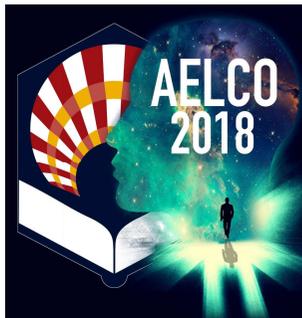


The persuasive interaction between stereotypes and implicatures



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1. Stereotypes in semantics

As elements of public communication (including advertising and propaganda), **stereotypes** are typically **studied from a socio-anthropological perspective** (**Domaneschi-Penco** 2016, 11-22). For example, the presence of *race- or gender stereotypes* is usually pointed out, and criticized (**Smith** 1990, **Browne** 1998, **Zawiska – Cinnirella** 2010, **Sheehan** 2014).

Stereotypes determine the *social nature of meaning* (**Putnam** 1975), and they **guide semantic interpretation**, e.g. in *semantic narrowing* (**Lakoff** 1987, **Levinson** 2000, 37-38, 112-134, **Wilson** 2003).

- (1) All doctors *drink*
- (2) Mary is a *working mother*

Wilson (2003, 274): *drink* = ‘drink alcohol’, or ‘drink significant amounts of alcohol’». And Mary is not just a mother who works, but she is a stereotypical working mother, who must bring up small children alone, working outside the home, etc.

(**Lakoff** 1987, 80-82): semantic narrowing is a default inference guided by an informativeness heuristic according to which **what is expressed simply must be interpreted as stereotypically** exemplified, i.e. having as its meaning the stereotypical meaning associated to that expression.

This fairly corresponds to **Levinson's** (2000, 114) "I-principle" instructing the reader to:

"amplify the informational content of the speaker's utterance, by finding the most *specific* interpretation, up to what you judge to be the speaker's m-intended point [...]"

Shegloff (1972, 102 about formulations of locations), **Levinson** (1998, 566-567): minimal expressions require to be attributed a **meaning via some implicature** (explicature), **which typically involves recourse to the stereotype** associated to that expression:

"she's gone to the supermarket"

"she's gone to school"

also mean she will do the typical activity one expects on that location.

2. Stereotypes in advertising

Stereotypes (such as “Children love to play with toys” or “Women love to shop”) are **widely used in advertising**, also for their being able to convey complex contents very quickly (**Sheehan 2014, 75**):

Advertisements present brief dramatic stories with a message (i.e., a selling message) in a very short time period. For example, television commercials take place in 30 seconds and most print advertisements fit into a single page of a magazine. [...] **Using stereotypes** in advertising messages **quickly sets the stage for the messages**: Stereotypes convey characters and images quickly and clearly.

Moreover, stereotypes have a **specifically persuasive effectiveness** (**ibid.**, 79):

Studies have shown that if you have knowledge of how others stereotype people who are part of your own demographic group, **you will start acting that way**. [...] The real power of stereotypes is their ability to change the behavior of the person holding the stereotype.

Still, the use of stereotypes contains **some risks**. Consumers are becoming more and more defensive. Decades of deceptive advertising have engendered distrust, undermining the credibility of advertising. (**Darke – Ritchie** 2007). As a consequence, also stereotypes **must be handled carefully** (**Sheehan** 2014, 81,82):

If people in the target audience relate positively to a stereotypical portrayal, the portrayal may help sell the product. If [...] (people's) opinions put the stereotyped group into a negative light, a stereotyped portrayal could be problematic. [...] **We can all recognize stereotypes that are blatantly offensive** [...]. For example, many advertisements targeted to women portray husbands and fathers as incompetent around the home. Women may laugh at these portrayals, but men viewing the same commercials may be less amused. [...]

Consumers may find the use of certain stereotypes questionable and possibly offensive. [...]

Stereotypes whose boldness makes them **difficult to convey** by means of overt assertion may **take advantage from being encoded indirectly**. For instance, **by means of implicature**.

