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INTRODUCTION

THREE DECADES OF RELEVANCE THEORY

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Almost three decades have elapsed since the publication of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's (1986) seminal and most influential book *Relevance. Communication and Cognition*, and exactly two since the publication of its second edition (Sperber and Wilson 1995). In them, the authors presented and revised a series of claims and principles about human verbal communication and the foundational postulates of what is now known as 'relevance theory'. Over all these years, their two books and numerous subsequent publications have given rise to a strand of research in pragmatics with a psychological basis and cognitive orientation. Often alluded to as 'relevance-theoretic pragmatics', this strand seeks to unravel how the mind processes utterances –and, more widely, discourse– the contribution of diverse linguistic elements (e.g., discourse markers, particles, adverbials, intonation, etc.) to comprehension, why the mind arrives at a particular interpretation and the effects that may follow from understanding utterances in one way or another.

Relevance theory has certainly awoken the interest of many pragmatists and linguists in general by posing many intriguing problems and thought-provoking questions. Relevance theorists' continuous challenging of often-taken-for-granted assumptions, claims, generalisations, and even whole models, has also brought fresher air to those disciplines. Indeed, they have analysed in depth a wide variety of linguistic and communicative phenomena from a different perspective and with a new theoretical apparatus, which has shed much light onto underexplored or overlooked issues.

This book celebrates these happiest anniversaries and, most importantly, the fact that relevance theory still continues to appeal to researchers, who find in it a very

valuable model for understanding the intricacies of linguistic communication. This is a collection of papers, which very sincerely acknowledges the extensive work carried out not only by the authors of the theory themselves, but also by a large number of researchers who have elaborated on some of its postulates and distinctions, empirically tested some of its predictions or applied the theory to diverse domains or neighbouring fields, thus expanding its scope. Consequently, a tribute of deepest gratitude is paid to all of them for their brave efforts to answer questions related to an incredibly complex human activity.

Ten papers are collected here. Five of them elaborate on issues that have traditionally concerned practitioners in relevance theory: the intentional nature of communication, how speakers guide hearers to recover intended meaning, how specific types of utterances or linguistic elements are interpreted, or the consequences of communication. Two papers apply the relevance-theoretic apparatus to account for features of some linguistic varieties or languages, thus helping to understand how they are structured and function. The remaining three papers present recent developments and further applications of the theory, as they consider *epistemic vigilance* mechanisms (Mascaro and Sperber 2009; Sperber et al. 2010). More precisely, those papers address the interaction of some linguistic elements with such mechanisms, explain their role in rhetoric and argumentation, or consider their importance in second language teaching and acquisition. Finally, the book concludes with a chapter that suggests possible future directions for research in relevance-theoretic pragmatics.

These works offer new insights and seek to fuel what can be considered an authentic revolution in pragmatics, particularly in its cognitive branch, which had scarcely been convulsed since the various publications on meaning and communication by philosopher of language Herbert Paul Grice. Although most of the chapters summarise essential postulates and explain the key notions they rely on, in what follows Sperber and Wilson's (1986/1995) views on communication, underlying assumptions, fundamental claims and basic concepts are presented. Since many readers will surely be familiarised with them, the following section is simply intended as a reminder. For those novel to the theory, this discussion supplies the necessary background that enables them to conveniently understand the works gathered here, as well as what relevance theory has meant. Next comes a review of research done in various areas from a relevance-theoretic perspective, which helps situate the chapters of this book in the wider panorama of relevance-theoretic pragmatics. Finally, this introductory chapter is closed with a description of the chapters.

1. The relevance-theoretic revolution

In a field like linguistics, where most theories, models and frameworks have been constantly revised, refined, questioned and eventually abandoned in favour of others, referring to the contribution made by a particular one as a 'revolution' might sound presumptuous and even biased. Undeniably, proponents of new theories, models and frameworks have always been encouraged by a perennial and daring interest in unraveling how linguistic systems are organised and how they work at the service of communication, as well as in overcoming limitations in prior approaches. In a relatively young discipline like pragmatics, scholars have incessantly attempted to grasp the enormous complexity of human verbal communication, where linguistic systems are put to use to convey information and achieve goals that may crucially impact on human relationships, and the outputs of such systems have to be processed by an until fairly recently practically unknown mechanism like the human mind.

Relevance theory originated as an exciting endeavour to find convincing answers to a series of only apparently simple and obvious questions for which many pragmatists could have thought there were final answers:

- How do humans understand each other?
- How do we arrive at a particular interpretation of what others say?
- What makes us end up with a specific interpretation of an utterance?
- Why do we select or reject an interpretation?

In their search for answers to these questions, Sperber and Wilson challenged many tacitly accepted assumptions about how languages are used, how the human mind works and what might happen in it while processing input. Thus, they seriously questioned the code model of communication, which was deeply entrenched in the western linguistic tradition, and showed its many drawbacks, gaps and inconsistencies.

Some progress had been made when the role of inference in communication was taken into consideration. Indeed, the also influential work by Grice (1957, 1975) – wherein relevance theory is rooted and to which it is greatly indebted – meant a huge leap. However, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) went well beyond the so-called Gricean pragmatics by proposing a model that draws from valuable insights from disciplines such as philosophy of mind, developmental psychology or cognitive anthropology, to name but some. Thus, relevance theory incorporated some of their notions and views to pragmatics in order to offer a profoundly cognitive, psychological perspective that has implications for the nature and role of semantics and pragmatics.

