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Critical Study of Wayne Davis's *Conversational Implicature: Intention and Convention in the Failure of Gricean Theory*

In his recent book, Implicature: Intention, Convention, and Principle in the Failure of Gricean Theory (1998), Wayne Davis argues that the Gricean approach to conversational implicature is bankrupt and offers a new approach of his own. Although I disagree with Davis both in general and in detail, I think nonetheless that the problems he raises'or close relatives of them-- are serious and important problems which should give any Gricean pause. This is an extremely worthwhile book, even for those who disagree with it.

The first prong of Davis' attack on Gricean theory is a series of arguments designed to show that Grice cannot accommodate the role of speaker intention in conversational implicature generation. I think these arguments fail to accomplish this goal, because I think Davis is wrong about the role of speaker intention. Nonetheless, many of the more specific objections that Davis raises as a part of this general argument are important and damaging to Grice, though not quite in the way that Davis takes them to be. (I'll focus here on the problem of indeterminate implicatures.) However, Davis' own theory turns out to fare equally badly, as his way around these difficulties depends crucially on the (in my opinion) deeply problematic role he assigns to speaker intention.

The second prong of Davis' attack is to argue that Grice cannot accommodate the role of convention in conversational implicature generation. My response to this argument is quite different. I agree with Davis about the role of convention in implicature generation, but I take the Gricean story to be largely able to accommodate this. There is a point, however, at which the role of convention does pose problems for

Grice. This might seem to give Davis the upper hand. However, it seems to me that Davis' own view fares no better at this point. Nonetheless, the problem raised is a serious one for both Grice and Davis and one which needs to be answered.

Davis on Grice

Davis' goal is to argue that Grice's theory of conversational implicature, and any theory which shares its central tenets, must fail. It will be useful, then, if I start by stating what Davis takes to be the central tenets of Grice's theory.

(1) What Davis calls the Theoretical Definition of 'conversational implicature'. (I'll follow him in this from here on.) I quote Grice's own words rather than Davis' slightly altered rendition. (Davis takes the various formulations of this, including his, in the literature to be pretty much equivalent (13), so it seems legitimate for me to use Grice's own version. And it will be useful to me to have Grice's own words at hand later on.)

A man who, by (in, when) saying (or making as if to say) that p has implicated that q, may be said to have conversationally implicated that q, provided that

(1) he is presumed to be following the conversational maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle;

(2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, q is required to make his saying or making as if to say p (or doing so in those terms) consistent with this presumption; and

(3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (2) is required. (Grice 1989: 30-31.)

(2) The Calculability Assumption. Davis renders this as 'conversational implicatures can always be worked out or inferred from the conversational principles.' (Davis: 1.)

(3) The Generative Assumption. This holds that fulfilment of the three necessary conditions listed in the Theoretical Definition is sufficient for implicature. (This is not Davis' own formulation, but I find this more straightforward than his. I take nothing to hang on this.)

(4) Grice's Razor, 'which holds that it is more economical to postulate conversational implicatures rather than senses because conversational implicatures can be derived from independently motivated principles.' (Davis: 1.)

I am largely in agreement with Davis as to the central tenets of Grice's theory, although I am not happy for reasons that will become clear later with his formulation of calculability, and again, this will be discussed more later. I'm not sure that Grice's Razor should be taken to be a central tenet. However, when Davis begins his detailed discussion of Grice's theory, some important claims are added to this picture which are not in Grice, and not I think ones a Gricean should feel compelled to accept. These claims are those involved in Davis' definitions of speaker implicature and sentence implicature.

Davis distinguishes two sorts of conversational implicatures, speaker implicatures and sentence implicatures. Speaker implicatures, according to Davis, are those claims which the speaker means or implies by saying something else. (Davis: 5.) Since what

a speaker means, for Grice, is a matter of speaker intentions, speaker implicature is a matter of speaker intentions. 'Sentence implicature' is defined in terms of speaker implicature: '[a] sentence implicates, roughly, what speakers using the sentence with its regular meaning would commonly use it to implicate.' (Davis: 6.) Because speaker implicature is a matter of intentions and sentence implicature a matter of community-wide conventions, speakers may implicate claims that their sentences don't implicate and sentences may implicate claims that their utterers don't implicate. Davis takes speaker implicature to be Grice's particularised implicature, and sentence implicature to be Grice's generalised implicature. (Davis: 21.)

