

Pragmatics and Social Deixis: Reclaiming the Notion of Conventional Implicature

Author(s): Stephen C. Levinson

*Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (1979), pp. 206-223

Please see “How to cite” in the online sidebar for full citation information.

Please contact BLS regarding any further use of this work. BLS retains copyright for both print and screen forms of the publication. BLS may be contacted via <http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/bls/>.

---

*The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* is published online via [eLanguage](#), the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.

## Pragmatics and Social Deixis: reclaiming the notion of conventional implicature<sup>1</sup>

Stephen C. Levinson  
University of Cambridge

### 0. Introduction

By 'Social Deixis' what I have in mind is the range of phenomena that includes honorifics, titles of address, second person pronominal alternates and associated verb agreements, and the like. The area provides such clear examples of pragmatically sensitive aspects of language that it deserves much more attention from pragmaticists. Here I shall touch on some of the syntactic problems raised, but I shall be especially concerned with what we should say about the meaning of socially deictic items; the upshot of this discussion will be that we had better reclaim the notion of *conventional implicature* from the inappropriate uses to which it has been put by Karttunen and Peters 1975. Finally I point out that there is another borderline, besides the semantics/pragmatics one, that pragmaticists will have to concern themselves with, namely the pragmatics/sociolinguistics one, which at least in this area turns out to not be too problematic.

### 1. The Scope of Social Deixis

Deictic items are those linguistic items that are *anchored* in some aspect of the speech event, that is "those formal properties of utterances which are determined by, and which are interpreted by knowing, certain aspects of the communication act in which the utterances in question have a role" (Fillmore 1971:219). The traditional categories of person, place and time deixis can naturally be extended by the addition of social deixis (Lyons 1968:280), "the study of that aspect of sentences which reflect or establish or are determined by certain realities of the social situation in which the speech act occurs" (Fillmore 1975:Deixis II:76). Fillmore unfortunately goes on to water down the concept of social deixis (including presentatives, speech acts and the like); I propose to restrict the term to those aspects of language structure that are anchored to the social identities of participants (including bystanders) in the speech event, or to relations between them, or to relations between them and other referents (with minor extensions to be noted below). There are of course many aspects of language usage that depend on these relations (see for example the long discussion of polite usage in Brown and Levinson 1978), but they are only relevant to social deixis in so far as they are grammaticalised.

The suggestion that honorifics and related phenomena are properly considered part of the deictic system of natural languages has a number of distinct advantages. For example, just like the word *come* only (generally) makes a definite statement about the direction of motion relative to the location of speakers and addressees, so a *Vous*-type pronoun (henceforth a V as opposed to a T pronoun) only makes a definite statement about the absolute rank of the addressee relative to the rank of the speaker. Secondly the deictic interpretation of honorifics and related phenomena correctly predicts limitations to the variety of such systems: every kind of honorific or the like must be anchored to some aspect of the speech event. For example, as far as I know there are no

languages in which it is possible by means of a standard grammatical form to express that the human subject of a sentence is more elevated in social rank than a human object without reference to their rank vis-a-vis a participant.<sup>2</sup>

The social dimensions that seem to get encoded in languages around the world are of two kinds. The first kind is *relational*. The relations that typically get expressed are those between:

- i. speaker and referent (e.g. referent honorifics)
- ii. speaker and addressee (e.g. addressee honorifics)
- iii. speaker and bystander (e.g. bystander honorifics)
- iv. speaker and setting (e.g. formality level).

The first three of these are isolated by Comrie 1976; examples of (i) include titles of address, and the familiar Tu/Vous type alternates where the referent happens to be the addressee<sup>3</sup> (the honorific plural often carries over to the third person pronouns too); examples of (ii) can be found sparsely distributed all around the world, but proliferate in the 'speech levels' of S. E. Asian languages like Korean, Madurese, Javanese, etc.; examples of (iii) are rarer, and the best example is probably Dyirbal 'mother-in-law language'. (iv) is added to take account of grammaticalized formal style markers that can be found, for example, in Japanese *mas*-style, or in Tamil diglossic variants, which are potentially independent of social relations between participants. The term honorific should be restricted to the cases where the relations in (i) through (iii) express relative rank or respect; but other social dimensions like kinship and intimacy are also often encoded. For further details see Brown and Levinson 1978, Levinson 1977, 1978.

The second kind of social information encoded is *absolute* rather than relational. There are for example forms reserved for certain kinds of speakers, in which case we may talk (after Fillmore) of *authorized speakers*. For example in Thai *kh-ráb* is a polite particle used only by male speakers, the corresponding form for women being *khá* (Haas 1964). And there are forms reserved for *authorized recipients*, including some titles of address ('Mr. President', 'Your Honour'); in Tunica there were pronouns that differed not only with sex of referent, but also with sex of addressee (so there would be two words for *they* depending on sex of *addressee*; Haas *ibid.*).

These seem to be the main kinds of social information encoded in socially deictic items, and they are all anchored to aspects of the speech event. Notice that only the first kind, speaker-referent relations, imposes intrinsic limitations on the ways in which such information may be encoded in a linguistic system – namely in referring expressions, and grammatical agreements with them. The other kinds can be encoded just about anywhere in the linguistic system; addressee honorifics for example turn up in lexical alternates (Javanese), morphology (e.g. in Japanese), phonology (e.g. Basque palatalization; Corum 1975:96) and prosodics (e.g. Tzeltal honorific falsetto), not to mention the widespread use of special particles (e.g. Tamil). With this in mind we may now turn to look at the interaction of social deixis and just one aspect of form, namely syntax, including morphology.

## 2. Social Deixis and Syntax

The remarks here will be cursory and are merely intended to indicate the sorts of problems that arise; further discussion can be found in Levinson 1977, Brown and

Levinson 1978, and especially in the numerous recent works on Japanese honorifics (see e.g. Prideaux 1966, Makino 1970, Kuno 1973, Harada 1976). My illustrations will be drawn from Tamil, a language I happen to be familiar with; for similar remarks on Russian and other languages see Corbett 1976.

