

CONVERSATIONAL VERSUS CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURE AND SOME POLARITY ITEMS IN POLISH AND ENGLISH

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The aim of this paper is to discuss the pragmatic concept of implicature¹ in connection with what was traditionally referred to as adverbs of time, and more recently as polarity items, namely, *już*, *jeszcze*, and their English equivalents: *already*, *still*, *any more* and *yet*.

It has been noticed by various authors that these items convey information which cannot be represented within the truth-conditional bivalent semantics. That is, these words as such, or at least some of them, do not contribute anything to the truth conditions of a sentence, but they nevertheless convey meaning which has to be described if not by the semantic then by the pragmatic component. Horn (1970 : 321-324) says that these items carry presuppositions, which he describes by means of the following formulae:

- I. still/any more $(\exists i) (i < 0 \ \& \ t_1(S)) \mid$ Assertion:
 II. already/yet $(\exists i) (i > 0 \ \& \ t_1(S)) \mid t_0(S) \mid \sim t_0(S); t_0 = \text{now}$

Horn claims that these presuppositions may be suspended in some, but *not* in all negative sentences, as his example proves:

1. *Tricia isn't a virgin yet.

Wilson (1975 : 117-120) discusses *yet* only, but what she says is of great interest, since it constitutes a proposal of how non-truth-conditional information may be incorporated into the truth-conditional semantics. She suggests

¹ "An implicature in Gricean terms means the following. If the uttering of a sentence σ in a given context licenses the inference that p even though the proposition p is something over and above what the speaker actually says, then he has implicated that p and p is an implicature (or implicatum) of the utterance of σ ." (Karttunen and Papers 1979:2 fn. 3)

that *yet* carries non-logical implication:

2. John is not yet here.

Truth conditions: John is not here

Non-logical implication: John will be here

"The speaker is committed to the truth-conditional, but not the non-logical implications of what he has said. ... The meaning of the sentence is the sum of the two types of semantic implication, but a truth value is assigned only on the basis of the truth conditions: the non-logical implication is separately evaluated". Wilson mentions in passing that the non-logical implication may be treated as conventional implicature, but she does not discuss this further.

It seems that *już*, *jeszcze*, and their English equivalents form a category not only because they are adverbs of time,² but also because they are polarity items, and therefore they should possess common properties, whether semantic or pragmatic. It would be undesirable to ascribe non-logical implication to *yet* without ascribing one to *any more*. Does this mean though that the positive counterparts, i.e. *still* and *already*, also carry non-logical implications? Wilson obviously thinks that they do not, since she parenthetically notes (1975 : 132): "a semantically related item *still* very definitely carries an entailment". In a homogeneous entailment analysis of the implications of a sentence, negative sentences unlike positive sentences have no specific entailments other than a disjunction of negated entailments of a positive sentence. The fact that in the case of *yet*, the negated entailment of the related *still* is not one of the disjuncts — and it should be according to entailment analysis — suggests that entailments may not be uniform. Therefore, the asymmetry between positive and negative sentences seems to be even greater than the truth-conditional semantics predicts, namely, negation changes logical implication (entailment) into non-logical implication, which is a qualitative change and which in turn implies that negation may not be uniform, that is, that there are two kinds of negation. This is a view that truth-conditional semantics definitely wants to avoid. The situation might be remedied by ordering entailments as suggested by Wilson and Sperber (1979), but it is not clear how their theory could be applied to negative sentences, and particularly to sentences with the above items, since lexical entailments (and here this would be the case) cannot be directly ordered.

An alternative analysis might treat non-truth-conditional meaning of these polarity items as conversationally implicated in negative sentences, but entailed in positive. This would account for the nonsuspendability in

² Pasicki (1976) notes that classifying these items as adverbs of time may not be entirely proper, since the items in question display modal as well as aspectual properties. Besides, they do not always involve reference to time.

positive sentences, but would not adequately account for nonsuspendability in negative sentences, (Cf. ex. 2), which is unfortunate, since one of the tests for conversational implicature is that it is cancellable. The implicature of *yet* and *any more* is cancellable only in a specific situation, namely when it can be ascribed to somebody else than the speaker, and then cancellation might not be the proper word to use:

3. John isn't here yet and I don't think he will come.

Janka jeszcze nie ma i sądzę, że nie przyjdzie.

This sentence suggests that it is the hearer, rather than the speaker, who believes that John is coming.