The role of intention

Davis argues that the central tenets of Gricean theory are in conflict with the role of speaker intention in determining speaker implicature. This is absolutely right. Speaker implicature is a matter of speaker intentions, and conversational implicature according to Grice's Theoretical Definition-- is not. In fact, speaker intentions are nowhere mentioned in the definition. Clause (1) concerns the audience's presumption that the speaker is cooperative, Clause (2) what the audience is required to believe, and Clause (3) what the speaker believes about the audience. Grice's Theoretical Definition is, as Davis argues, completely inappropriate to speaker implicature.

If speaker implicature were Grice's notion, this would indeed be a devastating criticism of Grice's theory. It seems to me, however, that it is not. I think it is far from clear that Davis is right in attributing these notions to Grice. First, and least significantly, the definition Davis gives of 'speaker implicature' is not one that Grice ever explicitly gives or endorses. This alone does not mean that it is not his definition,

of course, and it is a natural definition to draw out of certain passages in Grice. [1] A clear piece of evidence that Grice would not have accepted this definition comes from the fact that Grice allows for the possibility of implicating by making as if to say, rather than by saying (as in clause (1) quoted above). For Grice, meaning that P is a necessary condition for saying that P. [2] One who utters a sentence standardly used to say that P [3] but actually means that Q only makes as if to say that P. This is what allows irony, in which one certainly does not mean what's generally meant by the sentence one utters, to be analysed as implicature. Since Grice allows for this possibility, it is, it seems to me, not right to attribute to him the claim that what is implicated is simply what is meant but not said by what one says. [4]

But this is not the only reason to resist the attribution of this view to Grice. A very important reason is that Grice is not hesitant about discussing what speakers mean or intend, but these notions are notably absent from his discussion of implicature. [5]

Instead, the focus tends to be on the audience-oriented aspect of his Theoretical Definition. Take, for example, Grice's brief summary of the notion (1989: 86): 'what is implicated is what it is required that one assume a speaker to think in order to preserve the assumption that he is following the Cooperative Principle (and perhaps some conversational maxims as well), if not at the level of what is said, at least at the level of what is implicated.' There is nothing at all in this brief summary about what the speaker means'the focus is exclusively on what the audience needs to assume. Given this sort of emphasis, it seems inappropriate to attribute to Grice the view that speaker implicature is what the speaker means by saying something else.

It becomes even less appealing to attribute this view to Grice when we consider some of its consequences. Consider a variant on an example that Davis gives on page

74. Albert tells Bettina that he feels sick. Bettina replies with 'I'll go find an aspirin'. Unbeknownst to Albert, what Bettina means by this is that there are aliens nearby, probably causing Albert's illness, and he should flee. (Bettina likes to protect herself from the aliens by holding an aspirin in front of her, and so she thinks that mentioning that she's going to find an aspirin is a good way to warn Albert. Albert knows nothing of Bettina's beliefs about aliens.) There is, it seems to me, little temptation to say that Bettina has implicated that Albert should flee. But on Davis' account this is just what she has done. By saying, 'I'll go find an aspirin', Bettina meant that Albert should flee, and this is precisely what it is for her to implicate it.

