

English rising declaratives of the Quality-suspending kind

Matthijs Westera

Universitat Pompeu Fabra
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GLiF, 16-11-2017

Prelude (1/2): a simple question

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How does communication work?

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HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR SPOUSE WITHOUT FIGHTING IN 7 SIMPLE STEPS

STEP 1
Pay attention to your spouse whenever you have a conversation.

STEP 2
Don't yell at your spouse when you are trying to convey a message or talking to each other.

STEP 3
Put yourself in your spouse's shoes so you can see the issue from your their point of view.

STEP 4
Confirm understanding by asking your spouse if they understand what you are communicating to them.

STEP 5
Try using different communication methods when your spouse does not understand something you said.

STEP 6
Take a break if you are not making progress communicating your thoughts or start to feel frustrated.

STEP 7
Apply the above steps every time you communicate with your spouse.

www.outspocoffamily.com/communicatebetter

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What justifies this new belief?



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1. Introduction & core assumption
2. The empirical phenomenon
3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics
4. Explaining the three main characteristics
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- ▶ when it is permissible to violate or risk violating a maxim; and
- ▶ disambiguation by context and paralinguistic cues.

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Main characteristics of the Quality-suspending kind (Gunlogson 2008):

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- ▶ **question-likeness**, e.g., uncertain truth, inviting “yes” / “no” answer;
- ▶ **speaker bias**, i.e., proposition expressed is deemed likely;

2.1. The Quality-suspending kind

- (2) A: (*Enters with an umbrella.*)
B: It's raining? Quality
- (3) B: What do you think of your new neighbor?
A: He's attractive? Relation
- (4) A: (*Receptionist*) Can I help you?
M: Hello, my name is Mark Liberman...? Quantity
- (5) A: Bonjour!
B: Bonjour, I'd like... err... je veux... a black coffee? Manner

Main characteristics of the Quality-suspending kind (Gunlogson 2008):

- ▶ **question-likeness**, e.g., uncertain truth, inviting “yes” / “no” answer;
- ▶ **speaker bias**, i.e., proposition expressed is deemed likely;
- ▶ **badness out-of-the-blue**, i.e., requires some contextual setup.

2.2. Main characteristics (1/3): question-likeness

- (2) A: (*Enters with an umbrella.*)
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From Gunlogson 2003:

- (10) (*At a committee hearing:*)
a. Are you a member of the Communist party?

2.3. Main characteristics (2/3): speaker bias

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(11) (*On the phone with Schiphol information.*) [from Beun 2000]

Caller: Hello. I have to go to Barcelona, from Amsterdam.

Can you tell me which flights leave next Sunday?

Agent: Just a moment. ... Yes, there are several flights. One leaves at 9.10, one at 11.10, and one at 17.30.

Caller: The flight takes about three hours?

2.4. Main characteristics (3/3): badness out-of-the-blue

(2) A: (*Enters with an umbrella.*)

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Hence:

- ▶ **Speaker bias:** the speaker considers the proposition expressed likely (for whatever reason, contextual or otherwise);
- ▶ **Badness out of the blue:** What needs to be contextually present is not evidence, but something like the *topic of discourse*.

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Final rise on declarative would:

- ▶ express incompleteness, contingency, open-endedness etc.; (many)

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Offensively brief review:

- ▶ most don't generalize to other rising declaratives (or beyond);
- ▶ most don't try to explain all three characteristics;
- ▶ those that do, end up assuming rather than explaining them.

Outline

1. Introduction & core assumption
2. The empirical phenomenon
3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics
4. Explaining the three main characteristics
5. Conclusion

Preview of the explanations

[SPOILER ALERT]

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Question-likeness:

Speaker bias:

