

## 【書 評】

Corinne Iten. *Linguistic Meaning, Truth Conditions and Relevance: The Case of Concessives*. Palgrave Studies in Pragmatics, Language and Cognition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2005. xii. 1–265.

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In the two decades since the appearance of *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Sperber and Wilson, 1986), numerous studies have applied relevance theory to issues in linguistics and neighboring fields.<sup>1)</sup> Two recent studies in this framework can be singled out as having particularly broad implications for linguistic theory. The first, Carston's voluminous *Thoughts and Utterances* (2002), addresses fundamental questions related to the semantics/pragmatics interface; the other, which builds on ground prepared by the first, is the book here under review.

The subject matter of Iten's book, narrowly construed, is the semantics of a set of 'non-truth-conditional' expressions (*but, although, even if*) commonly characterized as concessive. The scare quotes in the preceding sentence follow Iten's practice and reflect her view that referring to such expressions in terms of their effect on truth conditions is not an ideal way to characterize them. Her broader concern is, in fact, to argue that 'there is no such thing as a semantic distinction between "truth-conditional" and "non-truth-conditional" expression types' (234) and, more broadly still, to show how it is possible 'to account for linguistic meaning and verbal com-

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1) Francisco Yus maintains a running thematic bibliography of relevance-related studies at <http://www.ua.es/personal/francisco.yus/rt.html>.

munication without the notion of truth conditions' (105).

In dispensing with truth conditions in relation to linguistic semantics, Iten does not jettison them altogether. On the cognitively-based view she puts forth, truth conditions are retained insofar as they capture the relationship between assumptions communicated by utterances of sentences in contexts, and the world. This makes it possible to uphold the intuition that utterances are 'about' something, always the chief virtue of truth-based views of linguistic semantics, without recourse to the notion that sentences themselves bear, or completely determine, truth conditions. Iten is not the first relevance theorist to suggest such an approach (see, e.g., Sperber and Wilson 1986; Wilson and Sperber 1993; Carston 2002: 56ff; Blakemore 2002), but the relevance position in this regard is perhaps nowhere more accessibly presented or more closely supported by specific analyses than here.

Iten's first chapter explores general aspects of the relationship between linguistic meaning and truth and introduces the various types of expressions commonly regarded as 'non-truth-conditional'. Her primary interest is in what such expressions linguistically encode. She begins by sketching truth-based approaches to linguistic meaning, then considers at length two significant challenges to these approaches. The first is posed by the extensive evidence for the view that linguistically encoded meaning underdetermines the truth-conditional content of utterances ('linguistic underdeterminacy'). However, while this evidence, comprehensively examined by Carston (2002), casts serious doubt on the feasibility of a truth-based linguistic semantics, Iten sees a second challenge, presented by the very existence of 'non-truth-conditional' expressions in language, as more decisive in that, unlike underdeterminacy, it cannot be sidestepped by focusing on abstract properties of language rather than on language use. She argues that the existence of such expressions, together with that of indexicals and other context-dependent expressions whose contribution to truth conditions is unstable, makes it impossible to maintain simultaneously the two assumptions on which truth-conditional

views of linguistic meaning are based, namely: compositionality (that the linguistic meaning of a complex expression is entirely determined by the meanings of its constituents and their manner of composition) and semantic innocence (that the linguistic meaning of an unambiguous expression must be stable across contexts). Iten's own position is not that compositionality and innocence should be abandoned—which would remove the underpinnings of linguistic semantics altogether—but that the cognitively based approach to linguistic meaning which she embraces makes it possible to adhere to these foundational principles where truth-conditional approaches cannot.

Chapter 2 assesses the different ways in which proponents of truth-conditional frameworks have attempted to deal with linguistic expressions that appear to contribute nothing to truth conditions. Iten treats in this regard the views of Frege and Kaplan on sentence meaning; presuppositional approaches, both logical and pragmatic; and, at greater length, a range of speech act-based accounts, including Grice's attempt to deal with 'non-truth-conditional' expressions by means of conventional implicatures. Iten shows that no single one of these approaches is able to account for the full range of such expressions and further, that no approach accounts for every type of 'non-truth-conditional' meaning in the same terms. These findings lend support to her view that "the 'truth-conditional'/'non-truth-conditional' distinction is not semantic in nature" (61) and at the same time set a standard against which her own position, delineated in the following chapter, can be evaluated.