But note the oddity of the utterance when this expectation cannot be ascribed to the hearer:

4. John isn't here yet. As you know, he has left the country for good/for ever.

Janka jeszcze nie ma. Jak wiesz opuścił kraj na zawsze.

5. John isn't here any more. As you know, he never even managed to get here.

Janka już nie ma. Jak wiesz nie udało mu się tu nigdy dotrzeć.

If conversational implicatures are taken to be cancellable, the above utterances should not sound contradictory, but it seems that they do. Sadock (1978) claims that the order of the cancelling expression and the expression carrying the implicature is irrelevant. In our case, it definitely is relevant, since the sentence of 3) is acceptable, whereas 6) and 7) much less so:

6. I don't think John will come today. He isn't here yet.

Sądzę, że Janek dzisiaj nie przyjdzie. Nie ma go jeszcze.

7. John wasn't here today. He isn't here any more.

Janka dzisiaj nie było. Nie ma go już.

Sadock (1981) argues in connection with the word *almost* that cancellability may fail as a test for conversational implicature when the implicature is context-free, generalized and very strong. But then the only reason for not calling it conventional implicature is the attempted simplification of grammar, as no independent statement of the implicature needs to be made in the description of language. Unfortunately, the borderline between conventional and conversational implicature becomes so thin, then, that it is nearly non-existent.

Another characteristic of conversational implicature is its nondetachability, this means that any utterance that is semantically equivalent to the one that carries certain conversational implicature, possibly in the same context, should also carry this implicature. However, Sadock (1978) argues that in

many cases it is difficult to apply this test, since no well-formed paraphrases exist for the tested utterance, not to mention the fact that sometimes it is difficult to decide whether the two utterances are actually synonymous. Moreover, some conversational implicatures are dependent not only on the meaning, but also on the form of the utterance and then the test does not prove anything. We might try to offer some paraphrases for the sentences with polarity items, though their well-formedness can be questioned.³

8. John isn't here yet — John isn't here so far — John isn't here up to now — John isn't here by this time.

9. Janka jeszcze nie ma — Janka wciąż nie ma — Janka w dalszym ciągu nie ma — Janka dotąd nie ma.

It seems that these paraphrases do convey the message that John is expected, however, since the expectation is relatively weaker, we would be more inclined to assume the test is inconclusive, rather than that we have a case of conversational implicature.

One more test may be used to check conversational implicature, viz., calculability. Conversational implicature can be "worked out" from the meaning of the utterance on the basis of the Cooperative Principle and Conversational Maxims and, possibly but not necessarily, context. If we wanted to insist on the presence of conversational implicature in utterances with polarity items, we would have to specify the meaning from which the implicature can be calculated. This means that the items would have to convey something else beside the conversational implicature, since otherwise there would be nothing on the basis of which the implicature could be "worked out". And indeed, it seems that they do convey more than is contained in Horn's formulae, or else the following sentences should not be odd, while they clearly are:

10. a) Mary is 2 months old and she already is a baby.
b) and she is and will be a baby.

11. a) Marysia ma 2 miesiące i jest już dzieckiem.
b) i jest i będzie dzieckiem.

12. a) Mary is 80 years old and she is still an old woman.
b) and she was and is an old woman.

13. a) Maria ma 80 lat i jest jeszcze staruszką.
b) i była i jest staruszką.

14. a) John has just left and he isn't here yet.
b) and he isn't here but he will be here.

15. a) Janek właśnie wyszedł i nie ma go jeszcze.
b) i nie ma go ale będzie.

³ I substitute for the item in question its dictionary description.