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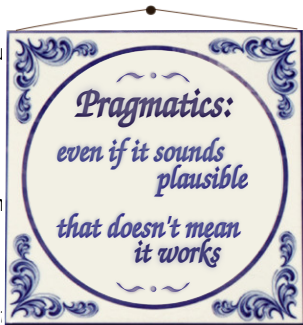
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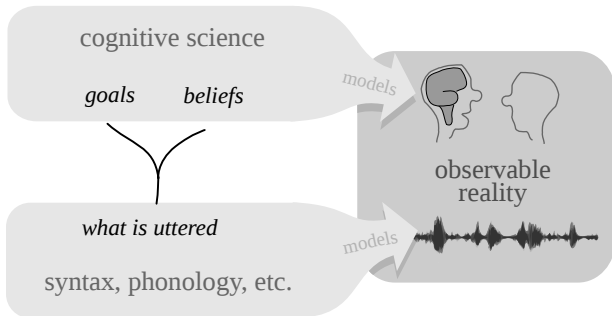
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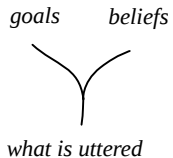
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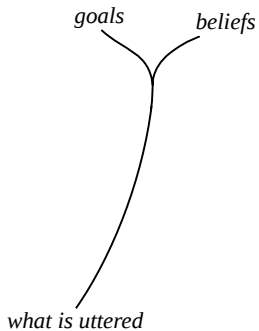
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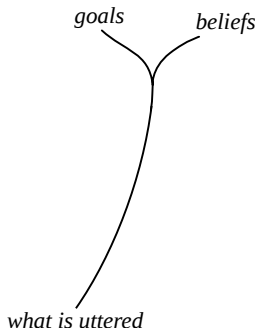
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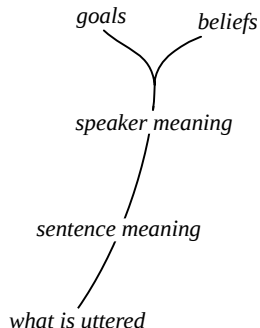
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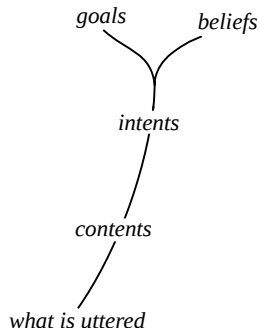
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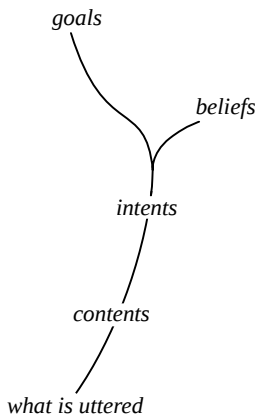
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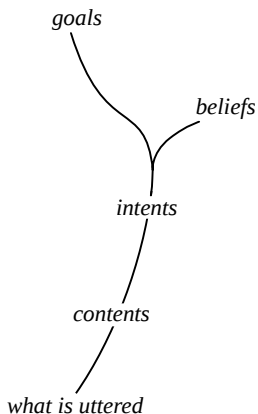
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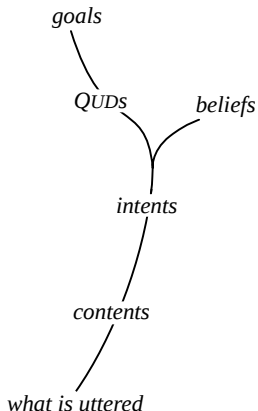
