

Jacques Moeschler

Department of Linguistics, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Institute for Cognitive Studies, Lyon, France

Jacques.Moeschler@lettres.unige.ch

The role of explicature in intercultural communication

1. Introduction

This paper has two main purposes, one empirical, the other theoretical. Its empirical purpose is to show the role of explicatures in verbal communication in general and in intercultural communication in particular. Its theoretical purpose is to explain why explicatures are central to verbal communication.

From a pragmatic point of view, one prediction of inferential pragmatics would be that intercultural misunderstandings are caused by contextual mismatches between speakers, whose layer is conversational implicatures. From a classical Gricean or neo-Gricean approach to pragmatics, this would lead to a very strange assumption: pragmatic misunderstanding would be caused by erroneous applications of conversational maxims or of pragmatic principles (for instance the Q/R or I-principles). This position will be criticized and will lead to the second, which is theoretical, purpose of my paper. I will propose a version of verbal communication that gives a central role to the development of linguistic meaning in contextual settings, that is, explicatures. Explicatures are enrichments of logical forms of sentences, and are either basic (propositional forms) or higher-ordered (illocutionary forces and propositional attitudes). I will argue, supporting my claim with some empirical data, that intercultural misunderstandings are caused by erroneous higher-ordered explicatures.

This assumption is productive enough to allow some interesting predictions, either empirical or theoretical:

1. When they occur, intercultural misunderstandings have not only minor consequences: they generally stem from some dramatic mismatch between speakers. I will give two examples of such mismatches based on erroneous expectations of relevance.
2. Intercultural misunderstandings are not transparent: they are generally not perceived as such, unless some other external fact causes such awareness. I will give a cognitive explanation of this lack of awareness.
3. Intercultural misunderstandings are more likely not to occur when linguistic understanding and communication are not involved: my assumption is that “the greater the audience’s mastery of the speaker’s language is, the greater the risk of intercultural misunderstanding”. Indeed, the better a non-native speaker’s mastery of a foreign language is, the less his native hearer will tend to attribute to him a different cultural background

Finally, I will show how and why the construction of the context is crucial to intercultural communication. This feature is not specific to intercultural communication, since it is crucial to monocultural communication too. Nevertheless, what happens in monocultural communication is that mismatches in context construction trigger automatic erroneous comprehension, either at the explicature or implicature levels, these errors being automatically perceived and repaired. By contrast, what happens in intercultural communication is that erroneous comprehensions of utterances are not automatically diagnosed, and when they are, cannot be easily repaired, because of the difficulty of the accessibility of mutual contextual assumptions.

2. Explicature VS implicature

One prediction of inferential pragmatics is that mismatches in verbal communication have to be located at the level of conversational implicature. This assumption is a consequence of Grice's definition of non-natural meaning, which implies a distinction between what is said and what is implicated. Consequences of what is said are truth-functional, i.e. do exceed conventional meaning. So any communicative mismatch at the level of what is said would imply a linguistic decoding problem, associated to the linguistic competence of the audience.

What I am interested in here is not this type of issue in intercultural communication. I would like to question the level at which examples like (1), an example of intercultural mismatches, are involved:

- (1) How should I go from the Airport to X?

This utterance has been used in order to receive not only the information required, but an offer to pick the speaker at the airport and drive him to X. Unfortunately, the answer has been a literal one, giving a precise procedure to go from the airport to X by train.

At a first look, the analysis is very simple: the speaker intends to perform an illocutionary act of request for help by performing a question.

From a technical point of view, things are more complicated, since such a request (the speaker asks his audience to come and pick him at the airport) is not a conventional way to produce indirect speech act. If it were the case, this would imply that the speaker and the audience have in common a rule like (2):

- (2) When the speaker does not know to go from A to B and asks his audience how to, he wants his audience to come and pick him at A to go to B.