*Referent honorifics* raise important problems for statements of agreement rules; these come about in part because of the widespread use of plurality to indicate respect for singular referents, although there are many other common person/number switches used for the same purpose (see Levinson 1978 for some putative universals here). For example in Tamil, (1) is ambiguous between the glosses given:

- 1) niinka vantaika  
 you-plural have come  
 you-sing-honorific have come

Note that if this was the only kind of relevant fact we could claim that the meaning of (1) is strictly speaking just the first gloss, while the second is *conversationally implicated*. However (2) is not ambiguous in the same way: it can only have the reading 'you-sing-honorific'.

- 2) niinka vaattiyar  
 you-sing-honorific (are the) teacher

For the you-plural reading to come across, the nominal predicate in (2) (*vaattiyar*) must be morphologically marked as plural as in (3):

- 3) niinka vaattiyar-kaL

The point is that finite verbs agree with the superficial plurality of the *Vous*-like pronoun *niinka*, whether or not it refers to one or more persons, while nominal predicates agree with real-world number, not superficial plurality. Comrie 1975 has used the widespread nature of this phenomenon to argue for a category squish; different languages make the distinction at different points along a scale from verbal to more nominal predicates. In Tamil superficial agreement stops in the middle of an adjectivally derived set of nouns; some such adjectival nouns will have to be marked as taking obligatory plural agreement in predicate position when preceded by a superficially plural pronoun, others as making a distinction based on real-world number.<sup>4</sup>

There are further agreement problems in Tamil. Some singular nouns, those referring to potentially respected persons, can take plural finite verb endings even though there is no superficial plurality in the subject:

- 4) periyammaa colraanka  
 grandmother says (plural)

while other such nouns have an in-built honorific termination requiring agreement on one of four levels of respect; thus:

- 5) talaivar colraar  
 \*colraanka  
 The head man says-sing-honorific-male  
 \*says-plural  
 -sing-very-honorific

Moreover there is a confused area that arises between finite verbs and underived nominal predicates on the predicate squish, namely with nominal predicates derived from personal

adjectives; these interact with person and honorific level in a peculiar way. Example (6) illustrates that third person honorific pronouns will only take super-honorific agreements on such predicates, while second person pronouns tolerate honorific endings:

- 6) *avaanka keTTikaaranka* (they are/he-hon. is a clever person-plural)  
 \**avaanka keTTikaarar* (he-hon. is a clever person-sing.hon)  
*niinka keTTikaarar* (you-hon. are a clever person-sing.hon)

And there are a lot of further problems introduced by the fact that there are not only singular/plural switches used to indicate respect, but also person and number switches: 'we-inclusive' can be used to indicate 'super-respected-you', 'it' to indicate 'you-neutral-honorific' and so on. Each of these usages have their agreement quirks. One may also use a third person title with second *or* third person verb agreement in honorific address.<sup>5</sup>

An entirely different set of problems tends to arise with respect to *addressee honorifics*; again I shall illustrate with a simple example from Tamil. There is in Tamil a bound morpheme *-nka*, underlying *nkaL*, a particle whose sole function is to indicate the speaker's (rather high) respect for the addressee. Naturally, there are rules of honorific concord governing co-occurrence with other honorific items. But the interesting thing about this particle is that while it is firmly bound into syntactic processes in some ways it isn't in others. It can be shown to be inserted at a specific point in the transformational cycle. Insertion precedes yes/no question formation, but follows WH-question formation. Thus in (7) the particle *nkaL* (italicised in the examples) is affixed to the verb *vantaan* before the question particle *aa* is attached. But in (8), a WH-question, *nka* is attached to the question particle itself.

- 7) *muttee inke vantaanunkaLaa?*  
 Did Muttu come here sir?

- 8) *enkiinka pooveen?*  
 Where shall I go sir?

Moreover, insertion respects the co-ordinate structure constraint and doesn't occur between adjective and noun or between adverb and following verb. However, beyond that its distribution can only be described as promiscuous. It can occur anywhere else with no respect for constituent bracketing. For example, in sentence (9) *nka* can occur in each of the slots marked ( ):

- 9) *naan( ) matraasukku( ) pooratanaale( ), nalla taksi( ) veeNum( )*  
 I to Madras in order to go, a good taxi need

Under what kind of a labelled node would such a thing be introduced? There is no traditional grammatical category that is appropriate. And if we invent one, then we will have to invent lots, because other such particles have quite different distributions.

Both the agreement and the particle problems discussed here seem to require rules relating aspects of syntactic form directly to aspects of pragmatic context. Rules like Lakoff's context-sensitive transderivational constraints (see Gordon and Lakoff 1971) would fit the bill, although Sadock 1975 has produced cogent arguments against them on methodological grounds. A formulation of these as filtering rules, along the lines of Gazdar and Klein 1977, seems to escape these objections in part.<sup>6</sup> To exemplify, the agreement problems with V-pronouns could be handled by the filtering analogue of the following insertion rule: let the logical form contain the unmarked T-pronoun, and let the V alternate be substituted just in case the context contains the associated pragmatic

significance, before the application of agreement rules where followed by a finite verb, but after such rules when the clause contains a nominal predicate. Or some refinement thereof (note that this will not handle example (4) above where there is no plural subject to trigger plural verb agreement).

### 3. The Semantics/Pragmatics of socially deictic items

Clearly socially deictic items have as part of their meaning their social significance (in some cases as with the Tamil particle *-nka* reviewed above, the social significance exhausts the item's meaning: in others, as in the Tamil V-pronoun *niinka* it is an addition to the primary denotation). The problem I want to address here is just how we are to capture this aspect of meaning within the range of semantic and pragmatic relations we have available in current frameworks. We may start by taking a simple example and working our way through those relations in search of a suitable candidate.