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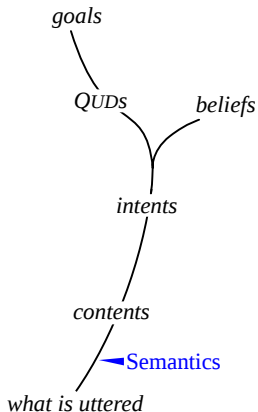
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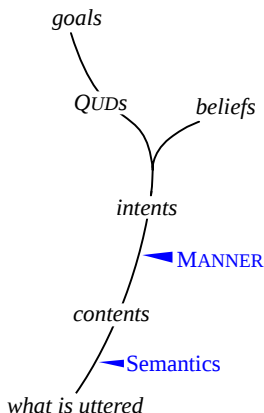
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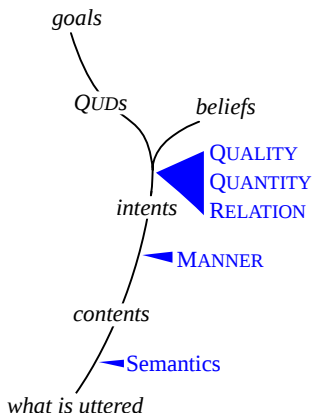
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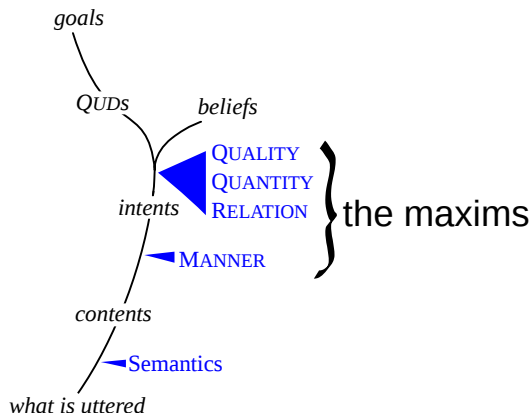
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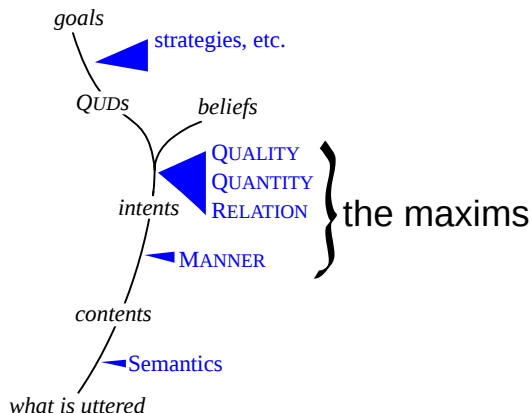
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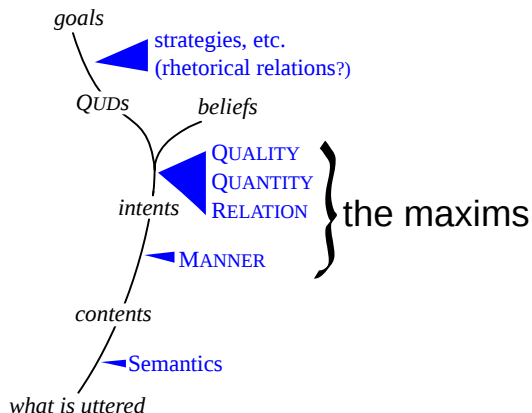
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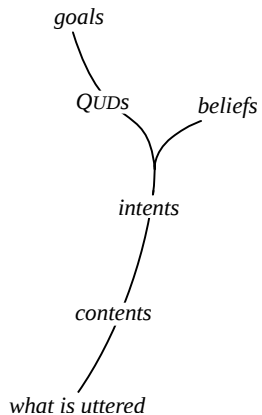
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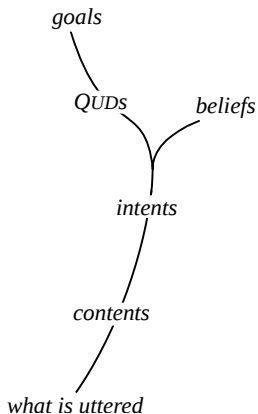
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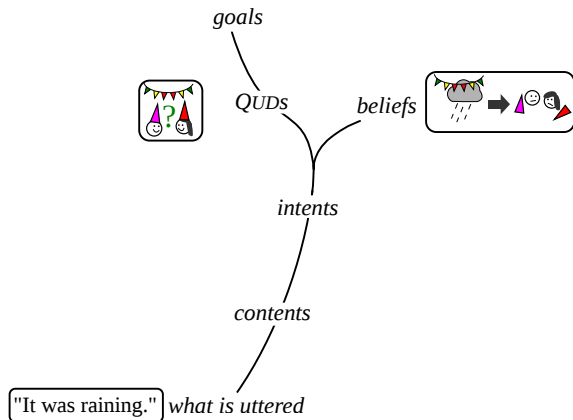