3. Implicits as distractors from questionable contents

Implicits, as compared to explicit encoding of information, **are less likely to be found questionable** by addressees. This was noticed many times in a general perspective (cf. for ex. **Ducrot 1982, Givón 1982, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1986, Rigotti 1988, Lombardi Vallauri 1993; 1995, Sbisà 2007**), and specifically concerning texts with persuasive purposes (cf. Lombardi Vallauri 1995, 2009b, 2016, Sbisà 2007, **Saussure 2013, Lombardi Vallauri - Masia 2014**).

A naturalistic, evolutionary, anthropological account?

Glen Grant – Images and non-linguistic Sounds



Awareness that **the source is trying to modify our beliefs raises critical reaction.**

But this is the very essence of **assertion**: to propose some content as **something by which one *wants* to modify your beliefs.**

Implicits partly conceal this intention, and so they «circumvent» critical judgment.

"When someone tells us something, when *we* accept it and *make inferences* based on this information, *the resulting conclusions are considered as ours*" (Mercier 2009: 117, transl.) - *and will be more easily accepted* than if they had been explicitly communicated. (Reboul 2011:14)

"The *less important the communicator's role* in the formation of the conclusion by the addressee, *the more the addressee will accept the conclusion.*" (Mercier 2009: 118, transl.)

(In my opinion, this is specular to Krebs & Dawkins 1984: **communication** - not only human - **evolved for the manipulation of others**, i.e., **to influence their behavior**.)

"the **egocentric bias** leads to a preference for one's own beliefs and will induce a **preference for beliefs which one has reached by oneself**; this explains why it may be advantageous for the communicator to use implicit communication: it allows him to induce in his addressee beliefs (i.e., reasons and conclusions) which **the addressee having reached them by himself will be more prone to accept** and to hide his ultimate intentions regarding the conclusion he wants the addressee to reach as to the future course of her action." (Reboul 2011:17)

4. The combined effects of stereotypes and implicatures in advertising and propaganda



Stereotype:
“broadcasting companies always distort information”.

Headline apparently referred to a “rectified” Pisa Tower.

Interpretation maximizing relevance triggers **implicature:** “other channels show reality different from how it is, while Discovery Channel doesn’t”

Both claims would be found more questionable if asserted explicitly.

(3) Is it really necessary to correct everything?

Equip

Snelli con Poko

Garantito da **nitly**

Perché in ogni tazza non ci siano più calorie inutili. Non il solito dolcificante, ma una grande novità che troverete solo in farmacia. Poko non contiene saccarina ma aspartame, un elemento naturale che è davvero buono come lo zucchero e dolcifica 200 volte più dello zucchero; scientificamente sicuro, è approvato dalla Food and Drug Administration americana.

Aprirete una bustina di Poko e versatela nel caffè, nel tè, in qualsiasi bevanda: riscoprirete il piacere di bere dolce senza i problemi dello zucchero, risparmiando ben 20 calorie per dolcificazione! Con Poko è dolce dimagrire, restare in forma: senza Poko non vi rimane che bere amaro.

Buono come lo zucchero. Sicuro come l'aspartame.

Stereotype: “sugar is very very good” (still quite uncontroversial in the Nineteen-eighties).

Implicature: “aspartame is very very safe”

The stereotypical conception about sugar can induce the parallel conception about aspartame exactly because, instead of being mentioned directly, both are evoked implicitly by way of implicature.

(4) As good as sugar. As safe as aspartame

Felicity conditions:

(5) “There are people who try to steal our hope”