We can say that part of the meaning of the Tamil sentence (2), repeated here as (10), is (11) below:

10) *niinka vaattiyaar*  
you-sing-honorific (are the) teacher

11) with respect to the speaker, the addressee is socially higher or of equal status but socially distant

What exactly is the relation between (10) and (11)? Could (10) entail (11)? This is ruled out by two considerations. First, it is intuitively the case that things like T/V oppositions are invisible to truth conditions: 'tu es Napoleon' and 'vous etes Napoleon' have identical truth conditions. Secondly, the inference (11) happily survives negation:

12) *niinka vaattiyaar ille*  
you-honorific (are) not (the) teacher

What is preserved under negation? Semantic presupposition of course. However, negation is not the only sentential operator that fails to block (11), for the inference also survives modal contexts:

13) *niinka vaattiyaar nnu irukkulaam*  
you-honorific (are the) teacher it may be (i.e you may be a/the teacher)

Here of course (11) continues to hold, rather than the mere possibility of (11). To capture this within the concept of semantic presupposition we would have to emend the notion so that it survived modal contexts; this was of course suggested by Karttunen 1971, but it was rapidly shown that no logical sense could be made of the emended relation in ordinary modal logic (Hertzberger 1971).<sup>7</sup> Besides we would have to resurrect the notion specifically for this purpose alone, against a storm of protest; on methodological grounds alone we had best look for some other relation between (10) and (11).

One of the few concrete suggestions for the treatment of the significance of honorifics is that the relation between (10) and (11) is that of *pragmatic* presupposition (Keenan 1971:51). Since the collapse of the notion of semantic presupposition, the class of pragmatic presuppositions has been swollen with their erstwhile semantic counterparts, so the concept has of course changed. Nevertheless it is worthwhile examining Keenan's suggestion.

The kinds of inferences gathered together under the rubric of pragmatic presupposition seem in general to share the following important properties:

- i) the inferences are triggered by specific aspects of surface form, so that it is in general possible to find another sentence that has the same truth conditions but lacks the inferences in question
- ii) the inferences are *defeasible* in the sense that they may be overtly denied ('Bill doesn't regret doing linguistics, because he never did') or suspended ('Bill doesn't regret doing linguistics if indeed he ever did'); or in the sense that they may be cancelled by the conversational context (see e.g. Thomason 1973, Gazdar 1976:172)
- iii) the preservation or cancellation of the inferences in complex sentences is systematic, but requires a great deal of specially formulated apparatus to predict; attempts to solve the peculiarities of this *projection problem* in a sophisticated way can be found in Karttunen 1973, Karttunen and Peters 1975, and Gazdar 1976, and these clearly illustrate the nature of the problem.<sup>8</sup>

Definitions of pragmatic presupposition abound (see Gazdar 1976 for a very useful review) but there seems to be a broad agreement on the range of phenomena to be subsumed and its attendant properties.

Let us now ask whether the inference from (10) to (11) shares these properties. Socially deictic items usually come with a range of paradigmatic alternates, so property (i) will be met (it may not be so easy to find an alternate expression that has *no* socially deictic significance, but it will be a different one). But what about (ii)? Are the deferential aspects of honorifics *defeasible* by linguistic or non-linguistic contexts? Not in the way that pragmatic presuppositions are. Thus the presupposition that there is a king of France is cancelled in (14), but the honorific in (15) is not cancelled by a parallel construction:

- 14) You are not the present king of France, because there isn't one.
- 15) niinka vaattiyar ille, eenaa mariyaate kuTukka maaTTeen  
you-honorific are not the teacher, because I will not/am not giving you respect

The latter sentence if it makes sense at all, means that the reason you're not a teacher is that I don't give you respect in some other (non-linguistic) way. Nor can conversational contexts cancel the significance of honorifics like they can cancel or suspend presuppositions (Thomason 1973, Gazdar 1976). There are ironic and sarcastic usages of honorifics on the other hand, but then irony can 'cancel' most aspects of meaning, with the possible exception of presuppositions.<sup>9</sup> So honorifics, and these remarks extend to socially deictic items in general, do not share the crucial defeasibility properties of presuppositions.

What about property (iii), the particular mechanisms whereby the presuppositions of embedded clauses are preserved or blocked in complex sentences? Do honorifics behave in the same way? Again the answer is no, but to show this we must isolate some distinctive properties of presupposition projection that we can employ as a test.

One possible test would be whether honorifics survive embedding under predicates that are 'plugs' (e.g. verbs of saying, believing, hoping, thinking and the like), which on Karttunen's theory are supposed to block the presuppositions of the embedded clauses (see Karttunen 1973, Karttunen and Peters 1975). So we could ask whether the honorific in (17) is cancelled just like the existential presupposition in (16) is supposed, on this account, to be blocked:

16) Mad old Jim says the present king of France is bald.

17) niinka vaattiyar nnu raamu connaar  
you-honorific are the teacher, Raamu said

The latter can be understood in two ways: one in which Ramu's actual words are reported in which he gave respect to his addressee, and another in which the pronoun is switched to the point of view of the present speech event in which the speaker gives respect to the addressee. *But* irrespective of whom the honorific refers to it retains its honorific component. Moreover the ambiguity in (17) illustrates that the projection problem for honorifics (and socially deictic items in general) is of an entirely different kind than that for presuppositions. In the case of honorifics the pragmatic inferences are not intra-sententially cancellable at all (except in jokes, ironies and other special usages), but the problem is to locate which speech event and what participants they are deictic with respect to.

The use of *plugs* as a test however is not uncontroversial: the only other major attempt to solve the projection problem for presuppositions does not utilize such a subcategorization of verbs, and in fact claims that insofar as the presupposition of (16) is blocked at all it is cancelled by other aspects of the context (Gazdar 1976). The one uncontroversial property of presupposition projection that both Karttunen and Gazdar accept is the filtering of presuppositions in complex sentences formed from the 'logical' connectives (*and, or, if-then*). Thus the presupposition of the second clause of (18), that Jack has children, is not carried by the whole sentence:

18) If Jack has children, then Jack's children will be blond.

