

**Review of: Marta Dynel & Piotr Cap (2017),
Implicitness. From lexis to discourse**

Naomi Truan

► **To cite this version:**

Naomi Truan. Review of: Marta Dynel & Piotr Cap (2017), Implicitness. From lexis to discourse. 2018. hal-01845109

HAL Id: hal-01845109

<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01845109>

Submitted on 20 Jul 2018

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

LINGUIST List 29.2960

Thu Jul 19 2018

Review: Discourse Analysis; Philosophy of Language; Pragmatics; Semantics: Cap, Dynel (2017)

Editor for this issue: Jeremy Coburn <jecoburnlinguistlist.org>

***** LINGUIST List Support *****

Fund Drive 2018

28 years of LINGUIST List!

Please support the LL editors and operation with a donation at:

<https://funddrive.linguistlist.org/donate/>

Date: 04-Jan-2018

From: Naomi Truan <naomi.truanparis-sorbonne.fr>

Subject: Implicitness

[E-mail this message to a friend](#)

[Discuss this message](#)

Book announced at <https://linguistlist.org/issues/28/28-3117.html>

EDITOR: Piotr Cap

EDITOR: Marta Dynel

TITLE: Implicitness

SUBTITLE: From lexis to discourse

SERIES TITLE: Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 276

PUBLISHER: John Benjamins

YEAR: 2017

REVIEWER: Naomi Truan, Sorbonne Université

SUMMARY

In "Implicitness. From lexis to discourse", Piotr Cap and Marta Dynel aim at offering an overview of a term that still remains "a familiar terra incognita in pragmatics" (title of Chapter 1). Despite its frequent and relatively intuitive use, the authors argue, 'implicitness' has not been clearly defined in contrast to 'indirectness', for instance, while the latter belongs to the pragmatic legacy for years. It is suggested that 'indirectness' "involves, exclusively, the use of language" (p. 4), while 'implicitness', on the other hand, covers both language in use and language as a system. While 'indirectness' would be primarily – if not exclusively – a pragmatic concept, 'implicitness' would be at the semantic-pragmatic interface. 'Implicitness' can indeed be encoded in lexico-grammatical markers at phraseological and syntactic levels.

Recognizing the "lack of a solid conceptual handle on implicitness, both as a phenomenon and a label" (p. 3), this book intends to fill this gap by presenting twelve perspectives on implicitness through three levels of analysis: Word and phrase (Part I), Sentence and utterance (Part II), Text and discourse (Part 3).

Part I is devoted to four contributions at the word- and phrase-level, i.e. with "specific lexicogrammatical phrases and categories" (p. 6) based on the examples of and-coherence inferences, scalar quantifiers and or interpretations (Ariel), pronouns (Davis), lexical narrowing (Huang), and zero subject anaphors (Németh T.).

In her paper "What's a reading?", Ariel questions the role of readings as "recurrent, speaker-intended interpretations consistently associated with specific linguistic forms" (p. 17). She argues that from a speaker perspective, meaning is constructed through linguistic meanings, explicated inferences, and implicated inferences. Second-tier implicatures, which replace the first-tier implicatures, might also play a role, but "only the first three are potentially recurrent interpretations" (p. 34). In the cases discussed in this chapter, i.e. and-related inferences, exclusive readings of X or Y constructions, and scalar quantifiers such as some, many and most, explicated or implicated inferences "are not necessarily part and parcel of the speaker-intended reading", but rather "Truth-Compatible inferences or Background assumptions" (p. 34).

In "Pronouns and implicature", Davis defines indexicals as having "different referents in different contexts even when used in the same sense and evaluated with respect to the same circumstances" (p. 40). Indexicals do not express a concept with a fixed referent. In this regard, Davis argues that "the personal, demonstrative, and locative pronouns express primary indexical concepts, ones that do not contain other indexical concepts" (p. 41, emphasis from the author). The article addresses different types of implicatures generated by pronouns: due to sortal components (i.e. gender agreement, for instance), determiner components (cf. third-person non-reflexive pronouns), or independent pronoun implicatures.