1.1. Intention, manifestness and cognitive environments

Like Grice (1975), Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) conceive of communication as an intentional activity, in which the speaker is prompted by two intentions: (i) her *informative* intention, which is her desire to make *manifest* to the audience a particular set of assumptions, and (ii) her *communicative* intention, which is her desire that the audience recognise that she actually has a particular informative intention. Recognising these two intentions requires *theory of mind* abilities –i.e., being able to attribute mental states to other individuals– and, therefore, *metarepresenting* the intentions and beliefs of others –i.e., creating representations of other public or private representations (Apperly 2012). These abilities make it possible for individuals to understand whether the communicator believes what she says is true –*first-order* mental states– or what the communicator knows the audience know, what the communicator intends the audience to believe, or what the communicator believes the audience believe –*second-order* mental states (Leekam 1991; Happé 1994; Sullivan et al. 1995; Sullivan et al. 2003; Wilson 2013). These layers of metarepresentation can be depicted as follows (Sperber 1994: 195):

Speaker intends (*attribution of communicative intention* - 4)
me to know (*communicative intention* - 3)
 that she intends (*attribution of informative intention* - 2)
 me to believe (*informative intention* - 1)
 that *p*

The notion of *manifestness* is a remarkable innovation. A certain fact or assumption is manifest to an individual at a certain time if that individual is capable of creating a mental representation of it and accepting that representation as true or probably true (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39). The set of facts or assumptions of which an individual actually has a mental representation at a certain moment, or of which he may potentially form a mental representation, make up his *cognitive environment*. If two (or more) individuals are capable of forming similar, though not completely identical, representations of the same physical or psychological objects, those individuals share a *mutual cognitive environment*.

Through the notion of manifestness Sperber and Wilson (1995: 18) overcome the drawbacks of notions like *common knowledge* (Lewis 1969) or *mutual knowledge* (Schiffer 1972), which implied that, for communication to succeed, individuals should mutually share a certain amount of knowledge. It is virtually impossible to distinguish the amount (and type) of knowledge that two (or more) individuals

merely share from the knowledge that is truly mutual. Perceptual systems and cognitive mechanisms act like filters and greatly determine what individuals perceive and how they represent it. What is more, checking that two (or more) individuals actually share some knowledge would require time-consuming and almost never-ending mental operations.

However, the innovativeness of relevance theory does not end here. Though sharing the Gricean view of communication as an intentional activity, Sperber and Wilson also react against some of Grice's (1957, 1975) own ideas by arguing that, instead of the *Cooperative Principle*, two other general principles govern human cognition and communication.

1.2. A theory based on two general principles

Although based on Gricean pragmatics, relevance theory builds on it by rejecting some of its foundational postulates. Grice (1957, 1975) claimed that the Cooperative Principle and a series of maxims –those of *quantity*, *quality*, *relevance* and *manner*– govern communication. Communicators may abide by, covertly violate or blatantly flout those maxims in order to convey implicit contents and achieve certain effects. Also, Grice (1975) acknowledged the existence of other maxims of a social or aesthetic nature, such as that of politeness, which led to some adherents to his ideas to elaborate on those maxims and suggest different models to account for (im)politeness (e.g., Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983). Others, in turn, modified the number or raised the status of the original maxims to that of principles (e.g., Horn 1996; Levinson 2000), thus giving rise to neo-Gricean approaches. However, the Cooperative Principle and its maxims seemed to be based on intuitions about communication and observations of a series of regularities.

Relevance theory, in contrast, is a post-Gricean model; it questions the existence of the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, since their origin is unclear, they do not seem to have universal validity and their operation seems to have different effects depending on circumstances (Wilson and Sperber 1991a: 381, 1991b: 586). If anything, the Gricean Principle and maxims would have the status of (cultural) norms, understood as “[...] internalised, unconscious patterns that the individual follows without even noticing that he is complying with an unwritten model” (Escandell Vidal 2004: 349).

Relying on a constant tendency that has propelled the evolution of the human species in general and the human mind in particular and greatly contributed to its efficiency –maximisation of gain in exchange of effort invested– Sperber and Wilson

reject the Cooperative Principle and its maxims and propose two very general principles that govern communication and cognition¹. Indeed, by ‘principle’ they understand a formalization of how a particular system works; in other words, a “[...] causal, mechanical explanation” (Escandell Vidal 2004: 349). These two principles are the *cognitive* and *communicative* principles of *relevance*. The former states that human cognition is geared towards the maximization of relevance and is argued to reflect how the human mind functions. The latter, in turn, claims that every act of intentional communication communicates a *presumption* of its own *optimal relevance*. This second principle operates in all cases of intentional communication and is responsible for the selection of an interpretation out of the many possible ones that an utterance may have:

Communicators and audience need no more know the principle of relevance to communicate than they need to know the principles of genetics to reproduce. Communicators do not ‘follow’ the principle of relevance; and they could not violate it even if they wanted to. The principle of relevance applies without exception [...] It is not the general principle, but the fact that a particular presumption of relevance has been communicated by and about a particular act of communication, that the audience uses in inferential comprehension. (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 162)

These two new principles are based on the notion of ‘relevance’, which is the true cornerstone of the theory. Sperber and Wilson also characterise this notion in more precise terms than Grice (1957, 1975) actually did.

1.3. An underlying key notion

Grice (1975) included the maxim of relation and worded it as “be relevant”, but unfortunately he did not define what he took ‘relevance’ to be, nor did he clearly explain its role in communication. In contrast, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) portray relevance as a property of the stimuli individuals produce and, therefore, of a very special sub-set thereof: utterances. They define it on the basis of two factors:

- (i) The positive *cognitive effects* that information yields, or the improvements to our mental representation of the world or set of beliefs about it. Those improvements may be strengthening of previous beliefs, contradiction and eventual rejection of those beliefs or the formation of new beliefs from the interaction of previous ones with new information.

¹ In their 1986 work Sperber and Wilson only proposed a single principle.

- (ii) The *processing* or *cognitive effort* required by an item of information. This depends on the complexity of the linguistic form of the utterance that conveys that item of information (i.e., its syntactic structure, lexical items, etc.) or the effort of memory needed to retrieve or select a suitable context for processing it.