According to Karttunen 1973 this is because there is an ad-hoc rule that if the antecedent entails a presupposition of the consequent, then the latter is blocked from becoming a presupposition of the whole; according to Gazdar 1976 the presupposition is cancelled, as presuppositions always are, by the conversational implicatures here carried by the *if-then* construction (namely, that it is both possible, and possibly not the case, that the antecedent is true). In most cases the effect of both accounts is exactly the same.

Let us therefore apply this filtering property as a test, to see whether honorifics pattern like presuppositions with respect to projection. According to this diagnostic, if honorifics were presuppositional they ought to be cancelled in sentences like (19) or (20):

19) mariyaate kuTuttaa, niinka vaattiyar

If (I'm) giving (you) respect, you-honorific are the teacher.

20) niinka vaattiyar, mariyaate kutikkireennaataan

You-honorific are the teacher, if indeed I am giving (you) respect

But again, the respect given by the speaker to the addressee is not in any way cancelled or blocked in such sentences.<sup>10</sup> We may therefore conclude that honorifics, and the same can be demonstrated for socially deictic items in general, do not have the crucial hallmark of defeasibility nor the specific projection properties that we associate with

presupposition. And to include them by fiat would only be to introduce unwarranted heterogeneity.

In eliminating presupposition as a possible way of capturing the significance of honorifics and related phenomena, we leave ourselves with just two possible pragmatic relations. One is conversational implicature (Grice 1975), and there are indeed many polite usages that can be shown to work conversationally in this sort of way (see Brown and Levinson 1978). Honorifics proper, however, are not like this: they do not have the crucial properties associated with conversational implicatures of cancellability (as discussed in connection with presupposition) and 'non-detachability'. Non-detachability requires that it is not in general possible to find other words that express the same meaning that fail to have the inference in question (see discussion in Sadock 1978). But as we have seen honorifics share one property with presuppositions, number (i) above, and this is precisely that the significance associated with them is indeed detachable. Moreover there are other properties that Grice 1975 ascribes to conversational implicatures that honorifics do not have: they do not give rise on the whole to an indeterminate set of inferences, nor are they in general *calculable* in the sense that some inferencing has to be done to understand them.<sup>11</sup>

We are left then with the only surviving candidate for the relation between (10) and (11) above: Grice's (1975, 1978) *conventional implicature*. The only alternative, as pointed out by Gazdar 1976:183-5, who has also considered the dilemma posed by honorifics, would be to resuscitate semantic presupposition, now with an indexical semantics; but as we have already seen this seems to be ruled out by the survival of socially deictic inferences in modal contexts (unless we are to adopt Martin's (1975) baroque logical machinery).

Grice introduces the notion of a conventional implicature cursorily (1975:44) to handle the conventional, non-cancellable elements of meaning that are nevertheless non-truth-conditional. Grice's example is the conjunction *therefore* which on his analysis 'indicates' but does not entail that the second conjunct 'follows from' the first. Other examples that have been suggested are *but* (or rather its difference from *and* Grice 1961), *even* (Kempson 1975), *yet* and the difference between words like *deprive* and *spare* (Wilson 1975). The properties of conventional implicatures are taken to be that they are non-cancellable, irrelevant to truth-conditions, detachable (i.e. depend on the particular linguistic form of what is said), and perhaps less importantly have relatively determinate meanings and are non-calculable or at least non-calculated (see Grice 1975, 1978, and discussion in Sadock 1978). We see immediately that honorifics have this set of properties and so in fact do the other socially deictic items we noted in section 1.

But in what way is an honorific like a V-pronoun similar to items like *but*, *yet* and so forth? More I think than at first meets the eye. But to see this we shall first have to remove some misfits from the class of proposed conventional implicatures. Wilson 1975:113ff has claimed that while the verbs *deprive* and *spare* share a common truth-conditional element with approximately the sense of *withhold*, the differences between them are conventionally implicated. But Gazdar (in press) points out that the additional difference in meaning is really presuppositional in nature, as is shown by the filter test applied in (21):

- 21) If there really is some criterion whereby my teaching is good for Bill, then I deprived him of it.

where the antecedent clause explicitly mentions the presupposition due to *deprive* in the consequent, and thus serves to block or cancel it. Removing this case from the class of conventional implicatures has the salutary effect of eliminating a misfit: most conventional implicatures seem to express attitudes that can only be attributed to participants in a speech event, whereas although this is possible with *deprive* and *spare* (Wilson 1975:114-7) here the attitudes in question can be attributed to the subjects of the verbs as well.

This leaves us with a mere handful of proposed candidates for the class (*yet, but, even, and unconvincingly perhaps, therefore*). The paucity of examples prompted Kempson 1975:219 to suggest that "at least a plausible case can be made for the view that the set of conventional implicatures does not contain any members at all". But in fact there are a host of words in English of similar ilk that seem to have been entirely ignored. I believe that at least in some of their uses, words like *however, moreover, anyway, well, still, furthermore, besides, although, okay, oh*, and phrases like *in fact, in a way, in any case, all in all, be that as it may*, will have to be treated as carrying conventional implicatures. In addition of course there are socially deictic elements like *sir, madam, mac or mate, your honor, professor*, and summons forms with socially deictic implication like *hey, excuse me*, and polite formulae like *how do you do*. A total inventory of such items would surely run into the hundreds, and perhaps the thousands, contrary to Kempson's view.

It seems clear that forms like these have at least an element of meaning that makes no difference to the truth conditions of utterances they may occur in, but it is worth establishing that this significance is not presuppositional either. Consider a word like *although*, which glosses roughly as 'despite the fact that', and which we may claim has a truth conditional element equivalent to *and* together with a conventional implicature to the effect that for a sentence of the form *p although q* there is an implicature that given *q* one would not expect *p*. So (22) conventionally implicates something like (23):

22) Bill came although Harry did.

23) Given that Harry came, one wouldn't have expected Bill to.

but the implicature does not seem to be cancelled in our test *if-then* sentences:

24) If given that Harry came one wouldn't expect Bill to come, then although Harry came, Bill came.