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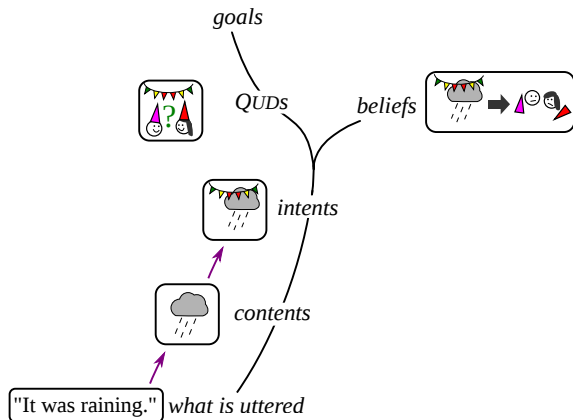
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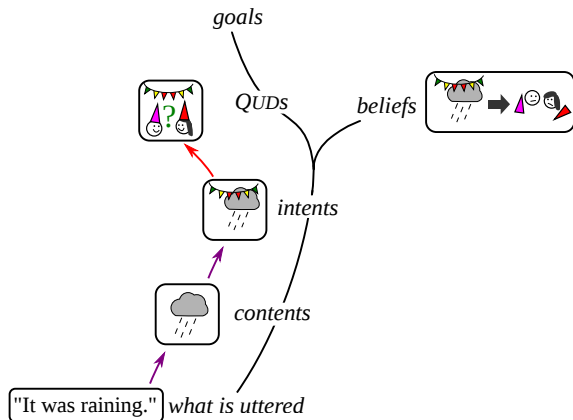
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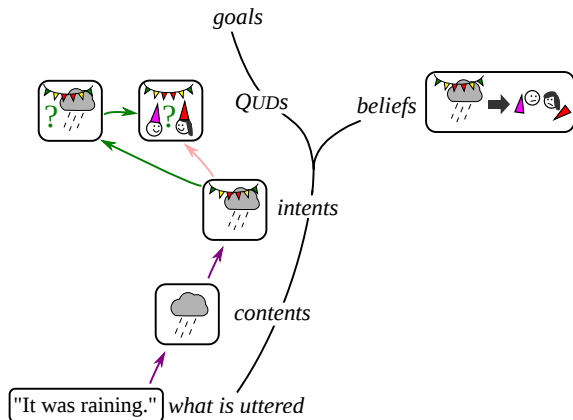
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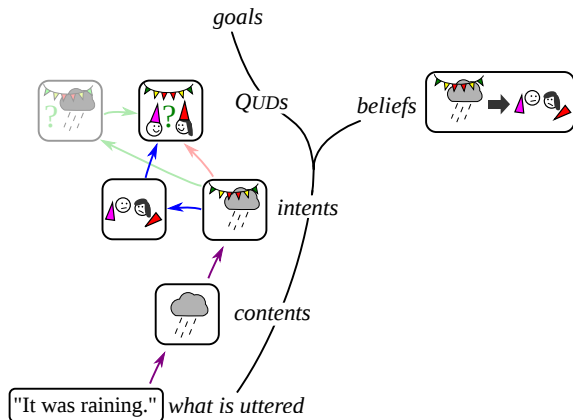
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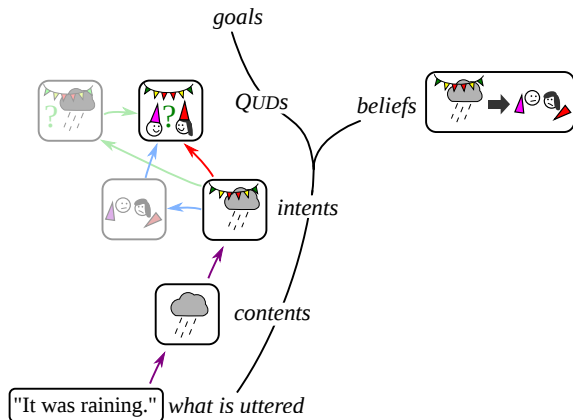
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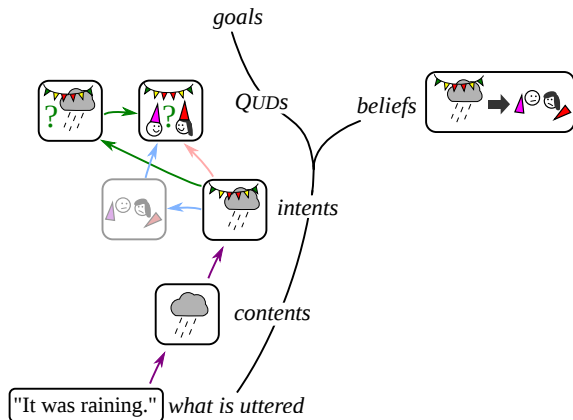