These two factors are also essential for understanding what the presumption of optimal relevance involves: (a) utterances will normally be relevant enough –i.e., they will result in enough cognitive effects– for the hearer to decide to invest the cognitive effort necessary to process them, and (ii) the formulation of utterances will normally be the one the speaker thinks, given her abilities and preferences, will result in a satisfactory amount of cognitive effects (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 270). The first part of this presumption means that hearers normally expect some cognitive reward which they cannot obtain otherwise, i.e., *positive* cognitive effects or “[...] a worthwhile difference to [their] representation of the world [...]” (Wilson and Sperber 2002: 251). In turn, the second part means that the speaker will normally be interested in producing utterances that are easily comprehensible and provide the hearer with enough evidences for the intended cognitive effects or additional cognitive effects rendering utterances optimally relevant (Wilson and Sperber 2002: 256-257). Nevertheless, the speaker’s performance will depend on her own cognitive skills and capabilities, which may be conditioned by absentmindedness, tiredness, boredom, etc., and her goals, among which is complying with norms dictating, for instance, register, amount or type of information to dispense, formality, etc. (Mazzarella 2013: 33-35).

In addition to the two principles of relevance, Sperber and Wilson (1995: 166) initially proposed a *criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance*, according to which an interpretation is consistent with the principle of relevance if, and only if, the speaker expects it to be optimally relevant. This means that, if the hearer finds an interpretative hypothesis optimally relevant, he should not think that the speaker intended a particular utterance to be optimally relevant under another interpretation. The hearer will think that an interpretative hypothesis was intended upon checking that it yields enough cognitive effects that offset a reasonable amount of cognitive effort.

By clearly defining relevance and arguing that the constant search for optimal relevance governs human cognition and communication, Sperber and Wilson go well beyond Gricean pragmatics. However, as pointed out, relevance theory also reacts against the well-established *code model* of communication. Indeed, Sperber and Wilson conceive of communication as a human activity requiring a great amount inference, which has significant implications for understanding the role of semantics and pragmatics.

1.4. A new conception of communication

The code model metaphorically depicted communication as a process in which the code enables the speaker to package her thoughts (i.e., encoding) in a parcel (i.e., utterance) and send it over to the hearer (i.e., articulating and speaking). The hearer's task is to open that parcel and match the encoded input to corresponding semantic representations (i.e., decoding) in order to decipher, so to say, what the speaker means. However, the code alone does not suffice to arrive at speaker meaning: not everything that the speaker means is encoded and there is no guarantee that the hearer interprets what she means correctly (Wilson and Sperber 1991b: 584-585; Sperber and Wilson 1995: 27).

Hearers have to segment sounds and delimit words; parse and disambiguate constituents; narrow or broaden concepts; assign reference to some expressions; recover elided linguistic material; determine the attitude the speaker projects towards the proposition expressed, her degree of certainty about it or if she is performing a certain action, and supply any assumption that is necessary for arriving at implicit contents. All these tasks rely on inference, so Sperber and Wilson (1987: 698, 1995: 10) opt for describing communication as an *ostensive-inferential* activity. It is 'ostensive' because the speaker shows something to the hearer –an utterance, which is indirect evidence for her communicative intention– and uses it to attract and direct the hearer's attention to something: her informative intention. Communication is 'inferential' because the hearer has to work out the speaker's meaning and her underlying intention when drawing the hearer's attention².

Grice (1957, 1975) emphasised the reliance of communication on inference, but he envisaged its role as limited to the determination of the spatio-temporal coordinates of an utterance, assignment of reference to some expressions and recovery of the implicit contents. Accordingly, hearers arrive at 'what is said' through decoding and very little inference, while arriving at 'what is implied' greatly depend on inference. This unveils a view of the role of semantics and pragmatics in communication in which the former contributes to the recovery of the proposition expressed, while the latter was crucial for arriving at implicit contents (Wilson and Sperber 1993: 3). On the contrary, by proving that inference intervenes in all the

² As a cognitive-pragmatic model, relevance theory focuses on comprehension and aims to account for how hearers arrive at speaker's meaning through a series of simultaneous inferential tasks. This should not mean that Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) are not aware of the crucial role that inference plays in production.

tasks listed above, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) present a more intricate picture of comprehension where pragmatic processes are indispensable for the recovery of explicit content.

Showing that communication involves much more than an encoding-decoding process also leads Sperber and Wilson to contend that individuals may use utterances in order not to simply pack and send over their own thoughts. By means of utterances communicators may reproduce words or phrases, represent diverse states of affairs and even allude to the thoughts of other people.

1.5. Utterances as metarepresentations

Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) believe that individuals can employ any natural or artificial phenomenon in order to represent another phenomenon it somehow resembles in certain respects. By means of utterances, which are public representations –i.e., perceptible, audible– individuals represent their own private, mental representations. Moreover, utterances may represent existing or desirable states of affairs or the thoughts or representations that an individual thinks another individual, or group of individuals, entertains. This is the basis for Sperber and Wilson's (1995: 228-232) distinction between *descriptive* and *interpretive* dimensions of language usage.

Since utterances are representations of representations, they have *metarepresentational uses* (Noh 2000). One of these is *metalinguistic*, when utterances publicly reproduce other public representations like words, phrases or utterances, or their logical or conceptual content. Clear examples are direct speech and quotations. Another metarepresentational use is *interpretive*, when utterances publicly resemble other public or private representations, like other utterances or thoughts. A typical example is indirect speech.

Furthermore, if utterances metarepresent the thoughts or utterances that (an)other individual(s) entertain(s) or say(s), they are used *attributively* or function as *attributive* metarepresentations, as the source of those thoughts or utterances can be identified more or less easily (Wilson 1999: 148). In contrast, if utterances only represent a word, phrase or sentence produced by an unidentifiable source, they work as *non-attributive* metarepresentations. Examples of non-attributive metarepresentations are (Wilson and Sperber 1988; Wilson 1999):

- a) Negative and disjunctive sentences, which metarepresent possible information or thoughts.
- b) Interrogative and exclamative sentences. These metarepresent desirable information or thoughts. Interrogatives are requests for information if the

speaker metarepresents an answer that the hearer can give, while they are offers of information if the speaker metarepresents an answer that she can give to the hearer.