What Davis has lost is the normative dimension of conversational implicature. On Grice's own account, speakers can't simply implicate whatever they mean by saying something else: Clauses (1) and (2) of the Theoretical Definition prevent this. [\[6\]](#)

Bettina did not implicate that Albert should flee, because Albert did not need to assume that she thought this in order to understand her as cooperative. (In other words, Clause (2) fails.) This seems a desirable result. What Grice's theory gives us and Davis' does not is the idea that what is implicated is not wholly up to the speaker. This is importantly parallel to Grice's notion of saying. For all Grice's focus speaker intentions, what is said is not left completely up to the speaker if the speaker chooses the wrong sentence (as with malapropism and mistranslation), she will not manage to say what she is trying to say. Grice's treatment of implicature yields the same sort of result: speakers like Bettina have chosen the wrong means for their intended implicatures, and as a result they don't succeed in implicating.

I've suggested that we needn't, and shouldn't, suppose that everything which is meant by what is said is conversationally implicated. In addition, I've suggested that the

constraints on implicature placed by Grice's theoretical definition serve an important purpose. But this means that Davis is simply wrong about the role of intention in implicature. Davis' speaker implicature is indeed incompatible with Grice's Theoretical Definition, but I think-- we should view this as a reason to reject Davis' speaker implicature (at least as a part of Gricean theory), and with it the role that he assigns to speaker intentions. [\[7\]](#)

Indeterminate Implicatures

If am right about the above, Davis' claim that Gricean theory cannot accommodate the role of intention in implicature is wrong. But he argues for this claim by discussing a wide variety of cases, and some of these cases are still seriously problematic for Grice, even if not it seems to me in the way that Davis takes them to be. A prime example of this comes from Davis' discussion of Grice on indeterminate implicatures.

Grice suggests in 'Logic and Conversation' that some implicatures may be (at least to some degree) indeterminate.

Since, to calculate a conversational implicature is to calculate what has to be supposed in order to preserve the supposition that the Cooperative Principle is being observed, and since there may be various possible specific explanations, a list of which may be open, the conversational implicatum in such cases will be a disjunction of such specific explanations; and if the list of these is open, the implicatum will have just the same kind of indeterminacy that many actual implicata do in fact seem to possess. (39-40.)

It has been suggested (by Martinich among others) that the implicatures involved in metaphor are best understood as indeterminate implicatures. The most important

problem Davis raises for this view is that it's very implausible to suppose that the utterer of a metaphor actually means to convey something as weak as a disjunctive proposition. Davis notes that the poet who says 'my love is a red rose' does not mean my love is beautiful or sweet-smelling or highly-valued. He rightly points out that the poet would not be pleased by one who replies with 'yes, that's true'she does smell good, despite being ugly and worthless.' (Davis 70-72.) In addition, Davis claims that Clause (2) of Grice's characterisation fails: 'There is no belief the speaker is required to possess.' (72.)

I think that Davis is onto a very important problem for Grice, one that is not easily solved'and one that is not confined to metaphor. But I also think that there are some problems with the way that Davis has characterised the situation. First, and least importantly, Clause (2) of Grice's characterisation is not concerned with what beliefs speakers are required to possess. Rather, its topic is what beliefs audiences are required to attribute to speakers. Next, Davis' argument against the claim that the speaker means the disjunctive belief is a bit weak'the mere fact that the poet would be displeased by someone insulting his love can't prove anything about what the poet meant. One may mean a disjunction, and still be displeased by having someone agree by affirming the opposites of two of the disjuncts, even if the topic is not one's love life, and even if the 'agreement' is not a response to one's poem.

Neither of these problems is devastating, or even serious, however. Although Clause (2) doesn't fail in quite the way Davis takes it to fail, it still fails'there's no one belief that the audience is required to attribute to the speaker. And although Davis' argument that the poet doesn't mean the disjunction is weak, it is still unlikely that speakers do mean such disjunctive claims.

These points become even clearer, I think, with a different example. Suppose that I am asked to write a letter of reference for Claudette. I write only, 'I cannot recommend Claudette highly enough.' [8] There are at least two ways to explain my apparent violation of the maxim of quantity'thus giving rise to a situation like that which Grice discusses in the passage above. Either Claudette is so wonderful that I cannot find adequate words of praise, or she is so lacking that I don't feel I can give a sufficiently positive recommendation for the job. What I mean to convey is the former, but there is nothing to indicate this to the audience. It has not occurred to me that my utterance could be taken to suggest anything but the praise I intend. It seems clear, in this case, that (a) there is no one belief the audience must attribute to me in order to understand me as cooperative'(2) does indeed fail; and (b) I do not mean the disjunctive implicature that either Claudette is so wonderful that I cannot find adequate words of praise, or she is so lacking that I don't feel I can give a sufficiently positive recommendation for the job.