Chapter 3, 'Relevance Theory and "Non-Truth-Conditional" Meaning', begins with a succinct introduction to relevance theory, with major sections devoted to the distinctions between procedural and conceptual encoding and between implicit and explicit communication, which are central to Iten's argument. On the first distinction, now widely employed both in and outside the relevance framework, expressions are seen as potentially encoding information that is either conceptual (representational) or concerned with the inferential phase of utterance interpretation

(see Blakemore 2002). Iten's presentation of this distinction is among the clearest available and includes a particularly helpful discussion of potential criteria for distinguishing the two types of meaning. The second distinction is that between communicated assumptions developed inferentially from a linguistically encoded logical form (explicatures), and those whose conceptual content is supplied solely through inference (implicatures). It is these two distinctions which allow Iten to account for the encoded meaning of all types of linguistic expressions within the same framework, without recourse to the notion that sentence meanings are truth conditions. She notes that while '[t]ruth-conditional semantics does have a role on this account, namely when it comes to capturing the thought-world relation [...] truth-conditional semantics of this sort is not linguistic semantics' (92).

After showing how this framework could be used to account for 'non-truth conditional' phenomena of all the kinds identified in Chapter 2, Iten turns in her final three chapters to the specific analyses she proposes for *but*, *although*, and *even if*. The meaning she assigns to *but* is almost disconcertingly simple ('process what follows as a denial of a manifest assumption'); however, she demonstrates that this formulation is superior to existing proposals, whether they involve ambiguity, as most do, or treat *but* as monosemous. Recent debate concerning the procedural constraint effected by *but* has centered mainly on the question of where the denied assumption comes from. Iten here abandons an earlier claim of her own (endorsed by Blakemore 2002) that the denied assumption should be one that is accessible (entertainable) in the context (Iten 2000). She argues persuasively that accessibility is an insufficient condition, and that the assumption must meet the stronger condition of manifestness, that is, that it should be not only entertainable in the given context but also capable of being accepted as true or likely to be true. Iten argues against the recent suggestion by Hall (2004) that *but* effects suspension of an inference rather than denial of an assumption. While allowing that Hall's account entails her own, she notes that the reverse is not true, and

adduces in favor of her own formulation examples in which an inference does not appear to have been suspended. Iten's analysis of *but* is comprehensive (bypassing only the 'exception' use in combination with universal quantification in examples like 'Everyone but Bill came to the party'), and demonstrably superior to anything else now on offer. Interestingly, she stops short of claiming that *but* encodes a single meaning, noting that only empirical research can determine for certain whether speakers, while acquiring a single general meaning for *but*, nevertheless separately store as well the more 'local' information that *but* can be used when replacing a negated constituent in much-mooted 'correction' examples like 'Mary is not my sister but my mother'.

On Iten's analysis in Chapter 5 *although*, like *but*, encodes an exclusively procedural meaning. She argues that these two forms differ both syntactically—subordinating conjunction vs. coordinator—and semantically. The procedure suggested for *although* ("Suspend an inference from what follows to a conclusion that would have to be eliminated") is identical to that which Hall (2004) assigns, incorrectly in Iten's view, to *but*. Iten's analysis turns on clear-cut differences in acceptability but also accounts for more subtle differences in acceptability arising from the positioning of *although* in the utterance.

Iten claims that "*even though* can generally replace *although* without a change in meaning" (2005: 248; cf. 246), with the single qualification that some people feel *even though* favors a "direct denial" interpretation and therefore find examples like 'I need some fresh air even though it's raining' virtually unacceptable. It is doubtful, however, that the differences between *even though* and *although* are confined to dialectal or idiolectal variation, since there are examples in which the differential acceptability of *although* and *even though* is less subject to variation. I have in mind examples involving non-declarative subordinate clauses in which *although* would seem unexceptional, whereas speakers I have consulted consistently find *even though* at best odd, and at worst altogether unacceptable:

- (1) ?This is a good plan, even though how shocked our backers will be!  
 (2) ??This is a good plan, even though don't forget about funding.  
 (3) ??This is a good plan, even though who's going to pay for it?