- c) Imperative sentences. If the speaker metarepresents a state of affairs as desirable from her own viewpoint, they work as requests; if she metarepresents a state of affairs as desirable from the hearer's viewpoint, they work as suggestions.

When metarepresenting another individual's thoughts or words, the speaker may also express an attitude to them, so the utterance becomes *echoic*. The attitudes that the speaker may express are numerous, as she may "[...] indicate that she agrees or disagrees with the original, is puzzled, angry, amused, intrigued, sceptical, etc.; or any combination of these" (Wilson 1999: 147). However, three attitudes seem to be essential for understanding some types of utterances: *endorsing*, *questioning* and *dissociative/rejecting*. This last one is characteristic of irony, which Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) analyse as a case of *echoic attributive metarepresentation*. An utterance is interpreted as ironic if the hearer identifies (i) that the speaker echoes her own or somebody else's thoughts or words, (ii) the source of those thoughts or words and (iii) that the speaker dissociates from or rejects those thoughts or words. This analysis of irony contrasts with both the classical and Gricean definitions, as well as with other more recent treatments in pragmatics and psychology.

Understanding utterances, then, involves much more than identifying words or arranging these in constituents. Hearers have to adjust concepts, assign reference, recover material that is not overtly present and, very importantly, determine the attitude the speaker projects towards what she says or whether what the speaker says is her own thoughts or somebody else's thoughts. As pointed out, all these tasks rely on inference, so Sperber and Wilson depict comprehension as a process in which the constant search for relevance causes the human make various inferences at the same time and at an incredibly fast pace.

1.6. A new picture of comprehension

Decoding only yields a set of conceptual representations or *logical form*, which is not fully propositional and needs enriching through inference. Inferential enrichment amounts to performing (some of) the tasks listed above and results in the *explicature* of an utterance. This is the explicit content communicated by an utterance. This content can be related to any information that the hearer thinks that the speaker intends or expects him to access –i.e., *implicated premises*– in order to arrive at some implicated content –i.e., *implicated conclusions*. Both implicated premises and

conclusions amount to the utterance implicit content and are often alluded to by the umbrella term ‘implicatures’. These are *strong* if the hearer has enough evidence to think that the speaker expects him to access or draw them, and *weak* if the hearer lacks enough evidence, so they may be contents that the speaker derives at his own responsibility (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 199-200).

The comprehension or pragmatic module does not perform all these inferential tasks sequentially, but holistically³. It processes linguistic input and generates interpretative hypotheses by simultaneously decoding, considering possible disambiguations, conceptual adjustments and reference-assignments; looking for elided constituents, constructing possible speech-act or propositional-attitude descriptions, searching for implicated premises and anticipating possible implicated conclusions. As a result, utterance comprehension can be described as a process of *mutual adjustment* of both explicit and implicit content (Carston 2002; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004). Whether its outcomes is one or another depends on considerations about which option might result in a satisfactory number of cognitive effects in exchange of a reasonable amount of cognitive effort. This means that the pragmatic module does not search for the most relevant outcome, which would involve constructing all the possible interpretative hypotheses and assessing them.

From this picture of comprehension follows the *relevance-theoretic comprehension heuristics*, which captures how the mind works in comprehension. Accordingly, hearers follow the path of least effort when adjusting explicit and implicit content of utterances, thus formulating interpretative hypotheses, and stop when their expectations of relevance are satisfied (Wilson 1999: 136; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004: 612). It is reasonable for hearers to do so because they will normally expect speakers, depending on their abilities and preferences, to formulate utterances in an easy and straightforward manner (Wilson and Sperber 2002: 259). Since relevance decreases as cognitive effort increases, hearers will very likely regard a particular interpretative hypothesis as intended if they can easily construct it. Moreover, it is reasonable for hearers to stop when an interpretative hypothesis satisfies their expectations of relevance because there should only be one optimally relevant interpretation. Two (or more) optimally relevant interpretations would detract from optimal relevance, as hearers will have to invest the additional effort to assess them⁴.

³ Like other modules, it has a very specific domain of action, is mandatory and works in a fast and frugal manner (Fodor 1983).

⁴ See Allot (2002) for a discussion on rationality and the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure.

1.7. A new conception of the role of the speaker

The very nature of inference does not guarantee that the outcome of mutual adjustment is the expected or intended one. The audience may misunderstand the speaker if they fail at any of the tasks involved (Yus Ramos 1999a, 1999b). However, communicators may guide the audience to the intended interpretations by means of their linguistic or expressive choices, thus ensuring that the audience understand them correctly. Style is therefore seen by Sperber and Wilson (1995: 219) as consequence of the communicator's willingness to be optimally relevant and assist the audience in comprehension. Speakers may take advantage of linguistic repertoires in order to generate specific cognitive effects that hearers could not obtain otherwise.

Formulations of a specific message that turn out indirect, lengthy, repetitive, and probably costlier in terms of processing effort, may evidence the speaker's desire to communicate (a wide array of) weak implicatures that contribute to optimal relevance. Among those implicatures, hearers may deduce information about how the speaker feels about a particular state of affairs, the reasons why the speaker phrases her message in a particular manner, how she treats the audience, their social relationship, etc. Weak implicatures like those would be of a *behavioural* nature (Jary 2013) and their derivation is essential for understanding phenomena like (im)politeness or literary communication (Pilkington 2000).