The concept of narrowing, i.e. the "phenomenon whereby the use of a lexical item implicitly conveys a meaning that is more specific than the lexical expression's lexically specified meaning" (p. 68), such as 'milk' that usually refers to 'cow milk' specifically even if it is not stated as such, is at the core of Huang's chapter, "Implicitness in the lexis: Lexical narrowing and neo-Gricean pragmatics". Within the neo-Gricean pragmatic framework, Huang claims that pragmatic enrichment involving lexical narrowing is a conversational implicature (and neither an explicature, nor the pragmatically enriched said, nor an implicature).

Németh T. closes Part I with a contribution entitled "Zero subject anaphors and extralinguistically motivated subject pro-drop in Hungarian language use". Németh T. describes implicit arguments as "arguments involved in the lexical-semantic representation of verbs which, however, are lexically unrealised, and whose implicit presence in utterances is attested by lexical-semantic, grammatical and pragmatic evidence" (p. 96). To sum up, the use or interpretation of subject anaphors and extralinguistically motivated subject pro-drop in Hungarian predicted by grammar "can be considered only a typical, default use" (p. 115). Rather, both grammar and pragmatics should be taken into account for the interpretation of these phenomena, showing that grammar (including lexical-semantic properties) and pragmatics "are two interacting components" (p. 96).

In Part II, the scope extends to the sentence- and utterance-level. It includes a phenomenon discussed in Part I, lexical borrowing (Wilson & Kolati), but also accounts of metaphorical language (Dynel, Wilson & Kolati). Kádár, Kecskes and Kuzon deal with indirect ritual offences, situation-bound utterances, and thematic silence, respectively.

Dynel opens this section with an article on "Implicitness via overt truthfulness". Based on the notion of implicature as the meaning that the speaker implies, Dynel revisits Grice's assumption on metaphor, irony, hyperbole and meiosis, four rhetorical figures that are known for flouting the Gricean Cooperative Principle. Basically – and oversimplified in comparison with Dynel's more elaborate account –, in all these figures, and in ironical statements more specifically, what is said is not what is meant.

"Lexical pragmatics and implicit communication" is the subject of Wilson's and Kolati's chapter. Lexical pragmatics is the study of "principles and mechanisms [that] apply at the level of the word or phrase rather than the whole utterance" (p. 148). They discuss the cases of lexical narrowing, "the continuum of literal, loose and metaphorical uses" (p. 157), and when narrowing and broadening combine based on the interpretation of a single word, the adjective 'empty'. Their corpus-based study shows that lexical narrowing and broadening "are highly flexible and context-dependant processes" (p. 172).

In "Indirect ritual offence. A study on elusive impoliteness", Kádár sheds light on "indirect ritual offence [...], that is a form of recurrent in-group behaviour, in the case of which other group insiders either intentionally neglect, or even make a series of subtle attacks on a stigmatised individual" (p. 179). In the author's dataset of 81 anecdotes, there are 9 cases in which "the narrator of the event of abuse uses the label 'implicit'" (p. 194), showing that describing an act as implicit is a recurrent denomination in the metadiscourse of lay people (and victims of indirect ritual offence).

Kecskes' paper addresses the case of "implicitness in the use of situation-bound utterances" (SBUs). SBUs are a perfect

example of the “direct relationship between conventions and implicitness” (p. 201). SBUs are both selective (“preferred ways of organizing thoughts”, Kecskes 2014) and completive (“they evoke a particular situation”, p. 207). Despite being characterized by a high level of implicitness, SBUs “may represent the most direct way to express some social functions” (p. 213) because they rely on tacit knowledge shared by the members of a community. SBUs thus show how pragmatic units can be both implicit and direct at the same time.