Exactly the same results are obtainable for all the candidate conventionally-implicating forms listed above, establishing that they cannot be treated presuppositionally.

What then do all these items have in common, apart from being a residual category? Notice that there are essentially two kinds of element in the list above: there are socially deictic elements on the one hand, and on the other items that serve to indicate to the addressee how a particular utterance is to be taken as contributing to the discourse. Now Fillmore 1971, 1975 drew attention to two kinds of deixis beyond the traditional three categories of person, time and place; namely *social deixis* and *discourse deixis*. Just like social deixis, the elements of discourse deixis have received little descriptive and less theoretical attention. But there are a number of studies that indicate that there are languages that have large inventories of particles and other elements with no truth-

conditional meaning that serve precisely the function of indicating the discourse role of clauses and larger units. For example, Longacre 1976 reports on some particles found in Amerindian languages in Colombia and Ecuador that function to pick out the main versus subsidiary themes and participants in stories; Uyeno 1971 describes some Japanese particles, *ne* for instance, that serve to adjust speaker commitment to what is said, and a review of a large number of such particles in the Mayan language Tzeltal and the Indian language Tamil can be found in Brown and Levinson 1978:152-167. In many languages such particles are omnipresent and occur in almost all sentences. (See Gazdar 1978:22-6, and Brown and Levinson 1978 for further references).

I propose then that conventional implicatures are *essentially deictic in nature*. The examples given seem to have a set of specific properties that they share: they are non-cancellable, they express a direct relationship between an aspect of the context and a linguistic form (of the sort capturable by a context-sensitive transderivational constraint), and they have specific projection properties. These properties seem to follow from their deictic nature. The direct relationship between linguistic structure and context follows, of course, from the nature of deixis, while the non-cancellability seems to arise because the aspects of the context referred to are not easy to express verbally or even to make conscious. For example it is by no means easy to state what the conventional implicatures of *anyway*, *besides*, or *in fact* are; and if one cannot easily state them, one cannot easily overtly cancel them (for one thing the requisite metalanguage for talking about discourse or social relations simply does not exist).

The specific projection properties of conventional implicatures can be illustrated by comparing (25) to (17) above:

25) Bill said the new car is big but beautiful

where the view that big cars usually aren't beautiful - an implication due to the contrastive conventional implicature associated with *but* - can be attributed either to Bill or the speaker. The latter, perhaps unpreferred, reading can be forced in examples like:

26) The San Clemente News said Nixon was a tax-evader but honest!  
Just as in (17) the ambiguity in (25) resides in which of the speech events (reported or actual) the relevant attitudes are to be attributed to.

The projection problem for conventional implicatures is thus quite distinct from that for presuppositions: the problem essentially consists in attributing the relevant attitudes to their appropriate sources. In general, in compound sentences we may expect the number of possible attributions to be directly related to the number of embedding clauses of saying, unless some of these are contextually ruled out, as in (26). As Wilson 1975:116 puts it, when conventional implicatures seem at first sight to be cancelled, they are "not really cancelled at all but merely interpreted as coming from someone other than the speaker". It may be a little harder to displace the relevant attitudes in the case of honorifics, but it is certainly quite possible to rule out the speaker as the source. For example in Tamil if a father talks to his daughter about his wife, he is likely to say something like:

27) atu ammaa colraanka  
that's (what) mother says-plural

where the plural verb ending indicates *not* his respect for his wife (a cultural impossibility

in India) but his daughter's respect for her mother.

My suggestion then is that the significance of socially deictic items (beyond whatever they happen to denote) can best be captured in terms of conventional implicature, and that moreover, honorifics (and other socially deictic items) actually seem to form a natural class with other non-truth-conditional non-cancellable implications which were the original core examples of conventional implicatures. The only problem with this assimilation is that Karttunen and Peters 1975 (and following them, Sadock 1978 and others) have misappropriated Grice's category to describe presuppositional phenomena.<sup>12</sup> But as we have seen, conventional implicatures have different properties, and Grice's original nomenclature clearly refers to this class of non-cancellable implications. Therefore I suggest that we should reclaim the term for its intended purpose. What's wrong with '*presupposition*' after all?

There's another thing in favour of the proposed nomenclatural revision. In a number of cases, and nowhere more clearly than with honorifics, it can be shown that there is a diachronic sequence from conversational implicature to conventional implicature (see Brown and Levinson 1978:263-85,203-208 for many examples); in fact it is possible to argue that there is a sequence from *particularized* through *generalized* conversational implicatures to conventional implicatures (see Levinson 1977:47-60). I know of no such arguments on the other hand for the diachronic emergence of presuppositions from conversational implicatures. What could be more natural than to call the end product of a process of conventionalization of conversational implicatures, *conventional* implicatures?

There are two final loose ends to be tidied up. Recollect that the brief illustration of syntactic problems associated with socially deictic items indicated that a particular syntactic mechanism seemed to be required to state the constraints and relations between honorific forms and their contextual significance, namely the unlovely context-sensitive transderivational constraint. If the significance of socially deictic items is captured in terms of conventional implicature, then we can see clearly why we need such things: we need statements of constraints that directly link aspects of the context to aspects of linguistic form, unmediated by semantics. And Gazdar 1976, and Gazdar and Klein 1976, have shown that the notions of conventional implicature (in Grice's sense, not Karttunen and Peters's) and transderivational constraints (of the context-sensitive variety) are interdefinable.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, there is a problem with the notion of social deixis. With the introduction of indexical semantics there has been a tendency to consider the problems of deixis as semantic, and to retain the term pragmatics for more intractable material (see e.g. Gazdar 1976). However this absorption of deixis into semantics may well be premature, for the facts of deixis are by no means as simple as Montague, Lewis, Lakoff and others seem to have imagined (see Lakoff 1975 and references therein). Fillmore's (1975) discussion raises a great deal of problems for such a view, with his distinctions between non-deictic, gestural and symbolic usages of deictic words.<sup>14</sup> The gestural uses would be impossible to handle without an infinity of pragmatic indices (as noted by Cresswell 1973). My belief is that the unabashedly pragmatic nature of social deixis will prove to be the last straw for the view that deixis can be adequately handled by indexical semantics.