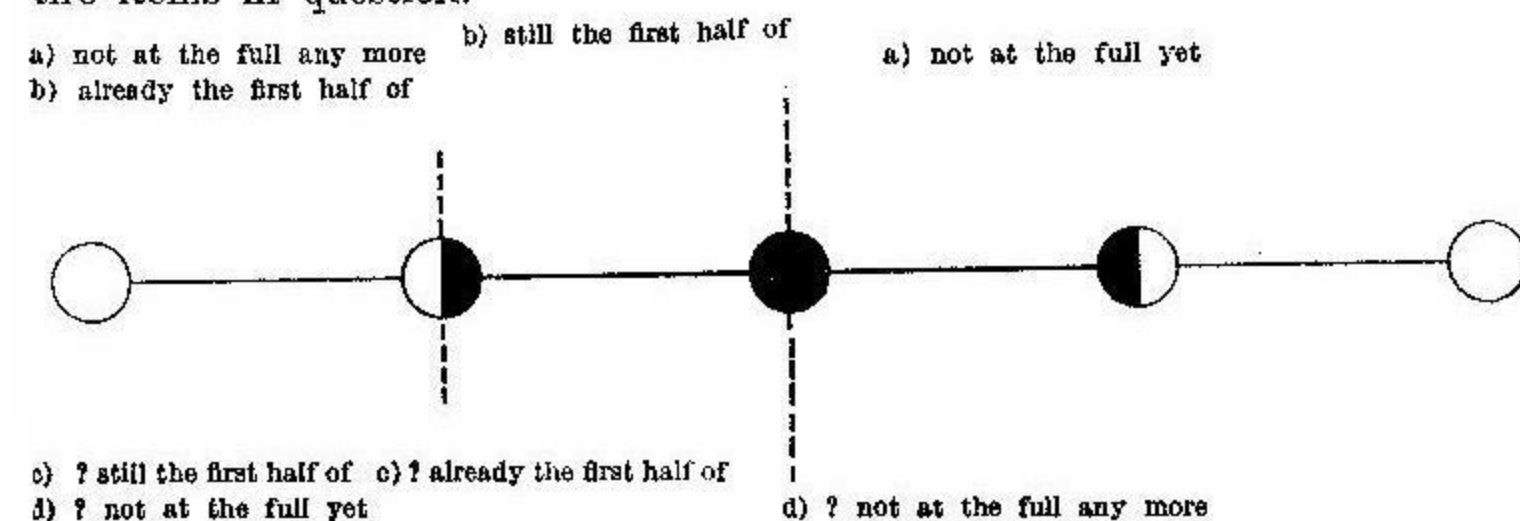
16. a) John isn't here any more and he will be back in a second.

b) John was here but he isn't here now and

17. a) Janka już nie ma i będzie za chwilę.

b) Janek był ale go nie ma i będzie za chwilę.

Undoubtedly there is something wrong with the logic of these sentences. The b) versions are better in this respect, though they assert exactly what is being implicated by the respective a) versions with one of the items. They may sound overinformative, partly redundant, but their logic is better than that of the a) versions. A natural reaction would be to say that the wrong adverb was used in the sentence. The reason why these sentences are so odd lies in the fact that the items convey something that is inconsistent with the rest of the meaning of the sentence. For instance, *already/już* suggest that the action began not long before the point of reference, *still/jeszcze* suggest that the action may end soon, or at least that its end is closer than its beginning, *any more/już nie* suggest that the action will not take place again in the near future, *not yet/jeszcze nie* suggest that in the recent past the action did not take place, or that its next occurrence is closer in time to the point of reference of the sentence than its last occurrence. A graphic representation of a lunar month may be used as an illustration of the possible distribution of the items in question:



When we consider the whole length of the lunar month, the d) expressions (below the line) seem not precise since they do not describe the state of affairs adequately, but this inadequacy is gradable: The closer they are to the middle the less imprecise they become, to entirely adequate at the new moon point and further on, and vice versa, the closer they get to the extremal points, i.e. the further from the middle, the less adequate they become. It seems that their adequacy depends on their relative distance in time from the two extremal points.

When only one half of the lunar month is considered, the d) expressions are even less acceptable and this does not vary with the distance from the extremal points. They cannot be called imprecise now but rather entirely inadequate. The c) expressions also seem to depend on their relative distances.

from the extremal points: The further from the middle, the less precise they are, and the further from the extremal points and the closer to the middle the more precise they are.

What does this graphic representation indicate? It seems that it suggests that the items in question should be treated as an aspectual phenomenon because, when their scope extends over the verb, they place the action in relation to other occurrences of the same action and they express the relative distances between the points of reference and the beginning and the end of the action. Undoubtedly, these notions belong to the category of aspect. It has been claimed more than once that aspect is not only a grammatical but also a semantic category. However, since it is non-deictic, it is difficult to predict how it contributes to the truth conditions of a statement. Therefore, in truth-conditional semantics of the type proposed by Kempson (1975, 1977), there might be no place for aspect unless a precise classification of the aspectual character of verb is incorporated into the theory.

