How is explicit content generated: Free enrichment vs. contextual cognitive fix

While most, if not all, researchers studying verbal communication agree that there are (at least) two distinct levels that need to be considered in elucidating what speaker meaning involves, that is, explicit and implicit content, there is a lot of controversy about how the division between the two should be made and what criteria should be used to distinguish these two species of communicated content. The focus of the present paper is on explicitly communicated meaning. Adopting a relevance-theoretic approach to verbal communication, the paper challenges the procedure postulated to underlie explicature generation within this framework. It is argued that free enrichment, adopted in relevance theory (Carston 2002; Sperber and Wilson 1986/95, 1987; Wilson and Sperber 2004, 2012) and in other pragmatic frameworks (e.g. Recanati 2002, 2004) as a mechanism contributing to computing explicatures by inserting additional conceptual material into the decoded logical form should be abandoned in favour of a simpler and psychologically more plausible procedure, viz. contextual cognitive fix. The contextual cognitive fix mechanism is postulated to lead to the recovery of the explicit meaning as communicated by the speaker via relevant contextual indexing of the concepts recovered, so it involves zooming in on the specific meaning as conveyed in a given communicative situation. In other words, the underdetermined components are posited to get a fully determined denotation at the level of the interactant's thought by fixing on the relevant entities in the mutual cognitive environment of the speaker and the addressee. Thus contextual cognitive fix yields an explicature without adding any extra concepts to what is decoded, so it avoids creating "a cognitive burden" (Corazza and Dokic 2007: 176), at the same time eliminating the worrisome proliferation of explicatures. Contextual cognitive fix not only fully endorses the semantic underdeterminacy thesis (Carston 2002), but also offers a natural motivation for it: thought representations which provide an underlying trigger for communication and have the form of Mentalese formulas may embrace concepts which cannot be uniquely expressed by linguistic means. Utterances used to communicate thoughts merely represent them and each one can potentially communicate an infinite range of meanings, that is why the recipient necessarily needs to pin down the specific meaning as intended by the communicator. Contextual cognitive fix assumes that this kind of meaning precisification takes place at the language of thought level, in contrast to free enrichment, which takes explicatures to include some extra descriptive linguistic material. On the contextual cognitive fix construal, utterances and their interpretations are believed to represent two different kinds of meaning: the former realized through linguistic means and pertaining to natural language and the latter taking place at the language of thought and having the form of the language of thought formulas (cf. Jary 2016), since as Fodor (2003: 153) observed more than a decade ago, "[w]e think in Mentalese and communicate in English", and these are two very different systems and should be kept apart.

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