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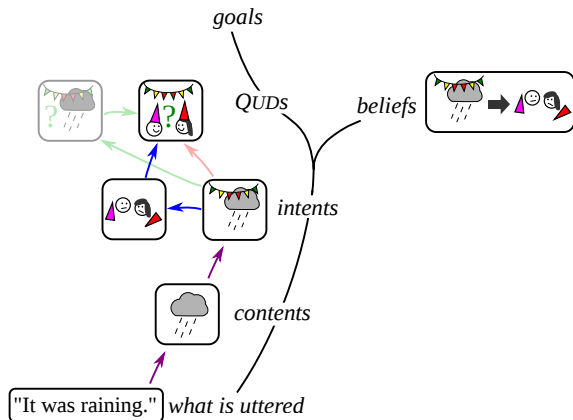
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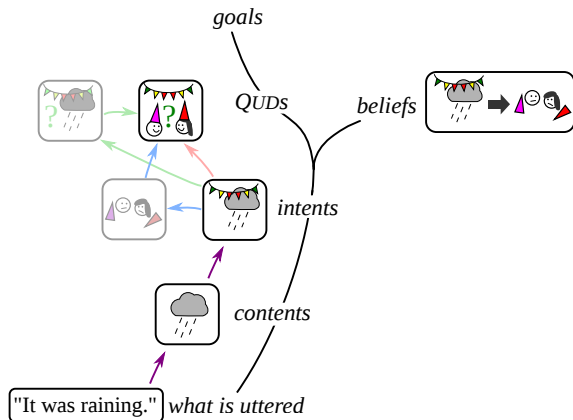
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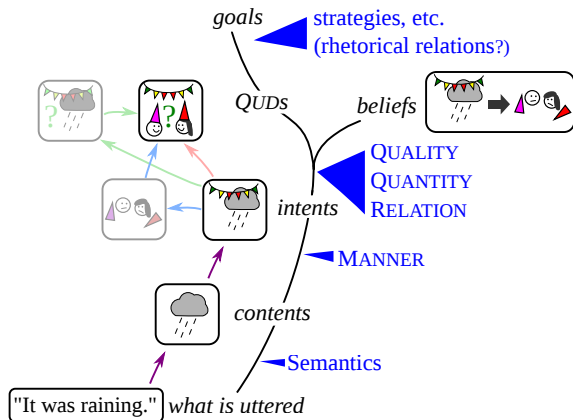
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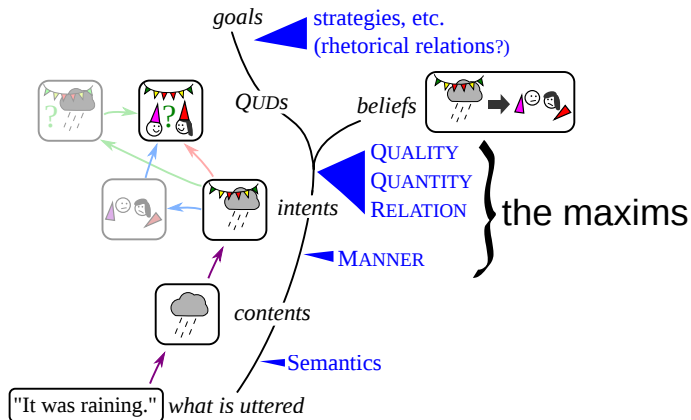
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- ▶ these details were put into place to *fit* intonation;
- ▶ but they have wider implications.

