Meaning 2.1: Cancellability and Negation

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Inferential relationships

(i) **Entailment**: Proposition A **entails** proposition B if the truth of A guarantees the truth of B.

Intuition: B is true when A uttered 'in a vacuum' — no context needed for B.
Notation: $A \rightarrow B$

(ii) **Implicature**: Proposition A is an **implicature** proposition B if B is inferred from A given the context, but B is not necessarily true.

Intuition: A intends to mean B but context necessary for A to mean B.
Notation: $A \rightsquigarrow B$

(iii) **Presupposition**: A proposition B is a **presupposition** of proposition of A if proposition B is a precondition on the truth / falsity of A

Intuition: A makes no sense without B — B establishes context.
Notation: $A//B$ (this notation is not standard)

WHN

Want:

. determine the relationships between propositions — 'what goes to semantics and what goes to pragmatics'

Have:

. definitions for entailment, implicature and presupposition

Need:

. squint at definitions to see what diagnostics come out of them

Cancellability and negation

Squinting hard enough at the definitions, there are two tests which emerge as pretty useful — both involve a negation of some sort.

(i) **Cancellability**

Intent: test whether B is an implicature of A

Test to perform: consider 'A and not B'

Interpretation of result: if A can still be true, B is an implicature if it was derived from context and there is no relation if B was not derived from context; otherwise, B is an entailment or presupposition.

(ii) **Negation**

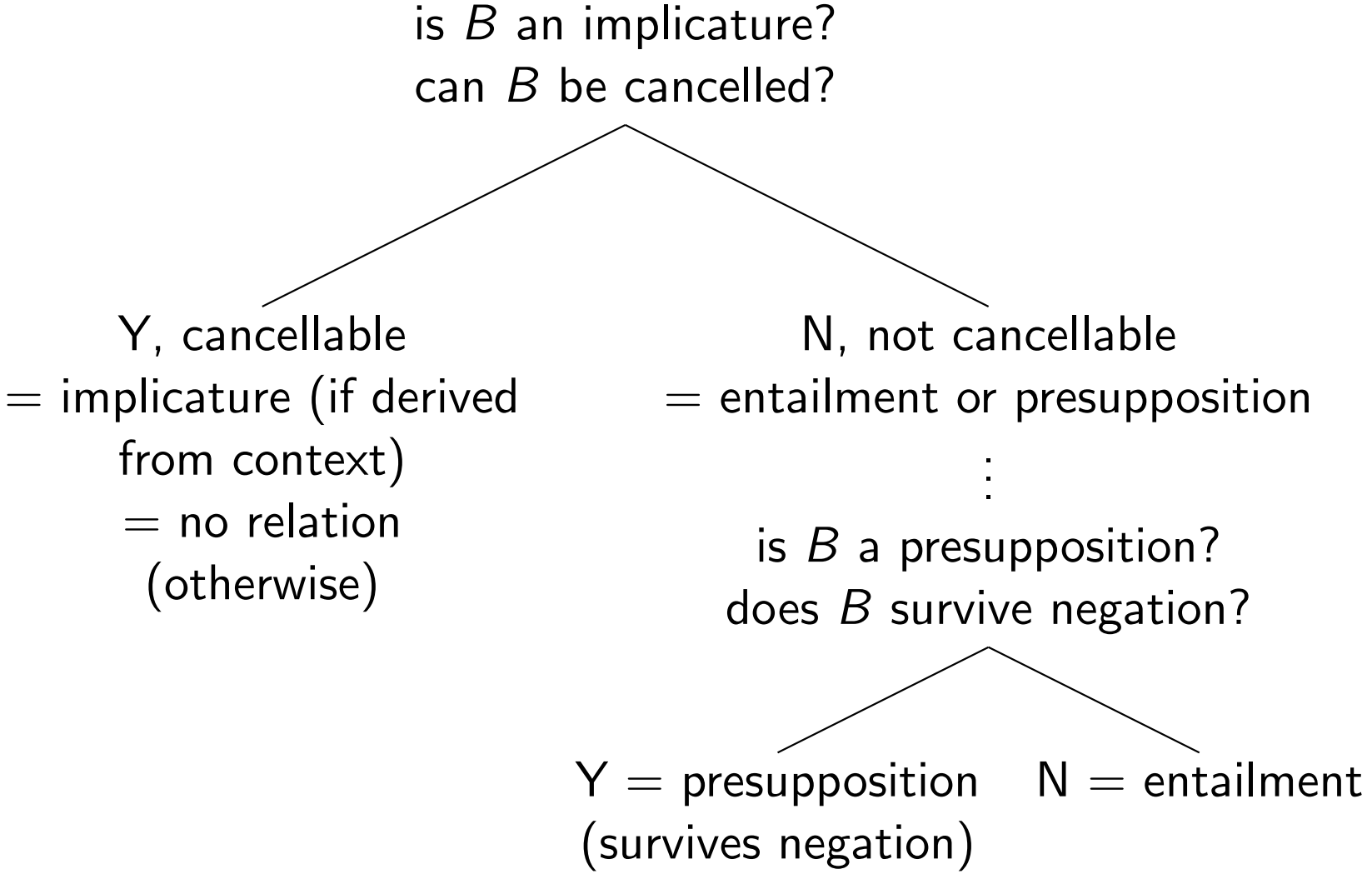
Intent: test whether B is an entailment or presupposition of A