No matter whether aspect is truth-conditional or not, the items will have to be assigned some aspectual features in the lexicon. As the first approximation, we might suggest formulae adapted for our purposes from Åqvist and Guenther (1978), who present a model-theoretic account of aspect:

- III. still/yet $P \diamond \rightarrow \square \{ \pm \} A \& \{ \pm \} A \& F \diamond \rightarrow \square \neg \{ \pm \} A$
jeszcze
- IV. already/any more $P \diamond \rightarrow \square \neg \{ \pm \} A \& \{ \pm \} A \& F \diamond \rightarrow \square \{ \pm \} A$
już

where: — and + mean negative and positive sentence respectively

— + = — and — — = \emptyset

$P \diamond$ it has at least once been the case that

$F \diamond$ it will at least once be the case that

$\rightarrow \diamond$ in the open interval of time determined by it is always the case that

These formulae may be disjunctively presented for each item as:⁴

- V. still, jeszcze $P \diamond \rightarrow \square A \& A \& F \diamond \rightarrow \square \neg A$
- VI. yet, jeszcze nie $P \diamond \rightarrow \square \neg A \& \neg A \& F \diamond \rightarrow \square A$
- VII. already, już $P \diamond \rightarrow \square \neg A \& A \& F \diamond \rightarrow \square A$
- VIII. any more, już nie $P \diamond \rightarrow \square A \& \neg A \& F \diamond \rightarrow \square \neg A$

The above formulae, although only crude approximations of what such formulae should contain, capture some intricate relations between the items

⁴ Dr A. Pasicki pointed out to me that the implicature referring to the future is always weaker than the one referring to the past. The above formulae in their present shape do not admit any possibility of formalizing the relative strength of the implicatures.

they describe:

- 1) *still* and *yet* are related items — they can be assigned a common aspectual formula, but at the same time they are mirror-image words,
- 2) *already* and *any more* — likewise,
- 3) *jeszcze*, *jeszcze nie* — likewise,
- 4) *już*, *już nie* — likewise,
- 5) If we assume that the central part of the formula, i.e. A or —A, is not only aspectual, but at the same time truth-conditional, and the non-truth conditional aspectual parts of the formulae are to the left and to the right of A or —A, i.e. the ones preceded by the aspectual operators, then it is evident why *already* may be used to negate the appropriateness of the use of the item *still*, since the relevant parts of the formulae are negations of each other.⁵

18. It's not that he is STILL here, he is ALREADY here.
or I'm not ALREADY here, I'm STILL here.

similarly in Polish:

19. Nie JUŻ tu jestem, tylko JESZCZE tu jestem.

- 6) The formulae may also let us explain why *yet*, though related to *still*, and *jeszcze nie* to *jeszcze*, etc., are not used in denials of affirmative sentences with the related items. Thus, to negate a sentence with *still*, we would rather use *any more*, and to negate one with *already* we would use *yet*; in Polish we would negate a sentence with *jeszcze* by using *już nie*, and one with *już* by using *jeszcze nie*.

20. It's not true that John is already here = John isn't here yet.

21. It's not true that John is still here = He isn't here any more.

22. Nieprawda, że Janek już tu jest = Janka jeszcze nie ma.

23. Nieprawda, że Janek jeszcze tu jest = Janka już tu nie ma.

Also in sentences with Neg-raising verbs the items may interchange in English, but must interchange in Polish:

24. I don't think he is still here = I think he isn't here any more.

25. I don't think he is already here = I think he isn't here yet.

26. Nie sądzę, żeby jeszcze tu był = Sądzę, że już go tu nie ma.

27. Nie sądzę, żeby już tu był = Sądzę, że jeszcze go tu nie ma.

The explanation may lie in the identity of the non-truth-conditional parts of the formulae of the respective items. Denying somebody's utterance usually amounts to stating that it is not true, unless we want to negate its relevance,

⁵ Sentences 18) and 19) constitute a problem for truth-conditional semantics, since if we assume that the polarity items do not participate in truth-value assignment, these sentences will be predicted as necessarily false, or contradictory at the purely truth-conditional level. Yet they do not seem to be in the slightest contradictory.

which in turn causes a disruption in the flow of discourse. So, unless we want to deny the relevance of the utterance, we deny one or more of its truth conditions, i.e. we do not deny its non-truth-conditional elements. Only such an exchange is natural, since it constitutes a constructive contribution to a conversation. Therefore, a natural denial, such that it does not disrupt this order, is the one that shares some of its own truth conditions with the denied utterance, and, moreover shares all the non-truth-conditional but conventional content with the denied utterance. It would be unreasonable to demand of adjacent utterances to share conversational implicatures, which are non-conventional.