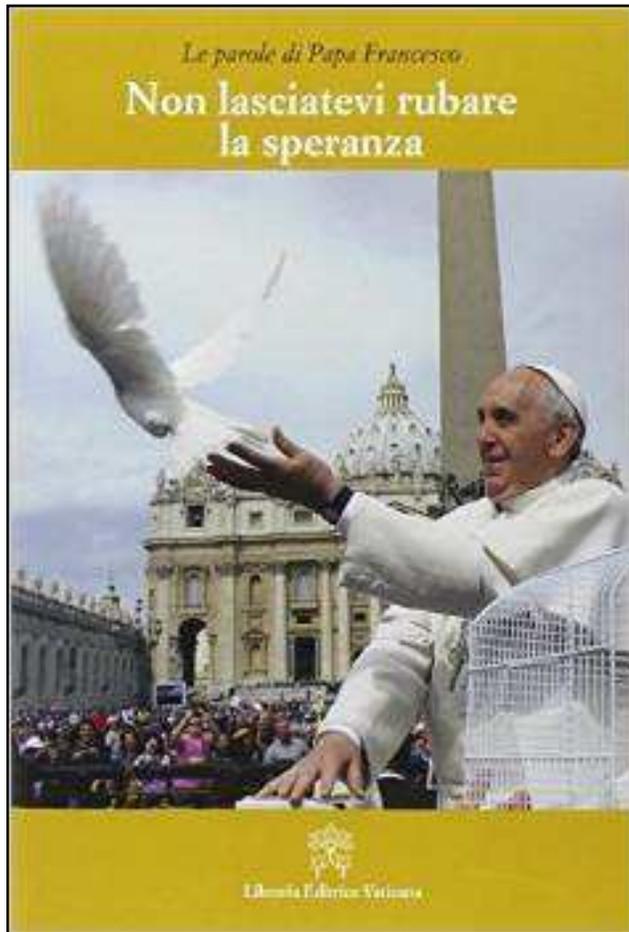
(6) “We may fear goodness and tenderness”

Implicature: “better be a Christian”

due to **stereotypes** which (if directly stated) would sound excessively bold:

(5) “Those who steal hope are typically not Catholic, and being a Catholic makes it easier to experience hope”

(6) “It is easier to experience goodness and tenderness if one follows the Catholic religion”



(5) Don't let them steal your hope



(6) We must not be afraid of goodness and tenderness



Stereotype: “the most desirable fruit juice is made 100% of fruit”

(This stereotype is kept alive by the usual claim “100% fruit”, which is to be found virtually on all packs.)

As a consequence, “100% Yoga” conveys by **implicature** something that would be hardly assertable, namely that “*Yoga is the most desirable content of a fruit juice pack*”.

(7) Hundred per cent Yoga.
No sugar, no hurry, just fruit.

Stereotype: “you film better / more important things with better devices”

Image: the 1989 fall of the Berlin wall and end of the Cold War.

“The images of history deserve TDK”, through a “reversed” attribution of suitability, raises by **implicature** that “**TDK are – among cassettes – the equivalent of the end of the Cold War in history**”

(By assertion it would sound boasting and exaggerate)

BERLINO '89

NON DIMENTICHEREMO

LE IMMAGINI DELLA STORIA MERITANO TDK

LE IMMAGINI CHE VORRETE SEMPRE RIVEDERE. LE EMOZIONI CHE VORRETE PROVARE ANCORA. È QUESTA LA STORIA CHE MERITA DI ESSERE CONSERVATA SU UNA VIDEOCASSETTA TDK. PERCHÉ UNA TDK GARANTISCE NEL TEMPO LA MASSIMA QUALITÀ DELLA DEFINIZIONE, DEI COLORI E DEL SUONO. UNA TDK NON DIMENTICA.

LO SPECIALISTA
TDK
TI FA VEDERE

(8) The images of history deserve TDK

Implicature and **stereotype**: “Prayers are effective”
(asserting it would be counterproductive)



Let us always pray for us, for each other, let us pray for the world,
for a great fraternity!

All announcements (on both sides) in the 2006 national political campaign in Italy consisted in **accusing the opposite side** of planning unwelcome measures. Now, explicitly accusing the opponents of bad actions would have been unpleasant, probably counterproductive and even illegal. So, **the accusations had to be indirect**, i.e. encoded by means of implicatures, to convince lots of people without raising their critical reaction.

