ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Local pragmatics: Issues and reflection

Qiao Huang[*]

College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Sichuan University, 29 Wangjiang Road, Chengdu 610064, China

Abstract: Pragmatic effects triggered by embedded structure have caused problems to Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature. This long-standing view is challenged by local pragmatics proposed by Mandy Simons. As to the theoretical development, Robyn Carston, Francois Recanati, and Emma Borg respectively raise their comments, while Simons positively responds to these commentaries and further elaborates her stance. In this article, the argumentation among these scholars is presented first, and much attention is paid to the value and influence of the argumentation, which would shed light on the current debate between semantics and pragmatics.

Keywords: semantics and pragmatics; local pragmatics; embedded pragmatic effects; what is said and what is implicated

*Corresponding author: Qiao Huang, College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Sichuan University, 29 Wangjiang Road, Chengdu 610064, China; qiao.huang@scu.edu.cn

1. Introduction

Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature (hereinafter referred to as TCI) in *Logic and Conversation* explains how a speaker can express additional meaning that is different from the compositional meaning of a sentence. This model requires the hearer to figure out the literal meaning first, and then infer the speaker's meaning based on pragmatic factors such as context and intention.

However, it is difficult for TCI to explain the embedded structure. Pragmatic factors can intrude into the embedded components of sentences, thus producing what Simons (2017a) calls "embedded/ local pragmatic effects"[1]: at a certain stage of interpretation, the propositional content within the scope of linguistic operators contains the output content of pragmatic inference.

---

1. Simons (2017a) uses "embedded pragmatic effects" and "local pragmatic effects" alternately in the text. Although the emphasis is different, they are equivalent and interchangeable. It should be mentioned that Simons (2014: 22) called the added content "embedded implicature", but it was questioned by reviewers. Therefore, Simons (2017a, b) uses the term embedded/local pragmatic effects. Carston (2017: 518) believes that the change in terminology used by Simons reflects her loyalty to Grice's framework. Besides, Huang (2017: 657) calls this content "neo-Gricean, pre-semantic conversational implicature"

(1) If the old king has died of a heart attack and a republic has been declared, then Tom will be quite content.

Cohen (1971: 58) suggests that the sentence's truth is compatible with the claim that Tom will not be quite content if a republic has been declared and the old king has died of a heart attack. Thus, Cohen maintains that the meaning of *and* is not that of logical conjunction, and its meaning of expressing "temporal ordering" is deduced from the antecedent of (1), so TCI cannot be applied to the interpretation of conditional sentences. In addition, examples such as disjunctive sentences, comparative structures, and complement sentences of propositional attitude verbs also bother TCI (Sperber and Wilson, 1986; Levinson, 2000; Carston, 2002; Recanati, 2003).

Simons (2017a) thinks that TCI can explain embedded pragmatic effects only by making some modifications. Borg (2017), Recanati (2017), and Carston (2017) evaluate Simons' arguments and raise their doubts respectively. Simons (2017b) responds to these challenges and further clarifies her stance. The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 1 is the introduction. Section 2 is a summary of Simons' (2017a) contribution, and section 3 briefly combs the critical opinions from these scholars. Section 4 reflects on the essence and value of this debate and discusses its influence on the existing theories, aiming at accurately grasping the late progress of Grice's theory of conversational implicature. Section 5 concludes.

2. Simons' insight: Local pragmatics

Simons (2017a) holds that embedded pragmatic effects are the results of the global (speech level) pragmatic requirement and are the measures taken by acting locally to solve the potentially global pragmatic violation. The interpretation assumes that the hearer can identify the embedded part of the sentence. As long as this assumption is guaranteed, a modified TCI with more substantial explanatory power emerges.

Consider a framework for relevance implicature: the speaker says p; if the speaker says p and only means p, the speaker violates the maxim of relevance, then that the speaker says p is initially determined not to cooperate; however, there is no reason to believe that the speaker is uncooperative. Therefore, the speaker wants to express something that could be inferred from p, making conversational contribution relevant in the present. Based on further deduction, it is concluded that the speaker means q instead of p, or means q in addition to p.