Returning to the question raised earlier in the paper, namely, whether the polarity items under discussion carry conversational implicatures, I would be inclined to answer it negatively. Although, we have discovered the basis on which the conversational implicature could be calculated, its noncancellability and its preservation under negation argue against it. Moreover, when conversational implicature is false, the utterance that implicates it is merely uncooperative, whereas the utterance with one of the polarity items is rather infelicitous or inappropriate when the implicature is false, also due to the fact that it does not conform to some part of the aspectual specification. Besides, the regularity and the symmetry of the phenomenon suggests that it is rather conventional than non-conventional (i.e. conversational) in nature.

Conventional implicatures, as defined by Karttunen and Peters (1979: 2), "arise not from the interplay of what is said with conversational maxims, but from the conventional meanings of words and grammatical constructions that occur in the sentence. ... They are detachable but not cancellable".

This definition much better conforms to the facts under discussion than that of conversational implicature. Moreover, as further defined by Karttunen and Peters, conventional implicature should belong to the "common ground", that is, to the common set of presumptions that the utterance of the sentence is intended to increment, if the sentence is to be noncontroversial and contributive. This very well explains why *yet* is used in denial of a sentence with *already* etc., since as they share the parts of the formulae that give rise to the implicature—the non—truth—conditional, aspectual parts—so they share the implicature and consequently they share the "common ground". Therefore, they are negations of each other not in the strict syntactic or semantic sense, but rather in the pragmatic sense — as natural exchanges in a cooperative conversation.

However, there is one problem with the definition of conventional implicature that must not be overlooked, namely that it seems to be vaguely circular. The word "arise" is misleading, since for instance in the case of *even*, as analysed by Karttunen and Peters (1979:52) *even* by itself does not carry any meaning beside the conventional implicature and the meaning postulate for

even specifies its implicature. This amounts to the claim that conventional implicatures arise from ... conventional implicatures, which is not very illuminating. In the case of our polarity items the implicature arises not from the whole specification of aspect, but only from its non-truth-conditional parts. This in turn is tantamount to defining conventional implicature (in a negative way) as everything that is conveyed by a sentence minus its truth conditions. It is hard to say whether this is more adequate, since this definition implies that all spectral phenomena could be treated in terms of conventional implicature and this might be too broad a generalization. Thus if we accept this definition of conventional implicature, all the sentences below will have to be analysed in a likewise manner:⁶

28. Mary is still a human being.
29. Mary is already a human being.
30. Mary has been a human being.

These sentences will have to be analysed as infelicitous or inappropriate, that is, the internal inconsistency would be analysed as arising from conflicting conventional implicatures. In other words, the items implicate that the action is limited in time — it either began not long before the point of reference or it may end soon after it — whereas *to be a human being* implicates that it lasts one's lifetime.

As Sadock (1978) sadly admitted, pragmatics cannot be successful until we all agree at least as to whether a certain bit of what is conveyed is semantically contained or not. This lack of agreement results in a situation converse to that of the happy days of presupposition. For instance, definite descriptions analysed before as presupposing the existence of their referent, nowadays are claimed to:

- 1) entail the existence of their referent (Kempson 1975, 1977),
- 2) entail and presuppose the existence of their referent in positive sentences, but only presuppose it in negative sentences (Gazdar 1977)
- 3) entail in positive but conversationally implicate it in negative sentences (Atlas 1979),
- 4) entail in positive but either entail or conversationally implicate it in negative sentences, since they are structurally ambiguous (Grice 1981).

Since pragmatics, for lack of consistent methodology is as yet derivative of semantics, this diversity is not surprising because every one of the above-mentioned authors assumes a slightly different semantics.

In the analysis of the polarity items, we have been trying to apply the pragmatic concept of implicature assuming at the same time truth-conditional

⁶ Naturally, if aspect is assumed to be non-truth-conditional.

semantics. It seems that with such meaning of semantics, pragmatic analysis of the polarity items is the only alternative. It has some attractions, as it explains the distribution of the polarity items and the relations between them in positive and negative sentences. At the same time we have tried to show that it has some dangers.

The subject of these particular polarity items is much broader and more complicated than has been assumed in this analysis. Pasički (1976), discussing *już*, *jeszcze* and their English equivalents, shows that their distribution is not even nearly as symmetrical and obvious as it might follow from the analysis presented above. It is even more complicated by their interaction with various classes of verbs and different time references. The aim of this paper could not therefore have been an adequate description of these items but rather an investigation into one of the directions that such a description might take. Needless to say, there are countless other possibilities.

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