(9) Inheritance tax again?
No, thanks



(10) The “no globals” in the government?
No, thanks

(9)
Inheritance
tax again?
No, thanks



(10) The “no
globals” in the
government?
No, thanks



(11) Illegal immigrants
at will?
No, thanks

(12) More taxes on your
savings?
No, thanks

(13) More taxes on your
house?
No, thanks

(14) Halting major
works?
No, thanks

The pattern is always the same: since the refusal would violate the Maxim of Relation in case there is no threat, its uttering raises the **implicature** that “**a winning Left will actually do the threatening thing**”.

statement (by the Right)	Gricean path	implicature (drawn by the target)
we are against the inheritance tax	<p>“It makes no sense to mention this threat, if there is no danger that it comes true. Consequently, ...”</p>	... the Left will introduce the inheritance tax
we are against the “no globals” in the government		... the Left will put the “no globals” in the government
we are against illegal immigrants without regulation		... the Left will accept illegal immigrants without regulation
we are against more taxes on your savings		... the Left will put more taxes on my savings
we are against more taxes on your house		... the Left will put more taxes on my house
we are against halting major works		... the Left will halt major works

Since the **implicature is drawn** by every person in the target audience “**autonomously**”, **the Right does not count** (in the target’s mind) **as responsible** for throwing unpleasant and largely false accusations at the Left. And, moreover, *the very contents* of such accusations *are not evaluated under the full light of a critical attitude*.

statement (by the Right)	Gricean path	implicature (drawn by the target)
we are against the inheritance tax	“It makes no sense to mention this threat, if there is no danger that it comes true. Consequently, ...”	... the Left will introduce the inheritance tax
we are against the “no globals” in the government		... the Left will put the “no globals” in the government
we are against illegal immigrants without regulation		... the Left will accept illegal immigrants without regulation
we are against more taxes on your savings		... the Left will put more taxes on my savings
we are against more taxes on your house		... the Left will put more taxes on my house
we are against halting major works		... the Left will halt major works

The implicature is always guided by a stereotypical concept of the Left:

- (15)
- a. - The Left strongly taxes incomes, properties, real estate and even savings.
 - b. - The left is against major economical enterprises, including big construction work.
 - c. - The Left takes sides with all “irregular people”: immigrants, no globals etc.

The stereotypical assumptions in (15) guide the implicature process, and at the same time they are re-inforced by that process. If asserted, such stereotypes would appear as too simplistic, and would probably be rejected (Sheehan 2014).

All this is not the result of chance or coincidence. Let us check what the propaganda of the Left coalition was like in the same elections:



(16) Without nursery schools, families can't grow



(17) A public health service that works means more freedom



(18) Temporary work clamps down your hopes

(16-18) assert **truisms** (nursery schools help families, health service frees from worries...). The aim of the campaign was more than that. Such statements **raise** the **implicatures** that nursery schools are likely to be reduced, that the public health service may be cut, and that firms may be allowed to increase forms of temporary work:

statement (by the Left)	Gricean path	implicature (drawn by the target)
Without nursery schools, families can't grow	“It makes no sense to mention this truism, if there is no danger about it. Consequently, ...”	... the Right will cut on nursery schools
A public health service that works means freedom		... the Right will cut on the public health service
Temporary work clamps down your hopes		... the Right will favour forms of temporary work

These implicatures are supported by stereotypes of a Right party:

- (19) a. - The Right cuts on welfare, such as public schools, health services and the like.
- b. - The Right takes sides with the (big) firms and, in general, against the interests of workers.

The fact that the accusing statements result from an **inferential process carried out by the addressee himself excludes the Left from responsibility, and prevents the accusations from being critically challenged.** The same holds for the **general, stereotypical assumptions** themselves mentioned in (19): if asserted, they would be recognised as **exaggerate and too simplistic.**

We tried to show that **the exploitation of stereotypes for the interpretation of implicatures has a twofold and *bidirectional, reciprocal* effect.**

Each ad convinces the addressee about the implicated content by exploiting the existence of a stereotype, and at the same time it **smuggles, reinforces and confirms the** (useful, but possibly exaggerate) **stereotype** in the mind of the addressee by evoking it in an implicit manner.

These facts are widely exploited in persuasive communication, especially when trying to ***convince the target audience about things that are not true***. Consequently, awareness of them should be regarded as **an important ingredient of democratic cohabitation.**

Thank You

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