#### 4. Boundary Problems?

Morris 1938 defined pragmatics as the study of the relation between signs and their users. Literally construed this includes a lot of things that linguists are unlikely to be interested in - for example the slips of the tongue investigated by Freud in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. It would also notably include the entire field of sociolinguistics, broadly understood to include the Ethnography of Speaking and so on. On the assumption that this is an embarrassment, we might try some boundary-drawing activity of the sort utilized by Katz and Fodor 1963: the upper bound for pragmatics would be semantics, the lower bound (especially) sociolinguistics. The upper bound has received massive attention (more perhaps than boundary-drawing activity deserves), the lower none, as far as I know.

The study of social deixis can be expected to throw some light on the nature of this lower bound to pragmatics. One of the things that emerges fairly clearly from the study of honorifics is that a basic distinction must in fact be made between the *meaning* and *usage* of social deixis items. This is not an uncontroversial claim: Fillmore 1973 talks of a 'direct sociolinguistic interpretation' for some such items, and the familiar use of flow-chart formalisms in sociolinguistics to describe the usage of address forms and the like implicitly carries the claim that for socially deictic items, *meaning* = *usage* (the formalisms originate with Geoghegan 1973). The reasons why we must make the distinction between meaning and use in this area are numerous (see Levinson 1977 for full discussion); for example informants can volunteer abstract meanings, not merely specifications for use, and they can extend their usage to new situations on the basis of the relevant meanings. But there are two more important arguments. The first is that honorifics, for example, can be used *metaphorically* and *ironically*; but such usages are parasitic on a previously established meaning. Secondly if we had no unitary package of significance to associate with socially deictic items (but only an extended recipe for their usage) we could not easily state the systematic relations between their syntax and their pragmatics (using for example, context-sensitive transderivational constraints).

We therefore have a neat solution to our lower boundary problem in this area: the meaning and the (pragmatic conditions on) associated syntax of socially deictic items lies firmly in the domain of pragmatics, while specifications for the use of such items in concrete, classified, social contexts can be assigned to sociolinguistics. Thus a *Vous*-type pronoun can be said to have as part of its meaning that the addressee is socially distant or of higher social rank to some specified degree (depending on the range of alternates in the language), while the fact that one uses it, *inter alia*, in addressing matrilineal cross-cousins only if they are older than one's brother's wife can thankfully be left for someone other than a pragmaticist to describe. And this distinction coincides with the kind of information that on the one hand one would expect, and on the other expect not, to find in a grammar, whether theoretical or practical.

I do not mean to insinuate that matters of language usage always lie outside the pale of pragmatics - that would be absurd. But it is worth drawing attention to an ambiguity in the way in which we use the word *pragmatics*. On the one hand we have in mind principles that govern language usage of the sort exemplified by Grice's maxims. Grice was at pains to point out of these that they have no intrinsic connection to language at all. On the other hand we use the word to refer to aspects of language structure that are

context-dependent, for example pragmatic conditions on linguistic rules. The two happen in some instances to be related, but if they weren't (and when they aren't) it would be possible to claim the principles of usage are none of the linguist's business. He might have a methodological interest in them, it is true, in so far as he has difficulty distinguishing the side effects of such principles from semantics, but strictly they would lie outside his domain.

On this view, then, pragmatics is concerned with principles of language usage just in those cases where they impinge on or interact with aspects of language structure; linguistics remains the study of *language structure*. But there is another possible view, which requires of pragmatics that it provides, with semantics, an account of *language understanding*. The latter view has quite different implications: Grice's maxims would still be part of the domain of pragmatics even if they had no structural implications. On this view, my neat boundary between the pragmatics and sociolinguistics of social deixis breaks down. Consider, for example, what kind of knowledge would be required in order to know that a particular use of a V pronoun was meant to be understood as ironic; you might indeed need to know that in Tamil village parallel cousins of the same age usually exchange T pronouns with one another, or the like - i.e. particular sociolinguistic rules for pronominal usage.

Since in my own work I adopt the one view in some circumstances and the other in others, I shall continue to perch on the fence; but I have the feeling that the second view is the more interesting program.

### Footnotes

1. This paper was presented to the Pragmatics Symposium at the Linguistic Society of America's Linguistic Institute, July 24th 1978, at Urbana, Illinois. I am grateful to the organizer, Georgia Green, for an invitation to attend and the provision of facilities; and to the University of Cambridge for a travel grant. Gerald Gazdar and Penelope Brown both commented on a proto-draft and I have incorporated substantial revisions that resulted. I am grateful too for comments by Stan Peters, Alice Davison, Larry Horn and Georgia Green.

2. Of course there may be specific titles that can indicate which person is of higher rank, or given two proper names we may simply happen to know. But the prediction is that there won't be things like special kinds of verb agreement, or a particle, that serves this function. Note that by referring back to the present speech event one can easily achieve this statement of relative rank between two third persons, by encoding their relative rank to oneself, in languages that provide honorific third person pronouns and the like.

3. It may seem peculiar to call respectful pronouns of address *referent* honorifics rather than *addressee honorifics*; but as Comrie (1976) points out what is peculiar to the latter class is that it is possible to say things like "this soup is good", which make no reference to the addressee, and still deliver him respect - this is done by lexical alternation, special particles and the like. Secondly, polite pronouns often form part of an entire paradigm in which first and third person pronouns are all distinguished on degrees of politeness in the same way.