Kurzton addresses “thematic silence as a speech act”. “Thematic silence” is understood as the non-mention of a topic by a speaker, not as silence *stricto sensu*. Thematic silence can be deliberate (choosing not to say something while speaking) or unintentional (not remembering to say something). Single utterances expressing promise, gratitude, being silent about something, and refusal, are presented, as well as their degrees of implicitness. The analysis then focuses on a political speech. In his party conference speech in 2014, Miliband presented six national goals, but two issues were omitted: immigration and the budget deficit. Miliband has been attacked by his political opponents and in the press for his lack of policy on these issues, but other media claimed that the original text contained arguments on both topics, but that Miliband read the speech without notes and then forgot. Both interpretations on this example of thematic silence are possible, Kuzon argues, depending on whether the hearer assesses Miliband's politics as positive, negative, or neutral.

Part III gathers contributions dealing with implicitness in “Text and discourse”. Part III contains a discussion on interactional practices from a cognitive perspective (Mazzone) as well as a pragmatic account on how implicatures influence conversations (Haugh). These proposals can be read in the light of the properties of discourse (Fetzer).

Fetzer's proposal is entitled “The dynamics of discourse. Quantity meets quality”. After an overview of the competing uses of the terms “context” and “discourse,” Fetzer advocates for taking into account not only content, “but also force and metadiscursive meaning” (p. 239) in the dynamics of discourse. She develops the concept of “granularity,” i.e. “size and conceptualization of discourse units” (p. 241) and divides the “dynamic frame of reference” (p. 249) into micro, meso, and macro discourse units, reflecting on discourse as “a multifarious and multilayered construct” (p. 253).

Mazzone offers some insights on implicitness as a communicative strategy in his contribution “Why don't you tell explicitly? Personal/subpersonal accounts for implicitness”. He shows that implicitness may be triggered both by subpersonal factors such as goals “made manifest by the observed situations [...] via our knowledge of human activities and needs” (p. 272) and by personal factors such as showing dis/affiliation. Mazzone's thesis is that in most situations, communicative goals are cognitively salient for the speakers and the hearers, then making implicit meaning retrievable from the context.

Haugh's chapter on “implicature and the inferential substrate” is the last one. The term ‘implicature’, initially coined by Grice (1975), refers to the “ordinary language sense of implying as ‘expressing indirectly’, ‘insinuating’ and ‘hinting at’ and so on” (p. 282). The inferential substrate refers to the fact that the same utterance can be interpreted in very different manners depending on the participants of a given interaction. An inferential substrate might be “cumulatively co-constituted” (p. 294) during an interaction from what is (not) said. Implicatures can be kept “off record” (p. 299), i.e. remain implicated and, as such, are “tied through recurrent interactional practices [...] to the inferential substrate in which they are grounded” (p. 299).

EVALUATION

Like Bertuccelli Papi's accounts on implicitness (2000, 2009), the edited book *Implicitness. From lexis to discourse* definitely represents another milestone in pragmatic research on implicitness. By gathering very diverse contributions, the book challenges the semantic-pragmatic interface, or, as the editors observe, enables us to “test the implicitness potential of the ‘semantic’ vs. ‘pragmatic’ properties of language” (p. 6). It fruitfully describes implicitness from various empirical perspectives and addresses linguistic items at all levels of analysis, from words to discourses, going through sentences and utterances.

Despite the relevance and theoretical significance of all the contributions, it is sometimes difficult to see the common thread running through all the chapters. This has mostly to do with the fact that no unique definition of ‘implicitness’ is shared by all authors. While it might be unnecessary, and even misleading, to work upon a single definition of ‘implicitness’, defining ‘implicitness’ “by specifying the range of phenomena that fall under the umbrella term ‘implicitness’, suggesting general boundaries, and providing levels or perspectives for their description” (p. 5) seems equally unsatisfactory given the fact that the authors themselves noted that ‘implicitness’ has until now merely been used as a “blanket term” (p. 1). Here it appears that ‘implicitness’ does not always refer to comparable linguistic phenomena; what is indeed the common denominator between levels of analysis of discourse (Fetzer) and pronouns (Davies), for instance?