So far, we have seen two problematic facts about this sort of case. First, there seems to be no one belief the audience is required to attribute to me. Second, I don't mean the disjunctive claim that Grice suggests would be implicated in such a case. These are, intuitively, worrying facts; and they are problems for Grice on Davis' understanding. It's not, however, clear yet that they are genuinely problems for Grice. First, Grice's discussion of indeterminate implicatures gives us a single claim as implicature in these cases'the disjunctive one'and this claim is therefore the one that the audience is required to attribute (rather than either of its disjuncts). Second, it is genuinely unclear whether Grice took being meant by the speaker to be a necessary condition for being a conversational implicature. He may well have done so, but the only place in which he states this explicitly is a passage in 'The Causal Theory of

Perception' which he chose to omit when he collected his papers for Studies in the Way of Words. [9]

But variants of these problems remain, even if we are as strict as possible in our interpretation of Grice.

(1) It seems completely implausible to suppose that any audience could be required to attribute the disjunctive belief (either Claudette's great or she's awful) to me in order to understand me as cooperative. (In fact, this would be worse than useless to the project of trying to understand me as cooperative!) So Grice's Clause (2) fails.

(2) Even if we don't assume that being meant is a necessary condition for being implicated, Clause (3) in Grice's characterisation 'the clause concerned with the speaker's beliefs' fails to hold. I certainly don't think that my audience can work out that either Claudette is so wonderful that I cannot find adequate words of praise, or she is so lacking that I don't feel I can give a sufficiently positive recommendation for the job. It hasn't occurred to me that my utterance could be taken as anything but praise, and I wouldn't have made the utterance if it had.

So it turns out that what Grice says about indeterminate conversational implicatures conflicts quite strongly with what he says about conversational implicatures more generally.

Worse yet, indeterminate implicatures are not an isolated, rare phenomenon. Implicatures which are indeterminate in the strongest sense 'those Grice would take to be open disjunctions' are actually, it seems to me, the norm. Consider the standard reference letter example, in which I give an unflattering reference for Desmond's philosophy job application by writing 'Desmond uses lovely fonts', and

nothing else. Possible implicatures include any of the following: You should not hire Desmond; Desmond's a poor philosopher; I don't think well of Desmond' The audience for my letter could understand me as cooperative by attributing any of these beliefs to me. According to Grice on indeterminate implicatures, then, the implicature carried by my letter will be Either you should not hire Desmond; or Desmond's a poor philosopher; or I don't think well of Desmond' But in order to meet Grice's necessary conditions for conversational implicature, I'd have to believe that my audience could work this out (Clause 3), and my audience would have to be required to work this out (Clause 2). Neither of these is likely to obtain, given the open nature of the disjunction. [10] Highly indeterminate implicatures, then, arise even in what should be the simplest cases. And they pose serious problems, even in these cases.

On Davis' own preferred account, most of the problems resulting from indeterminate implicatures simply do not arise. His account is a simple one: speaker implicature is defined only as what speakers mean by saying something else. The clauses of Grice's characterisation of implicature, as Davis rightly notes, have little bearing on this. As a result, Davis does not take them to be necessary conditions for conversational implicature. What Grice says specifically about indeterminate implicatures is, as we've seen, deeply problematic. Davis abandons this also.