4. Compare for example:

1) *avaanka nallavanka*

3rd.pl.pro. + Adjectival Noun+plural ending  
they are good men / he-honorific is a good man

- 2) *avaanka keTTikaaranka*  
they are clever people / he-honorific is a clever man
- 3) \**avaanka keTTikaarar*  
Adj.Noun+ sing.male, honorific ending  
he-honorific is a clever man
- 4) *niinka keTTikaarar*  
2nd.pl.pronoun + Adj.Noun + male honorific sing. ending  
you-honorific are a clever person

In (1) and (2) the adjectival noun takes plural agreement with the honorific and superficially plural third person pronoun; so they are ambiguous between real plurality and honorific plurality. Third person pronouns will not take a singular honorific termination to such adjectival nouns, as shown in (3). But superficially plural second person pronouns (referring to honoured singular addressees) will take such singular terminations. So there is a considerable amount of morphological mess in this area where there is a transition from superficial agreement to agreement with real world number.

5. Thus one can say for something like 'your Lordship says' any of the following in rural Tamil:

- 1) *esamaanka colraanka*  
Lord says-3rd person plural
- 2) *esamaanka colriinka*  
says-2nd person plural
- 3) *esamaanka colroom*  
says-1st person inclusive plural

where the 'we-inclusive' verbal ending in (3) is standardly used to implicate 'you-sing-super-honorific'.

6. The filtering analogue will serve to keep the syntax unsullied, although I am not sure that it solves the problems raised for syntactic argumentation.

7. Martin 1975 in fact showed that such a relation could be handled in four valued two dimensional logic. Martin's demonstration has had little effect on the declining fortunes of semantic presupposition because its rescue seems scant motivation for the recasting of semantics in such a baroque mould.

8. The different theories use quite different apparatus, and this together with substantive differences of opinion about the data make it impossible to isolate and state the basic properties of presupposition projection in an uncontroversial way. On the view of Karttunen and Peters 1975 there are two basic ways in which the presuppositions of a compound sentence can come to be less than the sum of the presuppositions of its parts: presuppositions are blocked by some higher predicates ("plugs") - especially verbs of saying, believing, thinking, hoping etc. - and in addition are filtered out in complex sentences formed by use of the connectives in specifiable circumstances. (Strictly on this account there is no *cancellation*: plugs block presuppositions before they mature so to speak, and filtering is achieved by generating vacuous presuppositions. But I shall continue to talk of presupposition cancellation because the mechanisms must at least simulate this).

On Gazdar's account on the other hand, there are no plugs. He provides examples

like (1)

1) The repairman didn't tell me that my camera was suitable for colour too

which seems to presuppose (2) and (3)

2) I have a camera

3) it is suitable for black and white pictures

even though the higher verb *tell* is a plug. Karttunen and Peters must attempt to produce the suppositions (2) and (3) by conversational implicature. Where *tell* and the like do block presuppositions this seems to be achieved, Gazdar claims, by a mechanism whereby presuppositions are always cancelled by contrary knowledge held by participants in the context. For Gazdar then the projection problem essentially consists of achieving mechanisms that will (a) generate all potential presuppositions along with the forms that gives rise to them, (b) cancel all those that are inconsistent with everything that is already known in the context, such knowledge being built up by the entailments, implicatures and presuppositions of what is said, added in that order, (c) achieve the filtering required by sentences built up with the 'logical' connectives by the same mechanisms as in (b).

9. I toyed with the idea that this might prove to be a distinguishing criterion for conventional implicatures, i.e. that whereas one could derive conversational implicatures from all that is 'said' in Grice's terms, including conventional implicatures, one would not be able to derive conversational ones from presuppositions. For example it is easy to produce ironic conventional implicatures (e.g. honorifics) but hard to produce ironic presuppositions - not however impossible it seems, as the following example due to Gerald Gazdar makes clear:

1) it is a wonderful party, *even* Harry came

which presupposes:

2) one wouldn't expect Harry to come

but which could be used ironically in a context where Harry is well known to never miss a party.

10. Larry Horn and Alice Davison reminded me that in French one can say *si je peux te tu toyer, tu ...* (that is 'If I can call you 'tu', then tu are ...'), which might be claimed to cancel the conventional implicature associated with *tu*. But it is not clear that it does: in counter-argument Gerald Gazdar pointed out that it is perhaps closer to "If I may speak frankly to you ..." where *frankly* is not cancelled. Secondly the cancellation mechanism, if such it is, is not the one in question: one is not mentioning the *meaning* of the *tu* form and thereby cancelling it.

11. Honorifics often derive diachronically from conversational *implicata*; and hence may be in theory calculable just as their original conversationally implicating uses were. For example the Japanese pronoun *watakusi* (*I*, most formal) originally meant 'slave' or 'servant' (see Brown and Levinson 1978:283); it presumably came to be a polite first person pronoun through usages in which (as in 'your slave is at your service') it was used to conversationally implicate that the speaker was at the addressee's service, and moreover to convey that since the speaker was relatively so humble, the addressee must be relatively very grand. The form is now frozen, but is presumably still calculable (at least by those with some historical knowledge of Japanese). The point is that it is important to be clear about the distinction between calculable-in-principle (by some analyst) and actually calculated in discourse (by participants).

12. To an oral version of this paper, Stan Peters suggested the following way of handling the facts in accord with the Karttunen-Peters framework, which I feel duty bound to record. The conventional implicatures of *but* etc, in so far as they survive plugs (as in my example (25)) do so by conversational implicature. Honorifics are different in kind, and should be thought of like *felicity conditions* on speech acts, which also are non-cancellable (according to Karttunen and Peters 1977). There are though, I believe, a number of things wrong with this approach. First, felicity condition is not a well-defined concept, and indeed it has generally been assumed that it would reduce to presupposition or conversational implicature. Secondly, as Andy Rogers 1978 has shown, most presuppositions are not cancellable in performative usages either, so it is doubtful that this assimilation of honorifics to felicity conditions is explanatory in any way. Thirdly, Rogers points out that the ability felicity condition on directives does *not* survive negation, questioning or modal contexts, whereas we have shown that the implications of honorifics do. Fourthly, Peters's motivation is to capture the intuition, he feels, that whereas *but* and the like add to the *content* of what is said, honorifics do not. But I am not sure the intuition is correct. For example in Tamil the items most like the honorific particle *nka* from a syntactic and pragmatic point of view are discourse deictic particles. In addition honorifics can and do perform important conceptual functions: in Tamil oral narrative one often keeps track of the referents of pronouns by means of the degree of respect given to the protagonists (where in English one would have to use explicit distinguishing descriptions or identifiers).