A non-conventional way of inferring the request for help is to use the Gricean implicature device. In Gricean pragmatics, implicatures are derived from the presumption that the speaker uses or exploits one maxim of conversation. The maxim implied here cannot be the maxim of quality, nor the maxim of quantity: nothing is inferred from the fact that the speaker does not say the truth or give more information¹.

¹ Maybe one could think that the speaker say less to communicate more, but this is not a question of quantity of information: In this case, it refers to the I-principle, not to the Q-principle.

The only conversational maxim referred to is the maxim of relevance: in other words, the intention of the speaker can be resumed as following:

- (3) The speaker asks how to go from A to B with the purpose of requesting from his audience to come and pick him at A.

This analysis is acceptable, but does not explain why (3) is a pragmatically acceptable way of requesting something from someone. If the speaker utters (1) for his travel operator, he certainly does not request him to come and pick him at the Airport. So if the requirement of the maxim of relevant is necessary, it is not sufficient to explain the utterer's intention or the possible interpretation of his utterance by his audience.

I would like to propose another analysis, which is linked to the notion of ostensive-inferential communication and which gives a central role not to implicatures, but to explicatures. What I would like to propose is that in example (1), the higher-level explicature of the speaker's utterance is not the illocutionary force of a question but of a request. This higher-level explicature is a free enrichment of the logical form of the utterance, based on premises whose accessibility is crucially cultural. In other words, when the audience does not obtain the higher-level explicature (4) as an interpretation of (1), it means that he has not correctly understood the speaker's meaning and that communication failed:

- (4) The speaker requests his audience to come to the Airport and pick him to X.

We will begin by defining ostensive-inferential communication, and then come back to the explicit/implicit distinction.

3. Ostensive-inferential communication and pragmatics

Within cognitive pragmatics, as illustrated for instance by Relevance Theory (RT), one of the main concepts is *ostensive-inferential communication* (Sperber & Wilson 1995). Linguistic communication is defined in RT as a mixed process, implying both a coding-decoding device (the code model) and an inferential process based on old and new information (the inferential model, Wilson & Sperber 2003). In isolation, neither correctly describes how linguistic communication works. Linguistic communication is obviously based on a code — a specific language, defined as a set of sound-meaning pairs — but knowledge of the code, although necessary for optimal linguistic communication, is not a sufficient condition for successful communication. It is not a sufficient condition primarily because the retrieval of the speaker's intention implies much more than a common code: world knowledge, as well as knowledge about the situation of communication, are crucial to the enrichment of linguistic meaning encoded within utterances.

The division of labour between these two models of communication can be explained in a functional way. From this point of view, it seems reasonable to devote the efficient and rapid linguistic parsing to a very specialised module (the linguistic module), without expecting a complete interpretation of the verbal stimulus. On the other hand, the capability of mixing outputs of the linguistic parsing (LOGICAL FORMS) with other sources of information (old information retrieved from long-term memory, new perceptual information coming from the physical environment, mid-term memory information resulting from previous utterance parsing) can increase the

efficiency of the cognitive system in inferring new information, since the inferential process is not subject to the time pressure inherent to the linguistic parser.

Linguistic communication as defined previously has two aspects: it is ostensive on the one hand and inferential on the other. Ostensive communication is achieved by an act of ostension from the communicator, even if ostensive communication can be non-linguistic, that is, conveyed by gestures, glances, smiles, or any other stimuli made recognisable by the communicator as an intentional means to convey his intention. The use of language in utterances gives rise to ostensive communication because the processing of an utterance follows the addressee's recognition of the speaker's intention to convey his informative intention in terms of an utterance. If language were a perfect communicative device, perhaps linguistic communication would be restricted to a special kind of communication, that is, ostensive communication. Since speakers can convey more than what they say, as in (5), the ostensive dimension of verbal communication is completed by inferential processes: the addressee must infer from what is said and from other accessible information (the context) the speaker's intended meaning:

- (5) Jacques: Axel, please go and brush your teeth!
Axel: Dad, I'm not sleepy.