This reasoning process can be divided into two parts: 1) Gricean reasoning, i.e., to identify a blatant violation of the principle of cooperation, and to conceive the conclusion that the speaker does not mean the (literal) meaning of the sentence (but other meanings) as Grice's conclusion; 2) interpretative step, i.e., starting from Grice's conclusion, the hearer continues to infer and find the best explanation to answer the question of what meaning the speaker is most likely to express.

It should be noted that this is the reasoning process for simple sentences (excluding embedded structures). Simons believes that this process can also explain pragmatic effects embedded in clauses, which is driven by the requirement of making the speech as a whole cooperative (Simons, 2017a: 472–473).

(2) A: What will you do for your mother's birthday?

B: Either I'll buy flowers or I'll cook a nice dinner.

Speaker A asks a question and speaker B replies with a disjunctive sentence. At the same time, any part of the disjunctive sentence is not the answer to the question under the complete literal interpretation. The hearer may naturally enrich and interpret this disjunctive sentence, i.e., buy flowers and give them to her mother or cook for her mother to eat. In this way, embedded pragmatic effects surface.

Assuming that the first part of the disjunctive sentence does not appear in the embedded clause but in a simple sentence, then the enrichment of the simple sentence is the same as that of the disjunctive sentence. The enrichment of the simple sentence can be interpreted by the traditionally conceived TCI. Speaker A asks a question, and assumes that speaker B is cooperative and rational. Then, speaker A hopes that B's answer is the answer to the question. Therefore, B's saying "buy flowers" actually wants A to speculate that B's meaning is to buy flowers and give them to his mother. Let us turn to the answer embedded in the clause. First of all, A judges that the whole content of the disjunctive sentence is compositional; second, A realize that the first part of the disjunctive sentence is not the answer to the question, because buying flowers is not the way to celebrate a birthday, and only those who buy flowers and give them to specific people are; then, the disjunctive sentence as a whole does not answer the question. However, there is no reason to think that the disjunctive sentence uttered by B is not cooperative, so the first part of the disjunctive sentence is not what B means. Based on this, with relevant contextual conditions, A deduces what the first part of B's disjunctive sentence really means[2].

The focus of this analysis is that the reasoning process of the disjunctive sentence is the same as that of the simple sentence. The difference lies in that the former is used to determine the content of the disjunctive sentence, and the result is embedded pragmatic effects. The inference of the embedded clause is triggered by the fact that the disjunctive sentence as a whole fails to meet the maxim of relevance, specifically, it fails to be relevant to the question raised (Simons, 2017a: 474–478). In short, through a rational reconstruction of Grice's reasoning, the hearer obtains intuitive and correct interpretation based on the compositional meaning of words with syntactic rules, which requires pragmatic enrichment of embedded clauses. However, the trouble with this interpretation is that if the intuitively correct interpretation is regarded as *what is said*, then the concept of what is said will be complicated and full of contradictions[3]. Therefore, Simons introduces another interpretation, taking the disjunctive sentence just mentioned as an example.

(3) A: What will you do for your mother's birthday?

B: Either I'll buy flowers or I'll cook a nice dinner.

Suppose we want to avoid the interpretation of embedded pragmatic effects that contribute to the truth-condition. In that case, the hearer can regard the intuitively correct interpretation as the result of global pragmatic inference, i.e., B says he wants to buy flowers or cook (absolutely/completely), and implies that B wants to buy flowers and give them to mother or cook for his mother. This is the same as the reasoning process for the disjunctive sentence above. At the same time, the only

---

2. Simons (2017a) does not mention whether the second part of the disjunctive sentence can play the same role. Carston (2017: 523) thinks that this is not a problem, and the same reasoning process can solve this problem.

3. At this point, pragmatic factors really intrude on what is said. For further discussion, see Saul (2002).

difference is the theoretical analysis of the conclusion: in the global interpretation, the conclusion consists of meanings independent of what is said (Simons, 2017a: 479–480).

Although both local and global methods can explain the pragmatic enrichment of embedded clauses, Simons believes that the choice is a theoretical issue rather than an empirical observation of whether there is evidence to make a choice. She points out that the key is the interpretation of reasoning itself. What resources does the interpreter need to provide for the reconstruction of partially enriched cases? The answer is to allow the interpreter to identify the content of the embedded clause. Let us turn to the complement sentence of a propositional attitude verb (there are changes to the original example).

(4) Where did Jane go last week?

(5) (a) Henry believes she spent the week with Frances.