13. That is, simply, that a conventional implicature can be defined as the pragmatic conditions (the significance attached by participants) under which the linguistic item which gives rise to it can be inserted (or equivalently, is not filtered out) by a transderivational constraint. And a transderivational constraint is whatever attaches conventional implicatures to linguistic forms. There are in fact technical problems with the Gazdar-Klein formulation, which I assume could be patched up.

14. The distinctions are between usages like those of *now* in the following examples:

- (1) Now as I was saying . . . (non-deictic use)
- (2) Steve is now on holiday/now in Urbana (symbolic use)
- (3) Don't shout now, but NOW! (gestural use)

The same distinctions show up in social deixis, which is yet another reason for considering the phenomena truly deictic. For example there are suppletive forms *Taa/Teey* in Tamil, addressee dishonorifics, where the first is used symbolically and the second only gesturally (as a call where it picks out an addressee of the right rank relative to the speaker). Kinship terms are often divided into deictic and non-deictic (non-addressive) sets; even in English one cannot address one's cousin Bill as 'cousin Bill'.

### Bibliography

- Brown and Levinson, 1978. Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena, in E. Goody (ed.) *Questions and Politeness: strategies in social interaction*, Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Comrie, B., 1975. Polite plurals and predicate agreement. *Language* 51(2):406-18.
- Comrie, B., 1976. Linguistic politeness axes: speaker-addressee, speaker-referent speaker-bystander. *Pragmatics Microfiche* 1.7:A3.
- Corbett, G., 1976. Syntactic destructors: problems with address, especially in Russian. *Pragmatics Microfiche* 1.3:A3-A12.

- Corum, C., 1975. Basques, particles and babytalk: a case for pragmatics. In *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, pp.90-9.
- Creswell, M.J., 1973. *Logic and Languages*, Methuen & Co., London.
- Fillmore, C., 1971. Towards a Theory of Deixis. Working papers in Linguistics, University of Hawaii.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1973. A grammarian looks to sociolinguistics. In Georgetown University Monographs in Languages and Linguistics No.25:273-287.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1975. Santa Cruz lectures on Deixis. Indiana Univ. Linguistics Club mimeo.
- Gazdar, G., 1976. *Implicature, Presupposition and Logical Form*. Indiana Univ, Linguistics Club mimeo.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1978. Pragmatic constraints on language production. To appear in B. Butterworth (ed.) *Language Production*, Academic Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ in press. Revised version of Gazdar, 1976.
- Gazdar and Klein, 1977. How to formalize context-sensitive transderivational constraints, CLS 13.
- Geoghegan, W., 1973. *Natural information processing rules: formal theory and application to ethnography*. Monograph 3, L.B.R.L., Berkeley, Cal.
- Gordon, D. and Lakoff, G., 1971. Conversational Postulates, CLS 7:63-84.
- Grice, H.P., 1975. Logic and Conversation. In Cole and Morgan (eds.) *Speech Acts*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1978. Further notes on logic and conversation. In Cole, P. (ed.) *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*, Academic Press.
- Hass, M., 1964. Men's and women's speech in Koasati. In Hymes (ed.) 1964, *Language in Culture and Society*.
- Harada, S.I., 1976. Honorifics. In Shibatani, M. (ed.) *Syntax and Semantics 5: Japanese Generative Grammar*, Academic Press.
- Karttunen, L., 1971. Some observations on factivity. *Papers in Linguistics* 4.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1973. Presuppositions of compound sentences. *Linguistic Inquiry* 4:169-93.
- Karttunen and Peters, S., 1975. Conventional Implicature in Montague Grammar. In *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1978. Requiem to Presupposition. *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*.
- Katz, J. and Fodor, J., 1963. The structure of a semantic theory. *Language* 39:170-210.
- Keenan, E.L., 1971. Two kinds of presupposition in natural language. In Fillmore and Langendoen (eds.) *Studies in Linguistic Semantics*, Hold, New York.
- Kempson, R.M., 1975. *Presupposition and the delimitation of semantics*. Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Kuno, S., 1973. *The structure of the Japanese Language*, Cambridge, Mass.
- Lakoff, G., 1975. Pragmatics in natural logic. In E.L. Keenan (ed.), *Formal Semantics of Natural Language*, Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Levinson, S., 1977. *Social Deixis in a Tamil Village*. Unpublished doctoral thesis in linguistic anthropology, Univ. of Calif. Berkeley.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1978. *Universals in Sociolinguistics*. M.s.
- Longacre, R., 1976. 'Mystery' particles and affixes, CLS 12:468-75.
- Lyons, J., 1968. *An Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge Univ. Press.

- Makino, S., 1970. Two proposals about Japanese polite expressions. In Sadock, J. and Vanek, A. (eds.) *Studies presented to R.B. Lees by his students*, Edmonton, Alberta.
- Martin, J.N., 1975. Karttunen on possibility. *Linguistic Inquiry* 6.
- Morris, C., 1938. Foundations of the theory of signs. *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* 1.2:77-138, Chicago.
- Prideaux, G., 1966. *The Syntax of Japanese honorifics*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis Austin, Univ. of Texas.
- Rogers, A., 1978. On generalized conversational implicature and preparatory conditions, Univ. of Texas, Austin, m.s.
- Sadock, J., 1975. The soft interpretive underbelly of generative semantics. In Cole and Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1978. On testing for conversational implicature. In Cole (ed.) *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*, Academic Press.
- Thomason, R., 1973. Semantics, Pragmatics, conversation and presupposition, mimeo.
- Uyeno, T., 1971. *A study of Japanese Modality: a performative analysis of sentence particles*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Wilson, D., 1975. *Presuppositions and non-truth-conditional semantics*, Academic Press.