance been (10)—equivalent to (9) regarding what is said—,

(10) I haven't eaten breakfast before,

the impliciture "this morning" would be no longer present. Thus, implicitures, like implicatures exploiting the maxim of Manner, but

unlike all other conversational implicatures, are detachable; in other words, the way of saying what is said affects the presence of an alleged impliciture. What about the pragmatically determined aspects of what is said? It seems more difficult to find clear examples. Let us consider, for simplicity, my utterance of (9). The referent of the personal pronoun 'I', a pragmatically determined element of what is said, does not seem to disappear in (11) or in (12), when uttered by a third person:

(11) The utterer of this sentence hasn't eaten breakfast.
(12) Kepa Korta hasn't eaten breakfast.

In this example, then, it appears that what is said or, more precisely, a pragmatically determined aspect of what is said—i.e., the referent of the subject of the sentence—is not affected by the different ways of saying it; in other words, it is non-detachable.

Besides, the issue of the non-detachability of the elements, pragmatically determined or not, of what is said, seems an issue that can be decided *a priori,* since how could an element of what is said not be present when the same has been said, though in a different manner? In any case, I propose the following as tentative results:

	non-detachable
what is said	+
impliciture	-
implicature	+

If this is so, we will have, on the one hand, a criterion for distinguishing conversational implicatures (except those that exploit the maxim of Manner) from other pragmatically determined aspects of utterance meaning, which is a desirable result for Carston, Recanati, and Sperber and Wilson's proposal as well as for Bach's, and, on the other hand, we would also have a good reason for not assimilating those elements to a single category of aspects of what is said but, instead, to accept Bach's triple distinction. Let us see now what happens with the cancelability 'test'.

6. Cancelability.

"A putative conversational implicature that *p* is explicitly cancelable if, to the form of words the utterance of which putatively implicates that *p*, it is admissible to add *but not p,* or *I do not mean to imply that p,* and it is contextually cancelable if one can find situations in which the utterance of the form of words would simply not carry the implicature. Now I think that all conversational implicatures are cancelable". (Grice (1967b, 1989), p. 44.))

Cancelability is one of the main characteristics of conversational implicatures, but not a good one, as Grice says immediately after the words above, for testing definitely their presence. We find a proof of this in that implicitures are explicitly cancelable:

(9) I haven't eaten breakfast. {this morning}
(9') I haven't eaten breakfast, but I do not mean that I haven't eaten breakfast this morning. In fact, I have never eaten breakfast,

as well as contextually:

(13) I have nothing {appropriate} to wear {for the wedding}.
(13') I have nothing to wear (uttered by a seminude indigent at the entrance of a church).

The case of the pragmatically determined aspects of what is said is not so clear. Though in examples like (9) it seems there is no way to cancel the referent of the personal pronoun, the cases of disambiguation could be considered as cancelable. For instance, consider

(14) He stood near the bank.

Let us assume that the meaning for 'bank' initially determined is 'financial institution building'. It is clear that we can add to that utterance *but not...:*

(14') He stood near the bank, but I do not mean by 'bank' a financial institution building, but the river bank, where he usually goes.

It is not difficult to imagine situations where the first meaning for bank is 'river bank' or 'seat'. But these facts do not prove, I believe, the result of the pragmatic process of lexical disambiguation

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to be *cancelable;* they only mean that it is *revisable.* Let me explain. When we say that an implicature or an impliciture is explicitly or contextually cancelable we say that it is suspended, it is no longer present, i.e., there is no implicature nor impliciture any more. In Grice's words above, *the utterance of the form of words would simply not carry the implicature* or the impliciture, in our case. On the contrary, in the case of the pragmatic determination of the meaning of an ambiguous term, the result can be revised, it can be substituted by another meaning; in fact, if a first candidate is rejected, it must be substituted by another one, since unlike implicatures or implicitures, the referent of the description 'the bank' must be present as an element of what is said. This appears also to be the case for the referents of indexicals pragmatically fixed. They can be revised, but they must always be fixed.[10]

On the other hand, this last point seems to apply to anything we can consider as an element of what is said. To say that an aspect of what is said is, in our sense, cancelable would not be simply a *contradictio in terminis?* How could anybody cancel (=not say) something he *has said?* The sense that Carston, Recanati, and Sperber and Wilson give to the category of *what is said* conflicts again with intuitions.

In sum, the results on the cancelability of the different pragmatically determined elements of utterance meaning are the following:

	cancelable
what is said	-
impliciture	+
implicature	+

7. Conclusions.

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[10] Concerning this issue, I think that Levinson's (1983, p. 115) distinction, taken from Horn, between cancelability and suspension does not give us any help. The crucial distinction seems to be the one between what Grice calls "cancelability" and what other theorists understand by this term when they claim that any pragmatically determined element of utterance meaning is cancelable; they might be talking about what I just called "revisability".

We have tried to show that, contrary to what Carston and Recanati claim, Grice's 'tests' of non-detachability and cancelability do serve to clarify the distinction among different elements of utterance meaning which are pragmatically determined. Considering a few examples, we have been able to tentatively establish that conversational impliciters are cancelable and detachable, and this result favors Bach's notion of impliciter in his debate with Carston, Recanati, and Sperber and Wilson.

Obviously, our aim was not to close this debate. We left aside other important points for the discussion. One of these concerns the consequences of each position for the problem of the delimitation between semantics and pragmatics and their relationship.

Another crucial but more specific point has to do with the distinction between literal and non-literal meaning. This issue turns out to be very important for Recanati's rejection of the notion of impliciter. Moreover, this issue may allow the discussion to treat the matter by more 'scientific' means, i.e., more separated from the conceptual and intuitive framework, which appears to be almost mandatory in pragmatic research nowadays. In this sense, the implications of the different theories concerning their assumptions about the psychological (and computational) processes underlying linguistic production and reception or, more specifically, about the priority of literal meaning, indicate the possibility for other contrasting methods for pragmatic theories, apart from the linguistic intuitions of speakers-hearers.[11] But this is a topic for another paper.

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[11] See, for instance, Bach (1994, pp. 154-60) and, especially, Recanati (1995).

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