In this case, the addressee's recognition of the speaker's communicative intention (his intention to inform someone of his informative intention) allows him to make inferences in order to understand the speaker's informative intention, i.e. his intention to inform an audience of something (Wilson & Sperber 2004, 611).

This analysis of communication as an ostensive-inferential device is an explicit version of Grice's theory of non-natural meaning (Grice 1957), and is the core concept of any pragmatic approach to verbal communication. The issue which divides pragmatic theories from each other (for instance Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory from Levinson's Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature — TGCI — Levinson 2000) is the nature of the principles responsible for the processing of inferred meaning. For instance, RT resorts to the single Principle of Relevance, whereas TGCI triggers implicatures either from the Q-Principle (derived from the Gricean Maxim of Quantity, Grice 1975) or the I-Principle (principle of informativeness, derived from the Maxim of Quality and the Maxim of Relation). In the course of this paper, I will restrict my discussion to ostensive-inferential communication as described in RT, and show how the Principle of Relevance plays a crucial role in the recovery of the speaker's informative intention.

RT claims that this criterion is the Principle of Relevance. The Principle of Relevance is a generalization of the Gricean Maxim of Relation ("Be relevant"), but also includes the maxims of Quantity and Quality. Being relevant implies not only giving information about what is said in a conversation, but also giving an appropriate quantity of information as well as satisfying the Gricean maxim of quality (Wilson & Sperber 2000). For instance, giving the precise number of children in (6a) is more relevant than to give a true number, entailed by (6a) as in (6b):

- (6) a. Anne has four children.
b. Anne has three children.

The same argument can be used for the maxim of Quality. For instance, asserting (7) while walking in the rain can be relevant even if the statement is false, if the speaker's utterance mentions in an echoic way a previous thought or utterance stated during sunny weather:

(7) What a beautiful sunny day!

In RT, relevance is a comparative concept, defined through the cognitive effects produced by the utterance in a specific context, as well as through the cognitive effort implied by the processing of the utterance:

Relevance

- a. All things being equal, the more cognitive effects an utterance produces, the more relevant it is.
- b. All things being equal, the more cognitive effort an utterance requires, the less relevant it is.

How can relevance and PR play the role of the expected criterion responsible for the inference of the informative intention? In the first edition of *Relevance* (Sperber & Wilson 1986), the principle of relevance simply states that “every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance” (Sperber & Wilson 1986, 158). The recent version of RT, as stated initially in the second edition of *Relevance* (Sperber & Wilson 1995) has split PR into two principles, cognitive PR and communicative PR. Relevance is a concept which plays a role both in cognition and in communication, but its extension is not exactly the same. As far as cognition is concerned, the key concept is **maximal relevance**: if cognition plays a crucial role in inference processes, then what triggers the search for the relevant information is the requirement for maximal relevance. In other words, human cognition is attracted by relevant information and is able to make a sharp distinction between relevant information and irrelevant information. But, the requirement for maximal relevance is balanced by what really happens in communication: How can addressees look for maximal relevance if speakers have no means to bring forth, together with his utterance, relevant information, or if they are reluctant to do so? The answer is that the communicative PR simply states that the presumption of optimal relevance is constrained by the speaker's abilities and preferences.

This shows why the audience looks for a relevant interpretation, that is, an interpretation that resembles the speaker's informative intention, even if his search for relevance can be complicated by the speaker's abilities and preferences.

If we turn back to intercultural communication and misunderstandings, we can draw a preliminary conclusion based on the general cause of ordinary misunderstanding:

Misunderstanding (general)

A misunderstanding is triggered, either intentionally or unintentionally, by the speaker's abilities and preferences, which allow erroneous interpretation by the audience.

Misunderstanding (intercultural)

An intercultural misunderstanding is due to an erroneous evaluation of the communicator's abilities and preferences by the audience.

In order to refine this claim, I will now introduce an additional concept from RT, the explicature/implicature distinction.