Test to perform: Assume 'it's not the case that A' is true

Interpretation of result: if B must still be true, B is a presupposition; otherwise, B is an entailment. We say presuppositions **survive negation**.

Work flow as a decision tree

Given an utterance A, want to know about the relationship proposition B has with A



Applying these tests — entailment: $A \rightarrow B$

Note: we denote infelicity ('semantic ungrammaticality') with the # symbol

A: Janelle wrote a song.
B: Janelle wrote something.

Cancellability: Try 'A and not B'; is A still true?

Test: #Janelle wrote a song, but she didn't write anything.
Result: A can't be true.

B NOT AN IMPLICATURE

Negation: Assume 'it's not the case that A' is true; must B still be true?

Test: It's not the case that Janelle wrote a song (... in fact, she didn't write anything)
Result: We see that B doesn't have to be true. B IS AN ENTAILMENT

Applying these tests — No relation

A: Jermaine is in the USA.
B: Jermaine is in Chicago.

Cancellability: Try 'A and not B'; is A still true?

Test: Jermaine is in the USA, but Jermaine isn't in Chicago.
Result: A can still be true and B not inferred from context.

B IS NOT AN IMPLICATURE

However, suppose we have the context: Jermaine is on a world tour, and he always comes back to his home in Chicago after international travel. If this is common knowledge, B could easily be an implicature of A.

Applying these tests — implicature: $A \rightsquigarrow B$

Context: James, Rick, a dog, named Fido, and some cookies are in a room. James leaves the room for a few minutes only to return to an empty plate of cookies. The following question/answer exchange happens between James and Rick. Fido's tail is wagging, and he is cleaning his snout.

What happened to all the cookies?
A: Well, Fido looks pretty happy.
B: Fido ate all the cookies.

Cancellability: Try 'A and not B'; is A still true?

Test: Fido looks pretty happy, but, just to let you know, he didn't eat all the cookies (.... I did. I didn't have lunch, and I couldn't resist. Sorry, James.)
Result: A can still be true and B was inferred from context.

B IS AN IMPLICATURE

Applying these tests — presupposition: $A//B$

A: Quincy took a long time to parallel park my firetruck again.
B: Quincy parallel parked a firetruck before.

Cancellability: Try 'A and not B'; is A still true?

Test: #Quincy took a long time to parallel park his firetruck again, but he never did it before.
Result: A can't be true.

B NOT AN IMPLICATURE

Negation: Assume 'it's not the case that A' is true; must B still be true?

Test: It's not the case that Quincy took a long time to parallel park his firetruck (... he did it on the first try!)
Result: We see that B still must be true when 'not A' is true.

B IS A PRESUPPOSITION

Take-homes

Things to keep in mind with all of this:

(i) implicatures on context dependent; cancellability test 'cancels' the context assumptions which give rise to inference

(ii) presuppositions are 'strong' in some sense: they can't be cancelled and they survive negation. They are preconditions on the truth / falsity of something.

(iii) entailments are those things which follow if you utter something in a vacuum — no context necessary.

When testing, I suggest using the order in that decision tree. It is not necessary, but I have found it to make things easier.

End of this video's material.