1.8. The conceptual/procedural distinction

Communication may now be metaphorically described as a ball where the speaker initially takes the lead in her conversational turn and then passes it to the hearer, who will take it in his turn and pass it back to the speaker again. As this exchange of turns takes place, meaning progressively emerges and is confirmed or negotiated. Although speakers and hearers collaborate in the joint endeavor of co-constructing meaning, the former can also assist the latter in their interpretative tasks.

Speakers can direct hearers' attention to specific sets of assumptions, or bring to the fore those they expect hearers to exploit, by means of the *conceptual* items in utterances. Thus, speakers help hearers select the mental context wherein to interpret what is said and, if necessary, figure out the premises necessary to arrive at implicit contents. On the other hand, speakers can also indicate how hearers should assign reference to some expressions, relate diverse items of information or construct adequate descriptions capturing their attitude to the proposition expressed, their degree of (un)certainly about it or what they intend to achieve with their words. This is possible because a variety of linguistic elements encode *procedural* meaning:

instructions that the comprehension module follows when computing information, which somehow impose constraints on inferences.

The distinction between *conceptual* and *procedural* expressions has been another major contribution of relevance theory and has led a number of scholars to analyse a series of expressions accordingly. Nouns, verbs and adjectives encode conceptual content, even if that content is amenable to subsequent adjustment resulting in what is known as *ad hoc* concepts: one-off, occasion-specific concepts. In contrast, discourse markers encode procedures that indicate the relationships between specific propositions and, therefore, steer the comprehension module toward one direction or another. The notion of procedural meaning enables practitioners in relevance-theoretic pragmatics to overcome drawbacks of the Gricean distinction between *conversational* and *conventional* implicatures, the latter of which were thought to result from the linguistically encoded material.

Some procedural elements like proper names and personal pronouns encode some conceptual content, even if schematic (Wilson and Sperber 1993)⁵. That conceptual content is integrated in the lower-level explicatures of an utterance together with the concepts encoded by other words. In contrast, the conceptual content of other expressions like attitudinal adverbials (e.g., ‘happily’, ‘unfortunately’), illocutionary adverbials (e.g., ‘frankly’, ‘seriously’), evidential adverbials (e.g., ‘obviously’, ‘evidently’), *hearsay* adverbials (e.g., ‘allegedly’, ‘reportedly’), and some parenthetical expressions (e.g., ‘they say’, ‘I hear’) becomes part of higher-level explicatures. While attitudinal and illocutionary adverbials indicate to hearers the sort of attitudinal description under which they must embed the proposition expressed, evidential and hearsay adverbials and parenthetical elements indicate whether the speaker has or lacks adequate evidence about the information dispensed (Wilson and Sperber 1993; Wilson 1999).

2. Research within relevance-theoretic pragmatics

In a paper published on the occasion of the first decade of relevance theory –the title of this chapter is clearly inspired by it– Yus Ramos (1998) extensively reviewed the contributions made by relevance theorists thus far. The publication of the theory was followed by some special issues in journals (e.g. Smith and Wilson 1992; Wilson and Smith 1993; Mateo Martínez and Yus Ramos 1998). An edited collection presented diverse applications and implications to understand irony, metaphor, metonymy, hearsay particles, some adverbials or scalar implicatures (Carston and Uchida 1998), while another presented in-depth analyses of the

⁵ Note, however, that some authors consider pronouns to be purely procedural items (e.g., Scott, in press).

conceptual/procedural distinction, intonation, focus phenomena, semantically underdetermined linguistic forms or the role of pragmatic inference (Rouchota and Jucker 1998). The theory was also applied to literary communication (e.g., Pilkington 1991, 1992), media discourse (e.g., Yus Ramos 1995, 1997, 1998), translation (e.g., Gutt 1989, 1991) or humour (e.g., Jodłowiec 1991; Curcó 1995, 1996, 1997; Yus Ramos 1997, 1998). And a notable bulk of research centred on grammar and discourse, addressing issues such as:

- discourse markers (e.g., Blakemore 1987, 1988, 1989; Jucker 1993; Moeschler 1993; Rouchota 1995);
- different types of adverbials and particles (e.g., Blass 1989, 1990; Ifantidou 1992, 1993; Itani 1994; Imai 1998);
- mood (e.g., Wilson and Sperber 1988, 1993; Clark 1993; Rouchota 1994) and modality (e.g., Berbeira Gardón 1993, 1998; Groefsema 1995);
- tense and aspect (e.g., Moeschler 1993; Wilson and Sperber 1993), or
- reformulations (Blakemore 1992, 1993, 1994).

Research from a relevance-theoretic perspective has continued with renewed enthusiasm and a vivid impetus. The prominence given to the role of inference in the determination of the explicit content of utterances led Carston (2002) to collect and profoundly revise a series of her most illuminating works on the pragmatics of explicit communication. Her ideas were also celebrated years later with the publication of another volume that showed their explanatory potential (Soria and Romero 2010). Quite similarly, the evolution of the theory subsequently encouraged other scholars to revisit issues like literary communication (Pilkington 2000; Unger 2006), evidentiality (Ifantidou 2001), particles (Iten 2002), humour (Yus Ramos 2003, 2008, 2013, 2016; Solska 2012), discourse markers (Blakemore 2002; Hall 2007), figurative speech (Vega Moreno 2007), intonation or paralanguage (Wilson and Wharton 2006; Wharton 2009). The resulting adjustments of the theory have also been presented in a series of works by Wilson and Sperber (2002, 2004, 2012).