4. Explicit and implicit communication

Since Grice, pragmatic studies on linguistic communication have tackled one major issue: explaining how and why speakers do not literally convey their informative intentions. Many solutions have been proposed, two of them being very popular in the literature.

The first solution (Stalnaker 1977, van der Auwera 1979) resorts to the notion of *common background belief* to explain why linguistic communication does not need to be literal and explicit. Information belonging to the common background is not to be reset, and thus makes communication much more efficient.

The second solution (Atlas & Levinson 1981, Levinson 1983, 1987, 2000) relies on the notion of *noncontroversial statement* and *common ground* (maxim of relativity):

“Maxims of Relativity

1. Do not say what you believe to be highly noncontroversial, that is, to be entailed by the presumptions of the common ground.
2. Take what you hear to be lowly noncontroversial, that is, consistent with the presumptions of the common ground.” (Atlas & Levinson 1981, 40)

Both theories imply a *principle of economy* in verbal exchanges: speakers do not have to say what is presupposed to be true, that is, information belonging to the common ground. But neither of these maxims explains *why* it is more economical and efficient to behave like this. Sometimes, it is not; many *unsuccessful* instances of communications are caused by *not* having asserted what is presumed to belong to the common ground. Moreover, reference to common ground implies that background information is a necessary and sufficient condition for successful communication. As Sperber and Wilson (1982, 1986) have argued, common ground defined as mutual knowledge can be neither a necessary condition (otherwise communication should always be successful) nor a sufficient one (because background information can be inferred) for successful communication.

The answer to the question of non-literal communication must therefore be looked for elsewhere. In RT, non-literal communication does not contrast with literal communication in terms of *economy*, but in terms of *contingency*. Literal communication, defined as total overlap between the set of implications drawn from the thought of the speaker and the set of implications drawn from the speaker’s utterance, is a very uncommon case. The usual situation implies a partial overlap between these two sets of implications (analytical and contextual). Hence, in verbal communication, the normal state is one where the intended meaning is not literally communicated (and therefore not fully economical), but pragmatically inferred from (and therefore contingent on) contextual information and the utterance.

The crucial point for my argument is that *intended meaning is inferred rather than conveyed literally*. The point I would like to develop now is the nature of what is inferred. It will be shown that the nature of the inferred meaning is the key to the understanding of pragmatic misunderstanding in general, and to intercultural misunderstanding in particular.

Gricean and neo-Gricean pragmatics define inferred meaning as *conversational implicatures*, either generalized or particularized. This definition presupposes that

what is said in the utterance is not the speaker's meaning (what he wants to convey), but the sentence meaning (what his words linguistically means, Searle 1979), even if the literal meaning (sentence meaning plus background knowledge) is a by-product of linguistic meaning and of background assumptions.

I would like to propose the following assumption: what is inferred is not restricted to implicatures, but contributes to the explicatures of the utterance (Sperber & Wilson 1986, Wilson & Sperber 2004). An *explicature* results from the enrichment of logical form, that is, the propositional form of the utterance. A propositional form is a complete proposition, in which referents are attributed to referential expressions, and the sentence is disambiguated (*basic explicature* in Wilson & Sperber 2004). The explicit part of the intended meaning can be completed by *higher-level explicatures* which specify the illocutionary force of the utterance and the propositional attitude of the utterance. In (8), (9a) is the basic explicature and (5b) and (5c) the higher-level explicatures:

- (8) How should I go from the Airport to X?
- (9) a. Jacques is going from the Airport to X at 10 p.m. on Saturday, April 10.
 b. Jacques is asking how to get the Airport to X at 10 p.m. on Saturday, April 10.
 c. Jacques wants to know how to get from the Airport to X at 10 p.m. on Saturday, April 10.

Some aspects of the speaker's informative intention are not overt, but covert, and need some additional contextual premises to be understood. For instance, (10) is a typical implicated premise allowing the drawing of implicated conclusion (11):

- (10) a. If Jacques is asking how to get from Casablanca Airport to Rabat, then Jacques does not know how to go to Rabat from the airport.
 b. Jacques would prefer not to go to Rabat alone.
- (11) Jacques is asking for someone to pick him up at the airport in order to go to Rabat.