    (b) Henry said she spent the week with Frances.

(6) But she can't have. I had lunch with Frances on Wednesday.

Simons (2007, 2010, 2011) has demonstrated that embedded verb clauses can be used as objects of pragmatic inference, and these clauses form the main part of speech content. Therefore, (6) is the natural response of any answer in (5), which requires that the hearer should recognize the content of the clause as the possible answer to the question. This shows that the speaker can respond to or question the content of the embedded clause independently of the full content of the sentence in which the clause is located (Simons, 2017a: 480–483). As long as each part of the disjunctive sentence can be identified as the contribution to the overall speech act and the antecedent and the conclusion of a conditional sentence can be distinguished, the interpreter can apply TCI to the interpretation of embedded pragmatic effects. Further, assuming that all the information about the sub-sentential constituents is available, the contents of these constituents can be used as the input of the Gricean operation.

In summary, Simons (2017a) clarifies why Grice's framework can explain embedded pragmatic effects. It is the violation of cooperation on the global level that triggers the interpreter to infer what a particular embedded clause conveys. Although this is different from the starting point and conclusion of Grice's TCI, the reasoning mechanism is the same. Some people may doubt that this is not really Gricean, but Simons believes that it is not her goal to prove that Grice is correct in every respect. She thinks that her analysis is consistent with the core content of Grice's concept of communication (Simons, 2017a: 469). In other words, interlocutors need to think globally and act locally.

3. Doubts on local pragmatics

Simons (2017a) has aroused heated discussions. Carston (2017), Recanati (2017), and Borg (2017) have expressed their doubts. This section will sort out the comments of three commentators on Simons (2017a) first, aiming at accurately describing the essence of the debate[4]. Furthermore, there

---

4. Limited to space, Simons' (2017b) feedback would not be discussed in this section, but in the next section, most of the views from Simons (2017b) and three commentators would be evaluated thoroughly.

are some common interests as well as their unique views.

3.1. The key lies in the distinction between what is said and what is implicated and the conception of what is said

Carston stresses that there is no evidence to show that Grice's worry about the examples of meaning placed in the range of logical operators is a worry about the derivability of Grice's model and the one about rationally reconstructing inference based on conversational maxims. Of course, Grice's TCI can be applied to the unconventional content of utterance meaning[5]. Carston believes that pragmatic principles can be applied to embedded speech content as long as the aim is to restore the interpretation of speech as a whole, whether Grice-like or not (Carston, 2017: 521–523). Considering Simons' defense of the "staunch holism", Carston thinks that pragmatic intrusion can be avoided by doing so.

(7) A: What's making noise up in the attic?

B: I'm not sure, but if there's a nest up there, we're going to have a big mess to clean up.

(8) What is said: If there's a nest up there, we're going to have a big mess to clean up.

What is implicated: If there's a nest occupied by birds up there, we're going to have a big mess to clean up.

Speaker B's answer in (7) leads to the result of (8). What is said by semantics does not seem to be within speaker meaning, because an old or abandoned nest does not cause great confusion. However, the holistic explanation is still feasible because Grice's concept of "make as if to say" can be used to derive conversational implicature, which constitutes speaker meaning (Simons, 2017a: 479–481). Carston thinks Simons has confused Grice's Group A and Group C[6]. Although the literal meaning happens to be wrong, it is only the function of a specific embedded operator, not the speaker's blatant violation of quality or any other maxim. If there is no embedded structure to answer, the literal meaning will be implied by the implicature, thus becoming a part of speaker meaning. There will be no discussion about "make as if to say" or violating maxims. The immediate consequence is that the content of "said and meant" is essentially an idle wheel, since it belongs to and is expanded by what is implicated.

The trouble brought to Grice's TCI by the examples given by Simons (2017a) lies not in the computability, but in how these examples can be adapted to Grice's distinction of what is said and what is implicated, precisely his conception of what is said (Carston, 2017: 527–529). Carston has already found that Grice inserted two incompatible restrictions into the concept of what is said: (a) on the one hand, the pragmatic requirements implied by the speaker; (b) on the other hand, the semantic requirement to keep close enough to the conventional compositional meaning of the

5. See Walker (1975: 156–157), Geurts and Rubio-Fernández (2015: 448) in the discussion of determining the reference of demonstratives and indexicals and selecting the lexical meaning of ambiguous words.