Later innovations, applications and suggestions for further research have also been included in some manuals, which make the theory accessible to students and novel researchers (e.g., Blakemore 1992; Yus Ramos 1997; Clark 2013). For the sake of exemplification, suffice it to mention those in areas like:

- misunderstanding (e.g., Yus Ramos 1999a, 1999b; Jodłowiec 2008) and pragmatic failure (e.g., Padilla Cruz 2013a, 2014);
- phatic communion (e.g., Žegarac 1998; Žegarac and Clark 1999a, 1999b; Padilla Cruz 2005a, 2007a, 2007b);
- (im)politeness (e.g., Escandell Vidal 1996, 1998; Jary 1998a, 1998b, 2013);
- historical linguistics (e.g., Ruiz Moneva 1997; Padilla Cruz 2003, 2005b);
- language acquisition, pragmatic competence and interlanguage pragmatic development (e.g., Padilla Cruz 2013b; Ifantidou 2014);

- computer-mediated communication (e.g., Yus Ramos 2001, 2010, 2011);
- expressive meaning (e.g., Moeschler 2009; Blakemore 2011; Piskorska 2012a);
- communication disorders and clinical pragmatics (e.g., Papp 2006; Leinonen and Ryder 2008; Wearing 2010), or
- the relationship between epistemic vigilance and understanding (e.g., Mascaro and Sperber 2009; Sperber et al. 2010; Padilla Cruz 2012; Mazzarella 2013, 2015).

The latest directions relevance theory has taken can also be seen in other more recent edited collections. These gather works which delve into the conceptual/procedural distinction, the nature and role of ad hoc concepts, lexical pragmatics, the role of context and metarepresentation, the role of valence, phatic communion, focal stress, the interactions of modality and evidentiality with epistemic vigilance, humour, (im)politeness, miscommunication, interjections and response cries, various speech acts, emotions, implicit communication, translation or style (Mioduszevska 2004; Korzeniowska and Grzegorzewska 2005; Wałaszewska, Kisiełewska-Krysiuk and Piskorska 2010; Escandell Vidal, Leonetti and Ahern 2011; Piskorska 2012b; Wałaszewska and Piskorska 2012; Wałaszewska 2015). Finally, one more volume will soon present new applications to computer-mediated discourse, psychotherapeutic discourse, literary discourse, humorous discourse, lexical pragmatics or morphology (Wałaszewska and Piskorska, in press).

The list of topics and references given here is obviously far from exhaustive, but it seeks to give an idea of the impressive amount of work done or in progress, to which the chapters gathered in this book purport to add up. Readers will certainly gain access to more specific references in databases, bibliographic repositories or catalogues, as well as on the “Relevance Theory Online Bibliographic Service”. Created some years ago and monthly updated by Yus Ramos (<http://personal.ua.es/francisco.yus/rt2.html>), this service facilitates access to an immense number of works through an index of authors in alphabetical order or a list of thematic sections.

3. This book

This collection is divided in four parts on the basis of common thematic threads: procedural meaning, discourse issues, interpretive processes, and the rhetorical and perlocutionary effects of communication. Although, as shown in the preceding section, the range of interests of relevance theorists is quite wide, the parts in which

this volume is divided address topics that have traditionally intrigued them and areas where significant contributions and progresses are being made. Moreover, although the chapters in each part delve into specific issues or phenomena, they have different orientations and implications for fields as diverse as linguistic description, morphology, machine translation, rhetoric and argumentation, or interlanguage pragmatic development.

3.1. Issues on procedural meaning and procedural analyses

The first part groups four papers that rely on the notion of procedural meaning. The first two papers look into the interaction of procedural elements with intonation, thus broadening the scope of procedural analyses, while the third paper presents what can be considered a traditional relevance-theoretic procedural analysis of some linguistic elements in an African language, thus contributing to its description. Finally, one paper explores the procedural meaning of verbal tenses and shows the usefulness of procedural analyses for a field like machine translation.

The first chapter is “The speaker’s derivational intention”, by Thorstein Fretheim. Based on the notion of *derivational intention*, which alludes to the route the audience should follow in order to reach the content of the speaker’s informative intention, this chapter shows the usefulness of that notion and argues that it cannot be separated from that of informative intention. Fretheim claims that the speaker’s derivational intention is constrained by encoded conceptual semantics and encoded procedural semantics alike. However, a given piece of procedural information may be at odds with the speaker’s derivational intention in a given context, and hence with her informative intention. Accordingly, he contends that the procedural meaning encoded by one expression may override and set aside the procedural meaning encoded by a co-occurring expression, if there is an intuitively felt conflict between the constraints on interpretation that the two expressions encode. In such cases, the more powerful procedural constraint is consonant with the speaker’s derivational intention and the less powerful procedural constraint is not.

By means of two sections on the pragmatic functions of certain intonational phenomena in Norwegian, Fretheim illustrates how native speakers differently ranked co-occurring procedural constraints on pragmatic interpretation. This caused their audience to adhere to the procedural information conveyed by the expression with the higher rank and to disregard the information coming from the more modestly ranked encoder of procedural meaning. The first section reports on results from a listening comprehension experiment. It showed that the more highly ranked

procedural constraint prevailed. The second section discusses the extent to which Optimality Theory may be a suitable framework for handling conflicts between co-occurring procedural constraints.

The second chapter is “Cracking the chestnut: How intonation interacts with procedural meaning in Colloquial Singapore English *lah*”, by Lee Junwen and Kim Chonghyuck. Also assuming that procedural meaning may interact with intonation, it looks into the different pragmatic functions of this particle, which are argued to result from the interaction between its unitary semantic meaning and the effect of pitch. This chapter questions previous analyses of this particle as a marker of solidarity, warmth or informality, attenuation or emphasis, assertion or accommodation. Due to the variety of pitch contours with which this particle can be pronounced, it had generally been regarded as either a set of homonymic variants, or as a unitary particle with a monolithic meaning despite tonal differences.

For Junwen and Chonghyuck, ‘lah’ describes the preceding proposition as being of high strength. The falling tone characteristic of declaratives leads the hearer to interpret that proposition as referring to an actual situation, while the rising tone characteristic of interrogatives leads him to interpret it as alluding to a desirable thought. The various pragmatic functions ascribable to ‘lah’ then arise as a consequence of processing. Additionally, this chapter accounts for a particularly troublesome phenomenon: the ability of ‘lah’ to pragmatically strengthen declaratives but to weaken imperatives. Through the chapter, its authors show that relevance theory provides a useful framework for analysing the effect of intonation on the processing of this discourse particle, which opens up new ways of characterising other particles in Singapore English.