A related difference emerges when considering the possibility of substituting *even though* for *although* in examples like (4):

- (4) A: We could throw a surprise retirement party for him. [pausing to reconsider]  
       Although ...  
 B: What?  
 A: Well, I was just wondering if he might resent being cornered like that.

*Although* with a fall-rise tone and followed by a pause is routinely used, as here, to suggest that the speaker is having qualms about what she herself has just said. *Even though*, similarly intoned, seems unlikely in this context as it would suggest that the party could be thrown despite its provoking resentment, rather than, more appropriately in relation to what follows, that the speaker is having doubts about the advisability of a surprise party altogether. These observations do not raise problems for Iten's analysis of *although*, but only for her suggestion that substituting *even though* for *although* does not affect meaning or acceptability.

Iten's examination of *even if* in Chapter 6 involves her in a well-worked area of research, owing to her assumption, shared by most others who have considered this expression, that *even if* is best viewed in terms of the separate semantic contributions of *even* and *if*. Both words have received copious attention from philosophers and linguists. Iten tackles the literature on *even* head-on, closely examining strengths and weaknesses of earlier proposals (by Bennett, Lycan, Barker, Francescotti, Fauconnier, and Kay) but opts for a more intuitive view of *if* on the grounds that her analysis of *even if* is compatible with all existing treatments of *if*. She shows that earlier treatments of *even* are unable to account for all

uses of *even* and proposes a scalar treatment that does handle all examples, including uses in ‘non-truth-conditional’ utterances such as questions, which pose obvious problems for truth-based accounts. She attributes the apparent inadequacy of earlier approaches, including previous scalar accounts proposed by Fauconnier (1975) and Kay (1990), to failure to explicitly acknowledge the role of pragmatic factors in the interpretation of *even* utterances, a role which the relevance-theoretic framework enables her to address straightforwardly.

In a brief conclusion suffixed to Chapter 6, Iten puts a finer point on her central claim, that truth-conditional and other truth-based approaches to linguistic semantics are unable to meet the most basic requirements for a viable semantic theory:

[E]quating the linguistic meaning of an expression with its contribution to truth conditions, while maintaining compositionality and the claim that sentence meanings are truth conditions, comes at the cost of semantic innocence [...] At the same time, insisting that an expression’s contribution to truth conditions is stable across contexts (and thus maintaining semantic innocence) makes it impossible to account for the meanings of sentences (that is their truth conditions) compositionally” [235].

She then turns to the implications of her study for the characterization of procedural meaning. While she considers all three of the expressions she has examined to be procedural in the general sense that they constrain the inferential processes involved in utterance interpretation, she finds that these expressions constrain inference in distinct ways. Whereas the constraints effected by *but* and *although* direct the hearer toward a particular inferential path and so directly constrain the derivation of implicatures in a way already familiar in the literature on procedural encoding, *even* serves instead to make certain contextual assumptions more accessible than others, thus only indirectly affecting implicatures (and possibly explicatures). A distinction between procedural constraints on effects and on

context is invoked in other relevance studies (see, e.g., Blakemore 1987; 2002: 97), but the detailed analysis of *even* in Iten's final chapter appears to provide the strongest support yet for such a distinction and, looking forward, suggests that there may be further subtypes of procedural encoding beyond the several varieties now recognized, as prefigured in the claim by Sperber and Wilson (1995: 258) that "procedural meaning can constrain *any aspect* of the inferential phase of comprehension" [italics added] (cf. Blakemore 2002: 130, 144).

This is a well-edited book, written in a lucid and engagingly unpretentious style. Iten goes out of her way to represent other views fairly and gives open consideration to areas of uncertainty and potential disagreement. In my view, her study merits the close attention of specialists in semantics and pragmatics, as the arguments it advances bear importantly on central concerns of both fields. If borne out, her findings will go far toward satisfying the expectation which has animated the efflorescence of research on connectives and other 'edge' expressions since the early 1980s, that such expressions have something important to tell us about the nature of language.

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