6. In fact, both (7) and "there's a garage around the corner" belong to Group A, where there are no examples of violation of the maxim, or at least it is not clear which maxim has been violated. This is different from Group C, which includes "examples that involve exploitation, that is, a procedure by which a maxim is flouted for the purpose of getting in a conversational implicature by means of something of the nature of a figure of speech" (Grice, 1989: 32–33). The examples Grice gave in Group C involved a "real, as distinct from apparent, violation of the maxim of Relation", which he thought were very rare. This example is B's bland statement about the weather in response to A's statement, "Mrs. X is an old bag" (Grice, 1989: 35). In this way, B openly refused to make his statement relevant to A's statement. Examples like this do not appear in Simons (2017a).

sentence (Carston, 2002, 2004; Carston and Hall, 2012). Therefore, Simons needs to further explain on the following questions: What is the effect of local pragmatic effects in Grice's sense? What is the relationship between "make as if to say" and what is said? How does "make as if to say" inspire the distinction between what is said and what is implicated?

3.2. The two-stage model cannot explain indexical resolution and pragmatic modulation

Recanati points out that Grice's TCI is a two-stage analysis: the interpreter first calculates the propositional content (semantic level) of utterance, and then infers what the speaker actually means (pragmatic level) according to the context. Therefore, conversational implicature is post-propositional because its calculation presupposes the prior identification of what is said.

As is known, the contextual assignment of indexical is managed by language rules (for example, the rule that "I" refers to the speaker of the utterance where "I" occurs). However, the assignment of demonstrative pronouns and free variables in the context depends on the speaker's intention, and the recognition of the latter is based on the assumption that the speaker abides by the principle of cooperation, which is an instance of Gricean pragmatic inference in a broad sense. However, Recanati does not regard the assignment of indexical as a two-stage model like Grice's derived conversational implicature, because indexical resolution and conversational implicature have different positions in pragmatic inference.

In detail, indexical resolution affects truth-conditions, conversational implicature does not affect truth-conditions, so it is inappropriate to exclude pragmatic inference that is both pragmatically triggered and pre-propositional.

(9) He is late.

The hearer does not know what is said until he determines the reference of the indexical word, so the fact that the speaker has already said *p* is not a prerequisite for reasoning. In fact, the relevant premise is that the speaker has already used the pronoun *he* in a referential way, so there must be a certain male in the brain, and the speaker wants to state the characteristics of the male that the verb phrase represents. Therefore, if the premise as input is not that the speaker has already said the fact of *p*, but some other fact, pragmatically triggered inference can similarly affect truth-conditions. For example, when the speaker uses an expression, its literal meaning produces a verbal interpretation that conflicts with the speaker's assumption of observing the principle of cooperation.

(10) There is a lion in the middle of the piazza.

The example can mean that there is a lion statue in the middle of the piazza. The premise of the sentence as input is not the fact of saying the sentence, because its literal meaning conflicts with the assumption that the speaker abides by the principle of cooperation. The interpretation of the lion's pragmatic modulation can affect intuitive truth-conditions (Recanati, 2004). Therefore, Recanati provides a pragmatic modulation analysis that reverses the order specified by the two-stage model: he advocates a local reasoning process that contributes to the determination of content by modulating the compositional meaning of the sentence, rather than an overall reasoning process that occurs based on the determination of the compositional content. He argues that due to the locality of pragmatic inference, absurd propositions in the literal expression of a sentence do not need to be worked out in the interpretation of speech (Recanati, 1993: 263–266). In actual processing, even if

the literal proposition does not need to be calculated, its role in the rational reconstruction is still admitted. All in all, that pragmatic effects generated by pragmatic modulation can be embedded proves that they are local and pre-propositional, which shows that the two-stage model explaining post-propositional effects cannot be applied to indexical resolution and pragmatic modulation (Recanati, 2017: 494–499).

3.3. Is the rational reconstruction really sound?

To some degree, what Simons (2017a) advocates in her local pragmatics is a rational reconstruction of the mechanism in communication between the speaker and the hearer. Although there is a divergence from Grice's TCI, local pragmatics is Gricean in a broad sense. However, the project that seems to be theoretically plausible has not gained much support from practice, and Borg (2017) and Carston (2017) respectively exhibit their concerns.