Furthermore, the boundaries between 'implicitness' on the one hand and related terms such as 'indirectness' on the other remain sometimes fuzzy at the end of the book. The anti-concept against which 'implicitness' is assumed to function, 'indirectness', is for instance at the core of Kádár's contribution on "indirect ritual offences". As the author says, "[s]tudying this issue thus provides insight into a key aspect of indirectness" (p. 179). Although Kádár convincingly argues that "implicitness and indirectness should be rigorously distinguished in the field" (p. 182), this distinction does not appear in every contribution. In Kádár's paper, it is suggested that lay and academic perspectives on implicitness converge when "indirect ritual offenses" become rarer but the attacks remain. In those cases, the phenomenon is perceived as (more) implicit. Simultaneously, in the academic literature, indirectness is considered to be on the formal level while impoliteness, in the case of indirect offences, is "implicit insofar as it provides retractability of meaning" (p. 183-184). How can both definitions be combined? Has then implicitness, from an academic perspective, to do with the (decreasing) frequency of the phenomenon or with the retractability of meaning? In a similar but distinct fashion, Kuzon analyzes "speech act with various degrees of indirectness, which [he has] labelled implicit speech acts" (p. 219), thus casting doubt on the differences between 'indirectness' and 'implicitness'. While this remark should not undermine the theoretical and analytic quality of all the contributions, it is a pity that the academic distinction between 'implicitness' and 'indirectness' (that should not be confused with impoliteness, as Kádár observes) is not addressed more systematically and thoroughly through the book.

Finally, although it is often the case in edited books where contributions are independent from one another, it would have been interesting to make the link between the chapters more explicit in each contribution. For instance, Huang's account on lexical narrowing and Wilson's and Kolati's contribution mutually inform each other. Yet they are not in the same part, even though Wilson and Kolati describe their work as belonging to lexical pragmatics that, as a reminder, is the study of "principles and mechanisms [that] apply at the level of the word or phrase rather than the whole utterance" (p. 148). The division into three levels of analysis is also a questionable choice, since many chapters actually mix different levels of analysis. In Kuzon's contribution, for example, the first part deals with single utterances, while the case study, Miliband's speech, rather concerns the domain of "text and discourse" that is addressed in Part III. Could also not the occurrences of "indirect ritual offence" (Kádár) be considered to be part of a larger discourse, the one of social exclusion? The editors readily admit the difficulty raised by this classification when they note that in Part I (devoted to "word and phrase"), "much of this material contributes to complex implicit messaging, and thus to inferential processes extending 'upward' onto the utterance and discourse levels" (p. 7).

Despite these remarks, *Implicitness. From lexis to discourse* is a valuable contribution for anyone with a strong background in pragmatics who may be (too) prone to utilize the concept 'implicitness' without exactly knowing what it (implicitly) conveys. The book covers a very wide range of topics on implicitness, so that every scholar will be able to learn what makes an utterance implicit or how meaning is implicitly construed in interaction.

REFERENCES

- Bertucelli Papi, Marcella. 1999. Implicitness. In Jef Verschueren, Jan-Ola Östman, Jan Blommaert & Chris Bulcaen (eds.), *Handbook of Pragmatics Online*, 1–29. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <https://benjamins.com/online/hop/link/articles/imp2.hop.3.html> (29 March, 2016).
- Bertucelli Papi, Marcella. 2002. *Implicitness in Text and Discourse*. Pisa: ETS.
- Grice, H.P. 1975. Logic and Conversation. In Peter Cole & Jerry Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics. Volume 3. Speech Acts*, 41–58. New York: Academic Press.
- Kecskes, Istvan. 2014. *Intercultural Pragmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Naomi Truan is a PhD Candidate in Contrastive Linguistics at the Sorbonne Université and the Freie Universität Berlin ("cotutelle de these"). Her research interests include Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Corpus Linguistics and Cognitive Linguistics. Her current work focuses on the pragmatics of the third person in political discourse in France, Germany and the UK.