For Davis, then, most of the cases we've discussed need pose no special problem. It is difficult to say what is implicated by the poet's utterance of the red rose metaphor precisely to the extent that it's difficult to say what the poet means by it if the poet means something specific by it, then the poet implicates something specific. I do not implicate anything negative about Claudette with my ill-judged letter, because I did not mean anything negative by it. The Desmond case, with its endless possible,

closely related implicatures, is trickier. But if I mean some very specific proposition, say, that Desmond is a bad philosopher, then I implicate that very specific proposition, and no other. If, however, what I mean is somewhat indeterminate, I really couldn't choose between the various possible negative implicatures, then what I implicate is genuinely indeterminate. I see no reason to suppose that this sort of indeterminacy is any sort of a problem for Davis. In fact, it seems rather a natural way of dealing with the case, and certainly preferable to the disjunctive implicature solution. These cases, then, are not the problem for Davis that they are for Grice.

But, as we have seen, Davis' account faces other problems, and we can actually see a hint of them in the solutions that he offers us to the indeterminacy cases. I find it a bit unintuitive to say that the implicature generated by my Claudette letter is completely positive. Similarly, it seems a bit strange to suppose that whether or not the Desmond case is one of indeterminacy will depend completely on whether I had a specific proposition in mind as the meaning of my utterance. It also feels odd to say that the poet's implicature would be utterly determinate if the poet had some particular proposition in mind. Nonetheless, we might be willing to accept these results. The problem is that the very feature which yields these results is that which also leads to the much more damaging results we saw earlier. Davis' account has abandoned the normative element of Gricean conversational implicature, and this is a significant loss.

The role of convention

Davis discusses a wide variety of cases in which he claims that both Calculability and Clause (2) of the Theoretical Definition fail to hold, due to the role played in communication by implicature conventions. This, he argues, shows the need to abandon Gricean theory in favour of his alternative account. I will argue that he is

wrong to suppose that the role of convention in implicature has this result. Nonetheless, another convention-based problem Davis raises is indeed a problem. However, I will suggest, it is also a problem for Davis' account.

Davis provides many examples of implicatures which seem to depend crucially on convention. Our example here will be tautology implicatures those arising from utterances like 'men are men', 'whatever will be will be', and 'war is war'. These are commonly explained as arising from violations of the maxim of quantity. The maxim of quantity demands that speakers give neither too much nor too little information. The information actually expressed by a tautology is about as minimal as information gets, and unlikely to be of much use to anybody. As a result of this flagrant violation of quantity at the level of what is said, Griceans argue, conversational implicatures are generated.

Davis argues that the specific tautology implicatures which actually arise in English are not ones that audiences could work out. Why, for example, does 'war is war' implicate that war is terrible while 'a war's a war' implicates that one war is much the same as another? And why does the latter not carry the same sort of implicature as 'a deal's a deal'? Cross-linguistic observations complicate things still further. In order to achieve in French the standard implicature carried by 'war is war', one would need to use a sentence which means 'that is war'. These observations, many of them drawn from the work of Wierzbicka, are interesting and significant: they show rather clearly that audiences cannot work out the implicatures from conversational principles alone. According to Davis' understanding of calculability, then, these implicatures are not calculable. For closely related reasons, Clause (2) seems as though it must go

unsatisfied, as there is no one implicature which an audience is required to arrive at in order to uphold the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative.

Tautology implicatures and others that seem to rely heavily on convention do not pose these problems for Davis. Davis takes these implicatures to be sentence implicatures, where a sentence implicates, 'roughly, what speakers using the sentence with its regular meaning would commonly use it to implicate'. (Davis: 6.) Unsurprisingly, given this definition, convention plays a vital role in generating sentence implicatures. (Davis' book contains an extensive discussion of the role and nature of implicature conventions.) Moreover, Grice's necessary conditions and the calculability requirement don't apply to this sort of implicature. So the role of convention in implicature seems to serve as support rather than a problem for Davis' view. [\[11\]](#)