The analysis that gives the status of the implicated conclusion in (11), that is, the implicature status, will be more thoroughly discussed in section 5. What is relevant here for my argument is that some implicatures are strongly implicated, whereas other are weakly implicated. In RT, an implicature is strongly implicated if "its recovery is essential in order to arrive at an interpretation that satisfies the addressee's expectations of relevance" (Wilson & Sperber 2004, 620), whereas it is weakly implicated "if its recovery helps with the construction of such an interpretation, but is not itself essential because the utterance suggests a range of similar possible implicatures, any one of which would do" (*idem*).

So it seems that in order to recover the intended meaning, addressees have to pass through several stages, beginning with determining the explicature, and proceeding to the implicatures (implicated premises and implicated conclusions). This procedure has been fully described in Wilson & Sperber (2004, 615) as the sub-tasks in the overall comprehension process:

Sub-tasks in the overall comprehension process

- a. Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content (in relevance-theoretic terms, EXPLICATURES) via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes.

- b. Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumption (in relevance-theoretic terms, IMPLICATED PREMISES).
- c. Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications (in relevance-theoretic terms, IMPLICATED CONCLUSIONS).

The final relevance-theoretic concept that is required is a general comprehension procedure. One crucial issue for pragmatic theory is to explain why and when addressees stop processing, that is, why they do not seek further weak implicatures, and at what point they stop processing. For instance, the question is why my addressee, when processing (8) (*How should I go from the Airport to X?*) understood my informative intention as restricted to (9b) (*Jacques is asking how to get from the Airport to X at 10 p.m. on Saturday, April 10*) and not to (7) (*Jacques is asking for someone to pick him up at the airport in order to go to X*). RT gives a comprehension procedure, the path of least effort (Wilson & Sperber 2004, 613):

Relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure

- a. Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguation, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.
- b. Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.

We now possess all the necessary theoretical tools to return to our initial examples and to account for the nature of intercultural misunderstanding (section 5). However, before giving a pragmatic analysis of intercultural misunderstanding, I would like to provide a more precise description of how pragmatic misunderstandings work.

I would like to propose here a general model of pragmatic misunderstandings based on the hierarchy of levels of comprehension and on the RT-comprehension procedure. In order to arrive at a complete comprehension of a speaker's utterance, the addressee must access the following levels of comprehension:

Hierarchy of levels of comprehension

Access the following layers:

- a. basic explicature
- b. higher-level explicatures
- c. implicated premises
- d. strongly implicated conclusion
- e. weakly implicated conclusion.

This hierarchy does not imply a linear order of linguistic and pragmatic processing. Its main function is to define the minimal conditions for successful communication. My hypothesis is that the determination of the explicatures (basic **and** higher-level) is a minimal condition for the recovery of the speaker's informative intention.

This hierarchy allows to make several predictions about the relevant layers of meaning which play a role in intercultural communication:

Prediction about intercultural communication

1. *Basic explicature* is the minimal level of communication. If the development of basic explicature fails, then ordinary misunderstanding will occur.
2. *Higher-level explicature* is the middle level of communication. If the development of higher-level explicature fails, then strong misunderstanding will occur.

3. *Implicated premise* is the first higher-level of communication. As implicated premises require knowledge of the world, access to implicated premises can be made more difficult when social, cultural, and behavioural assumptions differ among speakers.
4. *Implicated conclusion* is the second higher-level of communication. As implicated conclusions are about speakers' intentions and the strength of their intended meaning, failure in recovery of strong implicature is worse than failure in recovery of weak implicature.

In other words, I predict that failure may occur at *any* of these levels, and that failure at a lower level is easier to resolve than failure at a higher-level. A minimal requirement for successful intercultural communication is the correct identification of basic and higher-level explicatures. The main purpose of the next section is to test this prediction.