In “Reference assignment in pronominal argument languages: A relevance-theoretic perspective”, Helga Schröder adheres to the relevance-theoretic view that reference assignment is part of the process of explicature construction and that pronominal expressions procedurally constrain it (Wilson and Sperber 1993; Sperber and Wilson 1995). By instructing hearers to pick out a reference, pronominals contribute to the computational side of comprehension. Based on data from Toposa, an Eastern Nilotic language spoken in South Sudan, and Kiswahili, spoken in Kenya, Schröder demonstrates that two procedures are involved in reference assignment in African pronominal argument languages: an incorporated pronoun in the verb helps identify the referent, while that pronoun in the verb helps an attributive expression achieve referential status.

Quite often, African languages do not mark their nominal expressions for definiteness or indefiniteness, so they enter the conversation as undetermined. Disambiguation of such expressions requires pragmatic enrichment. Those

languages seem to follow a ‘double-strategy’ in terms of reference assignment. Pronominals can be marked in the verb or occur independently. Independent pronouns do not encode procedural information guiding the selection of the correct referent, whereas incorporated pronouns do. Processing independent pronouns, Schröder concludes, requires extra effort but yields cognitive effects related to focus identification and contrastive focus.

The last paper in this part has an empirical orientation and combines corpus work and linguistic experiments. In “Conceptual and procedural information for verb tense disambiguation: The English simple past”, Cristina Grisot, Bruno Cartoni and Jacques Moeschler seek to elucidate which features should be included in a model explaining and predicting cross-linguistic variation in the translation of tenses. Thus, the authors also try to explain how a source language verb tenses may be disambiguated in order to choose from among different translation possibilities and which features could contribute to improving the output of Statistical Machine Translation systems.

Corpus analysis reveals a lack of correspondence between English and French tenses. One of the most frequent divergences is that of the English simple past. Its semantic and pragmatic domains may be rendered in French through three tenses: *passé composé*, *passé simple* and *imparfait*. The authors assume that the conceptual and procedural contents of the English simple past can be used as disambiguation criteria in order to search for a French equivalent. They test this hypothesis through annotation experiments, whose results partially confirm their hypothesis.

3.2. Discourse issues

The two chapters in the second part of this book are connected by the fact that they address discourse. While the first chapter deals with the clues that hearers can rely on in order to perceive discourse as ironical, the second one analyses how specific manifestations of discourse, namely, rhetorical and ironical questions, may be distinguished. Obviously, these two chapters are further connected by the fact that they address irony from a relevance-theoretic perspective.

Francisco Yus Ramos had previously argued that irony comprehension involves the simultaneous or sequential activation of one or several contextual sources. A successful activation of these sources, especially the saturation of information that they may give rise to, leads to the so-called “criterion of optimal accessibility to irony”. Also, the simultaneous or sequential activation of these sources generates a number of prototypical cases in the comprehension of irony. This view of irony, the author thinks, is fully compatible with the extant relevance-theoretic approach based on the idea that irony is a case of echoic metarepresentational use of language, in

which the speaker expresses a dissociative attitude towards certain words or thoughts attributable to some other (group of) individual(s).

In “Relevance theory and contextual sources-centred analysis of irony: Current research and compatibility”, Francisco Yus Ramos has two aims. On the one hand, he checks whether those prototypical cases of irony are still valid and do cover all the possible ironic situations, together with the introduction of a more fine-grained notion of *narrowed cognitive environment*. On the other hand, he assesses to what extent his approach fits the latest relevance-theoretic research on irony such as the one involving different types of metarepresentation that are activated in successful irony comprehension.

Next, “Distinguishing rhetorical from ironical questions: A relevance-theoretic account”, by Thierry Raeber, aims to offer criteria for differentiating rhetorical from ironical questions. Some of their features have been conflated on the grounds of the interpretative effects ironical questions seem to yield. Indeed, ironical questions have often been regarded as subtypes of rhetorical questions (Bonhomme 2005), or vice versa, rhetorical questions have been considered as subtypes of ironical questions (Gibbs 2000) owing to the obvious answer they call for, their persuasive power and the cognitive effects they result in.

However, Raeber suggests that rhetorical and ironical questions are to be distinguished because the former implicitly assert a proposition bearing relevance – in most cases the answer itself or its consequences – while such implicit proposition, though manifest to the hearer, is not relevant at all by itself in ironical questions. The proposition implicitly rhetorical questions assert is recoverable thanks to a biased choice of answer. In contrast, ironical questions exhibit their in-context inaccuracy, thus giving rise to specific effects resulting from the contextual absurdity of pragmatic expectations, which are to be mobilized in order to motivate the question. Accordingly, Raeber proposes that failure at satisfying the hearer’s expectations of relevance triggers the attitudinal, non-propositional effects associated with ironical questions.

3.3. Interpretive processes

The third part of the book includes two chapters that consider interpretation. While the first one centres on the interpretive processes by learners of a second language, the second one analyses how different linguistic elements are put to work in order to guide interpretation. The first chapter shows that relevance theory has significant implications for, and very helpful applications to, the field of interlanguage

pragmatics. The second chapter, in turn, offers interesting insights into evidentials. Furthermore, both chapters are connected by the fact that, although in different domains, they take into account the role of epistemic vigilance mechanisms. These mechanisms have recently started to attract the interest of relevance theorists and are currently receiving due attention from them, as these works show.