It seems to me, however, that the same is true for Grice's view. This is because Grice's view is not quite that which Davis attributes to him. In particular, Grice's calculability requirement is crucially different from the one Davis attributes to him. Davis' understanding, recall, is 'conversational implicatures can always be worked out or inferred from the conversational principles' (p. 1). Grice, however, is quite explicit that conversational principles are not all that the audience has to draw on in working out implicatures. (Grice 1989: 31.) Rather, they also make use of background information, which 'it seems to me' may perfectly well include information about community-wide conventions. Once this information is allowed to enter into the audience's calculations, tautology implicatures become perfectly calculable. With this information a part of the calculation, audiences also become much more restricted as to what hypotheses are reasonable to consider in trying to make sense of the

speaker as cooperative. Given the background information about historical conventions, it seems far more plausible to suppose that the audience might be required to assume the conventional tautology implicatures. So neither Calculability nor Clause (2) need fail. These apparent problems for Grice's view are not problems at all.

Another problem Davis raises, however, is somewhat more difficult to deal with. Davis rightly points out that Grice's Razor loses all plausibility once we take seriously the role of convention in calculating implicatures. It no longer seems right to say that working out conversational implicatures requires fewer items of highly specific knowledge than disambiguation. Ambiguity solutions and implicature solutions are pretty much on a par as far as knowledge of specific conventions goes. So, if Grice's Razor is a central tenet of Grice's theory, then Grice's theory must go. However, it doesn't seem obvious to me that Grice's Razor is a central tenet of his theory. Grice first puts it forward after the original theory, and does so rather hesitantly: 'So, at least, so far as I can see (not far, I think), there is as yet no reason not to accept Modified Occam's Razor.' (Grice 1989: 49.) Certainly it is easy to imagine Gricean theory without the Razor, and this was indeed how Grice first imagined it himself.

Still, there may be serious problems for Grice even if Grice's Razor is not a central tenet of his theory. Grice's Razor is what gives us a reason to postulate generalised implicatures rather than ambiguities. Without the Razor, why should we ever prefer a implicature explanation? It is far from clear whether or not there is a satisfactory solution to this problem.

It is also far from clear, as it turns out, that Davis can provide a satisfactory solution to this problem. Grice's Razor is not a central tenet of Davis' theory. Indeed, Davis opposes it. But Davis has provided nothing to replace it, and he still faces the task of deciding when we should postulate an ambiguity and when an implicature. [\[12\]](#)

Davis' sentence implicatures, completely determined by convention, could easily be replaced by ambiguities. With Grice's Razor abandoned, it seems to me that Davis-like Grice-- will have trouble providing a motivation for ever preferring to postulate an implicature. So Davis is left with the same problem that faces Grice.

Conclusion

In my view, Davis' attacks on Grice's theory of implicature do not succeed in showing it to be bankrupt. Grice's theory is, I think, quite different from what Davis takes it to be, in important and worthwhile ways. Nonetheless, the problems Davis raises are well worth serious consideration and many of them are not easily solved. His book sets an agenda of problems to be solved by any theory of conversational implicature (including his own), and it deserves to be widely read. [\[13\]](#)

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[1] Davis has the definition in quotation marks, but has told me in correspondence that he did not mean to be suggesting that the definition was a quotation from Grice. Davis takes the definition from the passage in which Grice first introduces the term 'implicature': 'At this point, A might well inquire what B was implying, what he was suggesting, or even what he meant by saying that B had not yet been to prison' It is clear that whatever B implied, suggested, meant in this example, is distinct from what B said, which was simply that C had not been to prison yet. I wish to introduce, as terms of art, the verb implicate and the related nouns implicature (cf. implying) and implicatum (cf. what is implied). His reading of this passage is not an unreasonable one, but as I argue above it seems inconsistent with other claims made by Grice.

[2] This is one of the least intuitively appealing of Gricean doctrines. I by no means favour its endorsement. But the fact that Grice did is important to arriving at an accurate understanding of Grice.

[3] I'm ignoring all sorts of complications regarding sentences containing indexicals. Grice never worked these out satisfactorily, and it would only complicate things unnecessarily to try to discuss these matters.