5. A relevance-theoretic analysis of intercultural misunderstanding

As stated in the beginning of this paper, the first hypothesis which comes to mind is exactly the opposite: viz., that the cause of intercultural misunderstanding is a failure to recover implicatures.² I would now like to provide evidence for the main thesis of this paper and show that what speakers engaged in intercultural communication primarily need is to *access both basic and higher-level explicatures*. In other words, *explicatures, not implicatures, are the key level for communication in general and for intercultural communication in particular*.

Let's turn to the airport example, by giving it a more complete description. Here is the more complete record of the exchange of emails:

- (12) A: Bonjour, ma réservation d'avion est faite. J'arrive à Y le 10 avril à 20h40, et je repartirai de Y le 14 à 14h. Pouvez-vous me dire comment aller de l'aéroport à X? Je compte sur vous pour les réservations d'hôtel ou de logement à X....
- B: ...Pour ce qui est du transport de l'aéroport de Y à X, vous pourrez prendre un train à l'aéroport, avec un changement à la gare de Z et vous arriverez à la gare de X à 2 mn de l'Hôtel W où une chambre vous est réservée.
- A: Hello, my plane reservations have been made. I will arrive at Y on April 10 at 8:40 p.m., and will leave Y on 14 April at 2 p.m. Can you tell me how to get from Y Airport to X? I'm counting on you for the hotel reservation at X.
- B: ...Concerning travelling from Y Airport to X, you can take the train at the airport, with a change at Z station and you'll arrive at X downtown station, at 2 mn from the W where a room has been booked.

I would like to make two preliminary remarks. First of all, the exchange was rather explicit, and my Moroccan colleague's mastery of French was perfect. But the outcome of this example must be recalled. As a guest in Morocco, I did not know

² The implicature-thesis would imply that

- a. implicated premises are necessary to draw implicated conclusions, and
- b. strong and weak implicatures correspond to the speaker's informative intention.

This thesis locates intercultural misunderstandings (IM) in the non-mutual access of implicated premises, and describe IM as caused by different sets of (cultural) background knowledge. Conditions (a) and (b) make intercultural communication very improbable and difficult to success.

exactly how to proceed, and I was trying to get my addressee to understand my illocutionary point (Searle 1979), that is, to understand my utterance, repeated in (23), as conveying (24):

(13) Can you tell me how to get from Y Airport to X?

(14) Can you pick me up at the airport to go to X?

Here again, the “implicated premise” thesis could be mentioned as an explanation of why (13) conveys (14) through the implicated premises (15):

(15) a. Someone arriving in a foreign country needs some help.

b. To travel downtown alone from the airport at night is not a good idea.

c. To ask how to go from A to B is to ask for some help to go from A to B.

The crucial implicated premise is of course (15c), and at least in Western European culture, the role of the host is to manage and keep practical worries as minimal as possible.

The question is thus the following: why, in spite of the high accessibility of (15)³, is (14) not answered, and certainly not grasped? In other words, why is the implicated conclusion (16) not inferred?

(16) Jacques is asking for someone to pick him up at the airport to go to X.

Here is my answer. In order to understand this implicated conclusion, it would have been necessary for my addressee not to stop processing after obtaining the higher-level explicature (17):

(17) Jacques is asking how to go from the Airport to X.

It is important to remember the path of least effort that directs pragmatic processing and its second clause: “Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.” This leads to a preliminary answer: as soon as he grasped the higher-level explicature (27), my addressee achieved sufficient relevance to balance his cognitive process.

This analysis explains why a literal interpretation, based on a *higher-level explicature*, does not yield the implicated conclusion from the higher-level explicature and the implicated premise. But it does not say anything about the reasons why the speaker does not explicitly ask for some help at the airport, if he expects this.