Assuming that little attention has been paid to the cognitive underpinnings of L2 learners' pragmatic competence, Elly Ifantidou addresses the role of vigilance mechanisms in interlanguage pragmatic development in "Relevance theory, epistemic vigilance and pragmatic competence". The author evaluates the effect of explicit pragmatic instruction in an EFL academic context and of language proficiency on learners' metapragmatic awareness. This is an empirical study which considers different conditions of treatment, as determined by type of pragmatic input and level of language proficiency. It compares data from three groups of undergraduate students of English Language and Literature, which are used as control and experimental groups.

Through newspaper editorials, Ifantidou examines how learners may exercise epistemic vigilance towards the source of information and thus avoid being accidentally or intentionally misinformed. In the metapragmatic awareness task she administered, learners relied on (i) relevance-theoretic mechanisms for comprehension of content and search for relevance, and (ii) epistemic vigilance for acceptance of both the content and source of communicated information. Since understanding is a precondition, even though not sufficient, for believing (Sperber et al. 2010: 368; Wilson 2010), learners' pragmatic competence may benefit from sophisticated mindreading if they exercise epistemic vigilance towards the informant's (i.e., newspaper journalist's) epistemic states (e.g., acceptance, doubt, rejection) and intentions (e.g., to inform, to mislead). Therefore, the development of L2 learners' pragmatic competence is contingent on the development of their epistemic vigilance mechanisms.

The second paper analyses the interaction of epistemic vigilance with genre and evidentials –i.e., grammatical elements indicating the type of evidence the speaker has for making a statement. Authored by Christoph Unger, "Evidentials, genre and epistemic vigilance" shows that existing accounts have mainly explored the contribution of these elements to comprehension of speaker's meaning. However, communicators may exploit evidentials in order to indicate that they are competent in distinguishing their information sources (Wilson 2011). Hence, evidentials help communicators portray themselves as trustworthy individuals and enable the audience to evaluate the evidential status of the communicated information.

Drawing from Wilson (2011), Unger argues that evidentials may be used as genre indicators. Indeed, Aikhenvald (2004) had shown that reported evidentials very often appear in traditional narratives. This suggests that reported evidentials and traditional narrative genres may be conventionally related. Accordingly, the author contends that, as opposed to general markers of metarepresentational use and other indicators of information source, true reported evidentials raise the activation of a whole array of cognitive mechanisms specialised in checking support and coherence of the communicated content with existing beliefs. Furthermore, the relevance of traditional narratives resides in the validity of cultural values or norms communicated through exemplification. For this reason, the processing of such narratives strongly engages the argumentation module, whose activation is raised by reported evidentials.

3.4. Rhetorical and perlocutionary effects of communication

Before closing this book with additional directions for future research, two chapters discuss the effects of communication from a relevance-theoretic angle.

The first chapter in this part also discusses the role of epistemic vigilance in argumentation, thus linking this part to the preceding one. “Rhetoric and cognition: Pragmatic constraints on argument processing” adopts a cognitive-pragmatic perspective on rhetorical effectiveness in order to hypothesise that the information-selection mechanisms in interpretation positively influence the outcome of subsequent argumentative evaluation. Moreover, author Steve Oswald moves for the inclusion of a cognitive-pragmatic component in a theory of argumentation, which has typically refrained from adopting cognitive standpoints (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 74). Indeed, individuals need to understand arguments before evaluating them, which makes comprehension, to some extent at least, responsible for the selection of premises that will constitute the input to the evaluative stage of argumentation. Accordingly, arguers who want to convince their audience can be said to seek to constrain their interpretative processes so that they only presumably select ‘rhetorically-friendly’ contextual premises.

Rhetorical effectiveness is defined as the propensity for an argument to ensure that its conclusion appears to be optimally relevant with respect to its premises. In other words, successful arguments are those whose conclusions (i) are derived with little effort and (ii) generate significant cognitive effects given a series of premises. This definition encompasses both cases of sound argumentation, where potential counter-arguments are weighed and dismissed as epistemically weaker than the

argument under consideration, and cases of fallacious argumentation, whose success rests on the audience's inability to mobilise counter-evidence and discard the argument as fallacious (Maillat and Oswald 2009, 2011; Oswald 2010, 2011). Fallacious moves are therefore seen as attempts to manipulate those two conditions by making 'rhetorically-friendly' assumptions epistemically strong and accessible, and 'rhetorically-unfriendly' assumptions weak and less accessible.

In turn, the second chapter focuses on perlocutionary effects, which should not be merely understood as consequences of the comprehension process, but as phenomena influencing the way communicated stimuli are actually processed. "Perlocutionary effects and relevance theory", by Agnieszka Piskorska, narrows down the traditional Austinian definition of perlocution and confines it to intentionally evoked mental states, which may have a cognitive or affective nature. Although the notion of 'perlocution' was initially alien to relevance theory, there has recently been a growing interest in the speech-act theoretic concept (e.g., Jary 2010; see also Witczak-Plisiecka 2013 for a review). Sharing this interest, Piskorska briefly overviews relevance-theoretic insights into speech acts, such as its reductionism of speech act types or its account of illocutionary force in terms of procedural meaning. Then, she presents arguments supporting her claim.

The main one is that on many occasions effects like amusement, warning/threatening or offending are the reasons why individuals interact. If relevance is assessed solely in terms of positive cognitive effects, something important is missing. Indeed, extant relevance-theoretic analyses of politeness phenomena (Escandell Vidal 1998, 2004) and metaphor (Pilkington 2010) question the view that meaning equals the sum of explicatures and implicatures. Emotion and cognition must be integrated in pragmatic analyses of meaning and its consequences, as argued in (neuro)psychology (e.g., Damasio 1994). Therefore, Piskorska makes two suggestions about the relationship between comprehension and affective states, which are consistent with the massive modularity model of the mind (Sperber 2005). Nevertheless, experiments on the role of perlocutions are needed, although their results could be limited due to the difficulties at modelling actual emotions in experimental settings.

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