[4] The saying-implies-meaning thesis is not explicitly stated in 'Logic and Conversation', although it I take it to be implicit in Grice's use of 'making as if to say', particularly when discussing irony. It is explicit in his 'Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning', first published in 1968. (Grice 1968: 227-229; Grice 1989: 120-122.) It also appears in the 1989 version of 'Utterer's Meaning and Intentions' (Grice 1989: 87), although not in the 1969 version of this paper. I'm grateful to Wayne Davis for discussion of these textual matters.

[5] With one exception: in 'The Causal Theory of Perception', Grice says that implicatures must be meant. He chose to omit this part of the paper for Studies in the Way of Words (one of very few such omissions), so its status is not clear. The reason Grice gives for this omission is that the view presented there is 'substantially the same' as that presented in his later papers, which contain fuller discussions. (Grice 1989: 229) Since this passage is actually a notable departure from other statements of the view, it is hard to know how to treat it: it does not seem plausible to suppose that Grice changed his mind, as he wouldn't then say that the view is substantially the same. Nor does it seem plausible to suppose he still held the view, since if that were the case he would surely wish it to be stated somewhere. But even if the status of the claim were clear, it would only establish that being meant is a necessary condition for implicature, and this is much weaker than Davis' claim.

[6] Strictly speaking, this isn't quite right. These clauses only prevent speakers from conversationally implicating whatever they like. But conventional implicature is determined entirely by linguistic meaning; and Grice's third, briefly sketched category of non-conversational non-conventional implicature is meant to work just like conversational implicature except for the use of different maxims. So linguistic meaning would prevent speakers from conventionally implicating whatever they

like, while analogues of clauses (1) and (2) would prevent them from non-conventionally non-conversationally implicating whatever they like.

[7] This is not to say that Davis' speaker implicature isn't a useful and worthwhile notion. What I'm concerned with here is whether it can be attributed to Grice in particular, whether there is such strong evidence in favour of this attribution that we should make it even though the view we end up with is, as Davis compellingly argues, clearly internally incoherent. I think we should not. But the notion of speaker implicature, taken on its own terms (rather than attributed to Grice), is certainly a useful one for discussion of communication.

[8] This sentence (with a different name) is one that I actually read in a letter of reference.

[9] For more on this, see footnote 5.

[10] Davis also notes that open disjunctions are especially problematic for clause 2

[11] Not all of what Davis says about sentence implicature in his book seems consistent, and much of it also seems different from Grice's generalised implicature. In addition to the definition quoted above, he says that 'facts about a particular context or speaker will never play a role in deriving a sentence implicature'. (Davis: 27.) This is importantly different from Grice's generalised implicature. For Grice, generalised implicatures are ones that are usually carried by utterances of some particular form of words. The important difference between these two notions is that, for Grice, a sentence which usually carries some implicature may fail to do so; for Davis, that sentence will always carry the implicature. But Davis, like Grice, wants to distinguish between conventional and conversational implicature. The key to this distinction, for Davis, is that conversational implicatures depend on context and are cancellable. (Davis: 8-9.) Davis' sentence implicature is

meant to be a species of conversational implicature, but it cannot be according to the definition that Davis gives: what a sentence implicates is simply a matter of that sentence, and 'facts about a particular context or speaker will never play a role in deriving a sentence implicature'. (Davis: 27.) In correspondence, Davis tells me that he distinguishes (in a forthcoming work) between sentence implicature'which is independent of context and applied sentence implicature'which depends in part on context. This distinction will be an important one to properly understanding sentence implicature, and in particular the cancellability of sentence implicatures.

[12] Davis does discuss issues of ambiguity Vs implicature, but he does not provide a methodological principle which can do work analogous to that which Grice's Razor is meant to do for Grice's theory.

[13] I am very grateful to Wayne Davis, Chris Hookway, Maria Kasmirli, Teresa Robertson, and the Sheffield Philosophy of Language Reading Group for comments on this critical study and related material. I also thank the Sheffield Department of Philosophy and the AHRB for research leave to pursue the project of which this study is a part.