Two reasons can be mentioned here. First, the speaker might be reluctant to express his wishes explicitly. Second, he may have thought that his intention was clear enough to be understood. Although the first reason is plausible, I will concentrate on the second one, which is much more interesting. There is an obvious fact that makes intercultural communication much more risky than in ordinary exchanges: *speakers share a higher-level use of language without belonging to the same culture*. This fact,

³ This is a minimal presumption due to the intentional stance (Dennett 1987). We give here our formulation taken from Reboul & Moeschler (1998, 47):

“The intentional stance (*stratégie de l’interprète*) consists of an individual predicting others’ behaviour from two simple premises:

1. Others are rational agents.
2. They have beliefs, desires and other mental states.”

far from harmless, can be fraught with danger. My hypothesis is therefore the following:

Intercultural misunderstanding (2)

In intercultural communication, the higher the level of mastery of the shared language, the greater the risk of attributing to the addressee the same beliefs and knowledge as one's own.

In this respect, the first definition for intercultural misunderstanding (misunderstandings are due to false inferences caused by false explicatures) now receives an explanation: if my addressee arrived at a relevant interpretation by inferring a higher-level explicature, his answer had as main consequence to avoid a further misunderstanding, because I realised that my addressee's answer was *not* a refusal to assist, i.e. he reached the appropriate higher-level explicature and went on to draw the appropriate implicature.

I will now propose a third and final definition of intercultural misunderstanding:

Intercultural misunderstanding (3)

Intercultural misunderstandings occur when false assumptions lead to false higher-level explicatures. False inferences deriving from higher-level explicatures are caused by false attributions of shared beliefs and knowledge.

In other words, intercultural misunderstandings do not simply come up because speakers do not share common beliefs and knowledge, but because they attribute beliefs and knowledge to each other which they in fact do not entertain. I want to emphasize that this situation is reinforced when speakers share a common language at a higher-level.

6. Conclusion: The empirical field of intercultural pragmatics

In conclusion I would like to make some proposals about what could be the empirical domain of intercultural pragmatics. Though I have given a general sketch of how intercultural misunderstandings could occur, in this last section, I would like to make some suggestions about how intercultural pragmatics could define new empirical fields for pragmatic studies.

As a guideline, I will use the "sub-tasks in the overall comprehension process" given in section 3, that is, the layers of explicitature, implicated premise and implicated conclusion.

To me, the first layer (*explicitature*) is the core layer for investigating intercultural pragmatics. Following are some arguments that show that it is a central issue.

The first domain to investigate is to what extent, in a given situation, speakers of different languages and cultures will use different means to convey their intention either explicitly or implicitly. For example, French culture is based on a way of communicating with implicatures whereas American culture tends to expect speakers to express their intentions much more explicitly. This issue is an extremely empirical one, and should be investigated with sound comparative methods. Diplomatic negotiation, trade, academic cooperation, as well as social contacts could benefit from such research.

The second domain of investigation would be that of indirect speech acts and the conventional/conversational way of conveying illocutionary forces. Here the possible convergence and divergence between languages and cultures allows the investigation of the relationship between types of illocutionary force (for instance, why and when a request for information becomes a request for help, etc.)

The second layer is *implicated premise*. In order to understand speakers' meaning it appears worth concentrating on the types as well as on the nature of implicated premise under specific settings (family, social relations, professional relations, politics, etc.). For instance, because of the ubiquitous nature of Hollywood movies, a person knows how to behave if an American policeman orders him to stop his car. But who would understand when a Kenyan policeman said:

(18) A page of your driving license is missing.

What is missing, in fact, is a bank note, but this cannot be understood unless the following implicated premise is accessible:

(19) Bribe is usually requested by a policeman.

The third layer is *implicated conclusion*. The relevant question here is not the nature of what is communicated explicitly or implicitly, but the nature of what is *strongly* or *weakly* implicated. Here intercultural pragmatics has the same goals as inferential pragmatics, as much work has been focused on the conventional/generalized conversational nature of implicatures. These aspects of pragmatic meaning are not simply lexical or non-lexical; they imply knowledge about the contexts in which they can be used.

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