Borg (2017) does not deny Simons' contribution, while she maintains that local pragmatics lacks for cognitive reality. There is no doubt that explaining the actual process of restoring language meaning by modeling both sides of communication is very attractive. Besides, Borg (2017: 510–511) discusses the role of the speaker's intention in rational reconstruction, and she believes that the speaker may usually have vague and uncertain intentions, so successful communication might only be a matter of degree.

In comparison, Carston attempts to replace the rational reconstruction with a relevance-based process. She (2017: 534–536) seeks a more cognitively experienced process of interpretation. She thinks that Relevance Theory is based on the general view of human cognition, i.e., cognitive systems tend to maximize cognitive effects derived from input information and at the same time make the least effort possible. Therefore, speech interpretation is not a rational reconstruction of inference, but is related to the hearer's actual inference process and how cognitive factors limit these interpretations.

(11) A: What's making noise up in the attic?

     B: Oh, there's a nest up there.

Assuming that the hearer has the best-related expectation, A can expect B to provide an answer to her question. However, B's answer is indirect. She implies that birds make noise in the attic. Linguistic decoding provides the atomic concept NEST that is associated with a series of encyclopedic knowledge about the nest, whose accessibility is regarded as the context premise. Together with the decoded propositional content, implicature can be inferred. Therefore, there is a "backwards inference" from relevance-based speculation to the expressed proposition that affects this enrichment. This is an example of a general pragmatic mechanism in which the explicitness of the speech hypothesis and the meaning of the hypothesis are adjusted in parallel with each other. The process does not stop until the reasonable inference satisfying the hearer's expectation of relevance is reached.

4. Reflection on the debate: Local pragmatics and beyond

Generally, the framework put forward by Simons has gained much praise for her demonstrating the rationality of using the Gricean model to explain embedded pragmatic effects. Of course, it

remains to be a question of whether the approach could be widely accepted. The three commentators have expressed their own opinions, and Simons (2017b) also replies positively, promoting in-depth thinking on the issue. This section intends to further clarify and discuss some of the viewpoints in the article in an attempt to understand the essence and value of this debate more accurately and deeply. It is known that the debate between semantics and pragmatics, which is now more often conceived as that between semantic minimalism and contextualism, has lasted for over 60 years, and there is still no way out. Thus, when local pragmatics is involved in the debate, how does it inspire the current debate?

First, a new conception, i.e., what is expressed, appears in local pragmatics. At present, the source of the dispute between semantic minimalism and contextualism is the distinction between what is said and what is implicated. Simons believes that if the weak concept of what is said is admitted, what is said needs not be psychologically real, and what is said at this time can usually be downgraded to "make as if to say" (Simons, 2017a: 481), which later becomes what is expressed (Simons, 2017b: 543). In this way, what is expressed is not what the speaker must promise, and this is the development of standard Grice's model. Meantime, it also raises a problem. Such treatment is equivalent to abandoning the quality maxim in the traditional framework, which is bound to result in disputes. Therefore, Simons' approach still needs further verification. In addition to the concept of what is said, Simons modifies the maxim of quantity and claims that the maxim of relation could also be modified (Simons, 2017a: 488–489). It can be predicted that Simons may reshape Grice's model on the basis of revising various maxims. It is precisely because Grice does not discuss the origin of the maxims or the relationship between maxims that scholars can make a big fuss here. On the other hand, if Grice has made clear the maxims, what is said, what is implicated, and other issues, perhaps the current theoretical research in pragmatics would not have been so lively.

Second, Carston's focus on the role of what is said and its relationship with what is implicated is of great value. The trouble brought about by Simons (2017a) to Grice's framework lies in how it can be adapted to the distinction between what is said and what is implicated, specifically his concept of what is said (Carston, 2017: 527–529). Simons' (2017b) strategy is to modify the starting point of Grice's reasoning to what is expressed so as to maintain the explanatory power of the Grice framework in a broad sense. The proposition expressed is not only encoded by the uttered sentence, but also includes the determination of the object to which the indicative component refers and the contextual assignment of temporal words. Besides, what is expressed is a proposition that is closely related to the conventional meaning of the uttered sentence and is truth-evaluative (Simons, 2017b: 545–546). However, Simons (2017b) does not further explore the relationship between what is expressed and what is said, and the influence of what is expressed on the traditional distinction between what is said and what is implicated. The article is going to explain this.