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Also interesting:

- ▶ The only reason to suspend Quality is a clash with Relation, i.e., if there is no answer to the QUD which the speaker believes is true.

3.5. Interim summary

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Concretely, with the current definition:

- ▶ Quality suspensions can be blamed only on a clash with Relation.

Outline

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2. The empirical phenomenon
3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics
4. Explaining the three main characteristics
5. Conclusion

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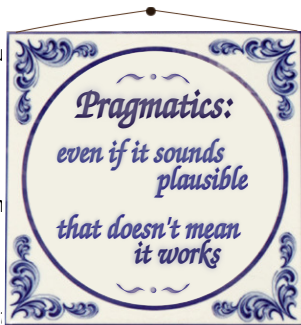
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(***): What about other ways of coping with a Quality/Relation clash?)

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Suppose Quality is twice as important as Relation...



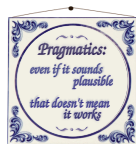
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so: suspend Quality only if $\text{prob}(\text{intent is true}) \geq 0.5$.

Assumption 4: Quality is more than twice as important as Relation.

When this doesn't hold, we expect to see bias-free rising declaratives...

4.3. Speaker bias



Suppose Quality is twice as important as Relation...

- ▶ exp. reward = $2 \times \text{prob}(\text{intent is true}) + 1 \times \text{prob}(\text{intent} \in \text{QUD})$
- ▶ suspend Quality to ensure compliance with Relation:
exp. reward = $2 \times \text{prob}(\text{intent is true}) + 1 \times 1$;
- ▶ violate Relation to ensure compliance with Quality:
exp. reward = $2 \times 1 + 1 \times 0$;

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Assumption 4: Quality is more than twice as important as Relation.

When this doesn't hold, we expect to see bias-free rising declaratives...

(15) A: Hey B, guess what the weather is like.

B: I have absolutely no idea; I haven't been outside in days.

A: Guess!!!

B: Fine. It's raining?

4.4. Badness out of the blue (1/3)

Let's remind ourselves:

(13) *(On the phone with Schiphol information.)*

...

Agent: One leaves at 9.10, one at 11.10, and one at 17.30.

Caller: The flight takes about three hours?



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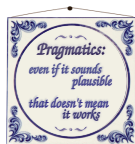
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- a. Is the weather supposed to be nice this weekend?
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Summing up:

- ▶ the required contextual setup is not the speaker bias;
- ▶ rather, it is something like the topic, or QUD;
- ▶ interrogatives, by contrast, are fine without contextual setup...

4.5. Badness out of the blue (2/3)

Suspending a maxim is only one way of dealing with a clash;
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Supposing that interrogatives serve only to introduce QUDs, we get:

- ▶ rising declaratives are fine if the QUD is already on the table;
- ▶ but not if it isn't – then an interrogative is preferred.

Complication:

- ▶ whether QUD is already 'on the table' is partly up to the speaker...

4.6. Badness out of the blue (3/3)

No apparent complementary distribution (Gunlogson, 2003):

- (16) A: (*Enters with an umbrella.*)
B: a. It's raining?
b. Is it raining?



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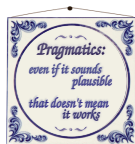
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- ▶ the context presents an *opportunity* for the speaker to present the QUD as being already 'on the table';
- ▶ and the speaker decides, for rhetorical reasons (etc.), to take it up.

Outline

1. Introduction & core assumption
2. The empirical phenomenon
3. Basic assumptions about pragmatics
4. Explaining the three main characteristics
5. Conclusion

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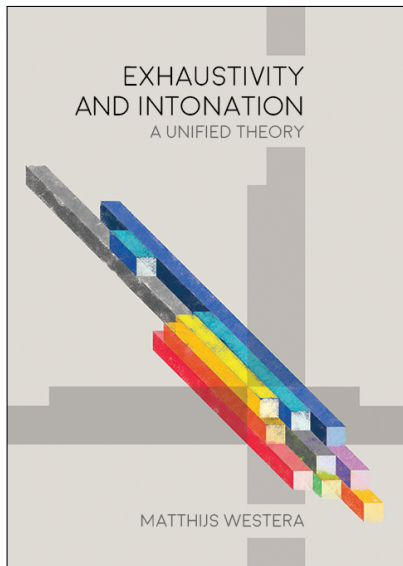
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By (re)conceiving of this in terms of 'suspending a maxim'
(and by being rather precise about what that means):

- ▶ the ICM theory predicts the various uses of rising declaratives;
- ▶ while also explaining core characteristics of, in this case, the Quality-suspending kind.

5.2. Further applications



5.3. Returning to “Prelude (1/2): a simple question”

How does communication work?

For example:

(17) A: We ran out of vegetables.

Hearing (1), we come to believe that they ran out of vegetables.

What justifies this new belief?