In Grice's model, what is said precedes what is implicated, but what is said does not precede any Gricean reasoning (Simons, 2017a: 486). This explains that the determination of what the speaker has said "is only the output of pragmatic inference, not the input" (Simons, 2017b: 544). It is worth attention that Simons (2017a) does not give a clear explanation of what is said. And she explains: "I am not committed to a Gricean view of what is said…Gricean pragmatics can get along…without reliance on this notion (i.e., what is said)" (Simons, 2017b: 541).

Though Simmons is not satisfied with Grice's what is said, she does not clearly state that she

totally rejects the concept of what is said. Given the current debate, both semantic minimalism and contextualism define the concept of what is said. In order to present their different views more vividly, we try to arrange a place for what is said in Simons' framework. Based on her discussion, we can infer that from the encoded content, the pronominal elements and tense markers are determined through context, and what is expressed is obtained through composition. From what is expressed to what is said, there may be ellipsis unpacking or generality narrowing. Then, starting from what is said, we can infer what is implicated in combination with contextual information[7].

It should be noted that Simons argues that there is no conceptual difference between the pragmatic reasoning in indexical resolution and that in inferring implicature from propositional content (Simons, 2017b: 548). This article holds that there is also no conceptual difference between the pragmatic reasoning from what is expressed to what is said and that from what is said to what is implicated. These two processes have different starting points for pragmatic reasoning, but the underlying assumption is that the cooperative principle is observed. Therefore, although Simons (2017a, 2017b) does not clearly explain the relationship between what is expressed and what is said, our interpretation of Simons' views is consistent with her theory.

(12) a. I have had breakfast.

b. I have had breakfast this morning.

c. I don't want to eat anything more.

For semantic minimalists, these three sentences are what is said, explicature[8], what is implicated; for relevance theorists, they are what is said, explicature, what is implicated; for Simons, they are what is expressed, what is said, and what is implicated.

Simons' model is also divided into three parts, with the difference that relevance theory adds a level (explicature) between what is said and what is implicated, while Simons adds what is expressed before what is said. At the same time, relevance theory holds that what is said contains pragmatic factors, but Simons' concept of what is expressed is not committed to pragmatics. Therefore, Simons' model cannot be regarded as a copy of the relevance theory. It is not a model with different terms but essentially the same. Besides, although the reason why Simons adopts what is expressed instead of what is said is to evade the speaker's commitment, she also stipulates that what is expressed should not contain pragmatic elements. It seems that Simons' what is expressed can be equated with Borg's what is said. Compared with Borg's framework, Simons' is more specific and precise in explaining examples. In this sense, we can think of Simons' framework as a further development of Borg's.

Third, Simons' position in the debate between semantic minimalism and contextualism can also be seen from the debate on the interpretation of embedded pragmatic effects. Carston (2017) adopts a lexical pragmatic approach to explain embedded pragmatic effects, forcing Simons (2017b) to

---

7. Following this, the Grice's circle proposed by Levinson (2000: 186) can be eliminated by Simons' framework. Due to space constraints, we will not go into details here.

8. Borg (2016) believes that the formal and functional definitions of the concept of explicature are flawed, and she believes that explicature does not need psychological reality in the process of processing. In addition, the theoretical purport of semantic minimalism is to minimize the influence of pragmatic factors on literal meaning, so semantic minimalists would not accept the concept of explicature. Here, "explicature" is used neutrally for convenience of discussion, and it is enough to remember that Borg is not in line with relevance theory.

explore further which interpretation approach is reasonable. She thinks that the enrichment is best understood as local enrichment (Simons, 2017b: 555). Although Simons insists that this substantial content is partial, it is not truth-conditional and is not part of what is said (Simons, 2017b: 557). For Carston, being local is being literal, and local pragmatic effects must be truth-conditional. Borg (2017a: 512) points out that "The local view, then, is a variety of Contextualist". As is known, semantic minimalists try to strictly distinguish the propositional meaning of a sentence from speaker meaning. Borg thinks that this may be possible, but at the same time, we need to accept the local view that pragmatics includes more than Gricean pragmatics (Simons, 2017b: 513). Their views on embedded pragmatic effects could be illustrated as follows.

Table 1. Different views on embedded pragmatic effects

	Carston	Borg	Simons
Embedded pragmatic effects are local?	Yes	No	Yes
Embedded pragmatic effects are literal?	Yes	No	No
Embedded pragmatic effects are truth-conditional?	Yes	No	No
Embedded pragmatic effects are parts of what is said?	Yes	No	No

In **Table 1**, it can be seen that Simons seems to bend with the wind. On the one hand, Simons accepts local interpretation; on the other hand, she does not regard it as literal content. Her viewpoint is a mix of semantic minimalism and contextualism. The source of the debate between the two camps lies in the different answers to what is said. The core concern of semantic minimalism is to minimize the influence of pragmatic factors on semantic contents and try to limit the difference between the conventional meaning and what is said of sentences to a minimum. And Simons makes it clear that the starting point of Grice's reasoning should be what is expressed without pragmatic commitment (Simons, 2017a: 466; Simons, 2017b: 539). Although Simons disagree with the view that what is said is the starting point of reasoning, the use of what is expressed without pragmatic commitment precisely indicates her inclination towards semantic minimalism[9].

Meantime, Simons believes that as long as local pragmatic effects enrich a complete proposition, local pragmatic effects do not need to be regarded as part of the truth-conditional content. Therefore, in order to maintain the position, it is crucial to identify the complete proposition first. However, the problem lies in the completeness of proposition itself is a highly controversial topic: semantic minimalists insist on propositionalism, that is, the semantic content of a sentence is the minimal proposition determined by the lexical meaning with syntactic rules, while contextualists advocate that linguistic meaning is not fully determinative in language communication activities, and they propose unarticulated constituents to illustrate the incompleteness of semantic minimalism. Simons points out that what is expressed is a proposition that is closely related to the conventional meaning of the sentence (Simons, 2017b: 546). This confirms her preference for semantic minimalism from another aspect.

Fourth, it is necessary to discuss the mechanism of language communication. Simons (2017a, 2017b) states: the purpose of linguistic interpretation is to identify the speaker's intention. Borg suggests "an account which seeks to model how interlocutors actually do recover linguistic

---

9. Also, there is another evidence to show that Simons is inclined to semantic minimalism. She says that "If we take that intuitively correct interpretation to count as 'what is said' (a loaded and difficult term about which there is much controversy) …(that) appear problematic not only for Grice's model of pragmatic inference, but also, according to many theorists, for his notion of 'what is said'" (2017a: 479).

meaning" (Borg, 2017a: 510), and Carston would like to "move beyond normative rational reconstructions of the logic of speaker-hearer interactions, towards a more empirically cognitively based account of communication and the processes of pragmatic interpretation" (Carston, 2017: 519). We think that these two opinions are worthy of attention, but we intend to make a preliminary explanation of the issues they have discussed in a broader perspective.

In fact, it is almost impossible to achieve fidelity transmission of meaning from the speaker to the hearer in daily communication unless the speaker clearly clarifies the compositional meaning of sentences before speaking. Concept is the basis of word meaning, so the discussion of meaning cannot be separated from the consideration of concept. Psychologists have pointed out that words can activate the matching concepts, and this connection is not a single linear connection but a selective connection of overall activation. A word can activate a conceptual network, with cultural specificity, individual specificity, and temporal and spatial dynamics. Then, the concept inspired by the same word for different individuals is likely to vary, but at a basic level, the word must have a public and shareable concept; otherwise, the words used by both parties in communication will become their private language, the speaker and the hearer will speak for themselves, and it is impossible to communicate successfully. Following this, natural questions emerge: what is this public and shareable concept? What is the relationship between the public concept and the overall concept of words? What contribution does the public concept make to successful communication?

These questions are not trivial, yet they are still in hot dispute. Looking at the criticism of Simons' (2017a) approach of interpretation from Borg (2017) and Carston (2017), they focus on the superficial phenomenon of linguistic interpretation, namely, the description of experience and meaning, ignoring the conceptual dimension hidden behind, which provides a starting point for further research. Of course, this article only preliminarily discusses the relationship between concept and communication, among which the complicated relationship needs in-depth study.

5. Conclusion

Simons (2017a, 2017b) demonstrates the rationality of adopting the Gricean model to explain embedded/local pragmatic effects. She believes that this results from a global (speech level) pragmatic requirement and is the measure taken by local actions to solve potential pragmatic violations. Her framework has triggered heated discussions among Borg (2017), Recanati (2017), and Carston (2017), and prompts Simons (2017b) to further clarify her position.

The debate revolves around the issue of the existence or abolition of the concept of what is said, the explanatory power of Grice's two-stage model, the approach of analyzing embedded pragmatic effects, and the mechanism of linguistic communication, which deepen our understanding of relevant issues. The article has discussed several of these arguments in depth, aiming to add some new thoughts on the basis of accurately grasping the essence of this debate.

Future research work can be carried out around the following aspects: first, research methods can be enriched. The academia is in a heated debate on what is said and what is implicated, and semantics and pragmatics, may not be solved by theoretical reasoning alone. Therefore, researchers can learn from the research methods of the experimental philosophy of language and understand the aforementioned classic topics from the empirical aspect (Noveck, 2018). Second, research contents

can be broadened. Almost all the examples that Simons (2017a, 2017b) offers are based on the relevance implicature, so can embedded pragmatic effects based on other maxims be explained in the same way? In particular, there is a great deal of controversy about the explanation of embedded scalar effects (Geurts, 2010; Chierchia, 2017). Can Simons' framework be successfully applied? This is worth further exploration.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

Borg E (2016) Exploding explicatures. *Mind and Language* 31(3): 335–355.

Borg E (2017) Local vs. global pragmatics. *Inquiry* 60(5–6): 509–516.

Carston R (2002) *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Carston R (2004) Relevance theory and the saying/implicating distinction. In: Horn LR and Ward G (eds) *Handbook of Pragmatics*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.633–656.

Carston R (2017) Pragmatic enrichment: Beyond Gricean rational reconstruction—A response to Mandy Simons. *Inquiry* 60(5–6): 517–538.

Carston R and Hall A (2012) Implicature and explicature. In: Schmid HJ (ed) *Cognitive Pragmatics*. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton, pp.47–84.

Chierchia G (2017) Scalar implicatures and their interface with grammar. *Annual Review of Linguistics* 3(1): 245–264.

Cohen LJ (1971) Some remarks on Grice's views about the logical particles of natural language. In: Bar-Hillel Y (ed) *Pragmatics of Natural Languages*. Dordrecht: Reidel, pp.50–68.

Geurts B (2010) *Quantity Implicatures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Geurts B and Rubio-Fernández P (2015) Pragmatics and processing. *Ratio* 28(4): 446–469.

Grice HP (1989) *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Huang Y (2017) Truth-condition-contributing conversational implicatures, intrusive constructions, and neo-Gricean pragmatics. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* 49(5): 643–662.

Levinson SC (2000) *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Noveck I (2018) *Experimental Pragmatics: The Making of a Cognitive Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Recanati F (1993) *Direct Reference: From Language to Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Recanati F (2003) Embedded implicatures. *Philosophical Perspectives* 17(1): 299–332.

Recanati F (2004) *Literal Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Recanati F (2017) Local pragmatics: Reply to Mandy Simons. *Inquiry* 60(5–6): 493–508.

Saul J (2002) What is said and psychological reality: Grice's project and relevance theorists' criticisms. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 25(3): 347–372.

Simons M (2007) Observations on embedding verbs, evidentiality and presupposition. *Lingua* 117(6): 1034–1056.

Simons M (2010) A Gricean view on intrusive implicatures. In: Petrus K (ed) *Meaning and Analysis: New Essays on H. Paul Grice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.138–169.

Simons M (2011) Dynamic pragmatics, or, why we shouldn't be afraid of embedded implicatures. *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory* 21: 609–633.

Simons M (2014) Local pragmatics and structured contents. *Philosophical Studies* 168(1): 21–33.

Simons M (2017a) Local pragmatics in a Gricean framework. *Inquiry* 60(5–6): 466–492.

Simons M (2017b) Local pragmatics in a Gricean framework, revisited: Response to three commentaries. *Inquiry* 60(5–6): 539–568.

Sperber D and Wilson D (1986) *Relevance, Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Walker R (1975) Conversational implicature. In: Blackburn S (ed) *Meaning, Reference and Necessity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.133–181.