

## Camp, “Insinuation, Common Ground, and the Conversational Record”

### 1 Minimally cooperative/strategic contexts

- In standard conversations (at least ones that are taken as standard in theorizing), there is (close to) full cooperation:
  - Interlocutors use words in the semantically conventional way so as to have their communicative intentions understood (conventional meaning as a solution to a coordination problem)
  - Interlocutors adhere to Gricean conversational principles (to communicate more than is explicitly articulated)
  - Interlocutors are concerned with contributing to a common topic/addressing a common question under discussion (paradigmatically inquiry)
  - The interests/practical goals line up of interlocutors line up
- But some conversations are *strategic*: there is only partial alignment of interlocutors’ interests (or uncertainty as to the alignment of interests)
- Camp takes these to still be “substantively cooperative enterprises” (p. 41)
- In these conversations, only *minimal standards of cooperation* are in effect:
  - “Speakers may aim to ensure only that there is *some* accessible interpretation of their utterance which makes *some* relevant, true contribution to the question(s) under discussion.” (41)
  - “Hearers may aim only to recover *some* interpretation that *some* audience might reasonably take the speaker to have intended.” (41)
  - At least one side is prepared to “work to conversational rule”.

**Question:** What does it mean to be (conversationally) cooperative? (Kelly)

### 2 Insinuation

- Insinuation is a strategic, risk-mitigating conversational move
- Without offering a full definition, Camp thinks the key feature of insinuation is “*implicature with deniability*” (p.46):
  - A speaker  $S$  produces an utterance  $U$  of a sentence  $L$  whose conventional function is to present a proposition  $P$  with illocutionary force  $F$ .
  - $S$  locutes and illocutes  $F(P)$
  - $S$  also intends to be recognized as presenting a distinct proposition,  $Q$ , in a mode  $M$ . (Modes have the same essential effects as illocutionary forces).
  - Communication is successful:  $H$  recognizes  $S$ ’s intentions (and in some cases,  $H$  comes to believe, desire, or intend etc.  $Q$ )
  - $S$  is prepared to deny  $M(Q)$  if  $H$  or someone else (such as an overhearer) explicitly attributes  $M(Q)$  to  $S$

**Question:** What is the difference between insinuation and other cases of implicature?

### 3 Strategic moves: Deniability and Pedantry

- Denial moves:
  - If  $F(P)$  is a minimally cooperative conversation contribution, denying one meant anything over and above  $F(P)$  is possible
  - If it is not, a speaker has to offer an alternative content  $M(Q)'$
- It is difficult for the hearer to resist the move to insinuate  $M(Q)$ :
  - Direct denial (“no”, “that’s false” etc.) targets  $F(P)$ , not  $M(Q)$
  - Explicit retorts, queries, or accusations directed at  $M(Q)$  invite speaker denial
  - Some explicit responses can actually lend credence to  $Q$  (e.g. “Are you suggesting that Obama is a radical Islamist?” “You said it, not me; but now that you mention it...”)
- Some resistance moves available to the hearer come in the form of *pedantry*:
  - *flat-footed pedantry*: “ $H$  insists on construing  $U$  as simply meaning  $F(P)$  and balks at  $F(P)$ ’s conversational insufficiency” (p.47)
  - *cunning pedantry*: “ $H$  twists  $U$  to serve their own conversational ends” (p.47)

**Question:** Are there other kinds of strategic moves for a hearer?

- Ari on a third kind of pedantry
- Shin on hearers forcing insinuated content

#### 3.1 The limits of deniability

- Central question: Since  $S$  intends  $M(Q)$  to be communicated, and in successful cases of insinuation  $M(Q)$  is recognized by  $H$ , how is deniability possible?
- Many think deniability is about direct vs. indirect or literal vs. non-literal speech, but Camp thinks this is not quite right.
- Denial “trades on the gap between what is in fact mutually obvious to the speaker and hearer, on the one hand, and what both parties are prepared to *acknowledge* as mutually obvious on the other”. (48):
  - $S$  intends  $H$  to arrive at  $M(Q)$  by relying on a set of interpretive presuppositions  $I$  that are operative in  $C$ .
  - These presuppositions are generally context-specific and implicit.
  - In cases of denial, the speaker pretends that they are actually in  $C'$ , governed by presupposition  $I'$ , which leads to a different implicature (or none at all)
  - The same is done by hearers in cases of pedantry

**Question:** What does Camp mean by “acknowledge”? (Good question! But we will wait to address this question until after we talk about speaker meaning/common ground/conversational record)

- The limits of deniability:
  - “For the alternative interpretation  $M(Q)'$  to be *admissible*—or above the threshold of ‘plausible deniability’—it must be *reasonable* to calculate  $M(Q)'$  on the basis of the uttered sentence’s conventional meaning  $F(P)$ , the commitments undertaken in the conversation to this point, and some set  $I'$  of epistemically accessible presuppositions consistent

with those commitments, in a way that renders  $U$  at least minimally conversationally cooperative.” (50)

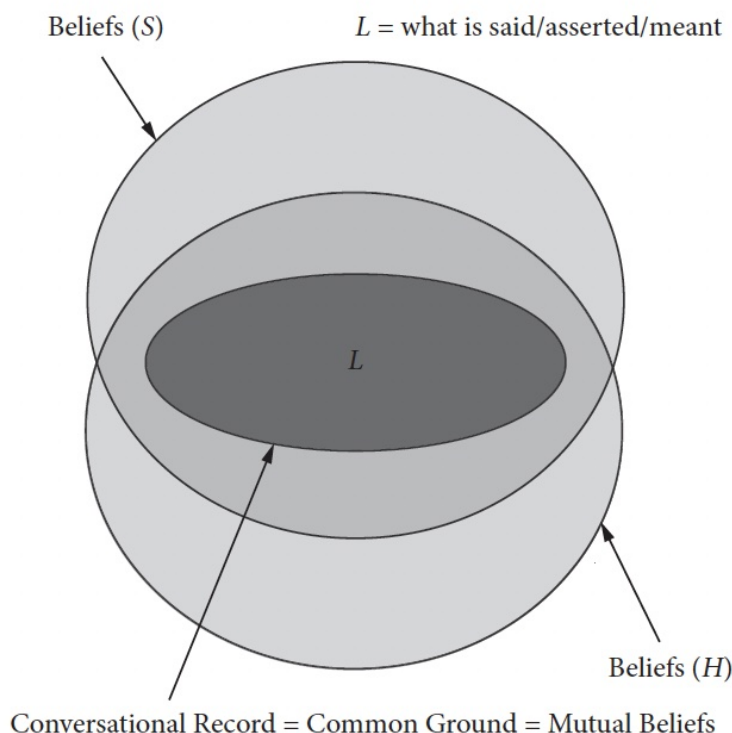
- Factors affecting admissibility:
  - The range of accessible alternative assumptions in  $C$  (e.g. 3rd party vs.  $H$ ,  $H$  who is a stranger vs.  $H$  who is a close friend)
  - Operative standard of reasonableness:
    - \* More known likelihood of conflict or motivation for strategic interpretation = larger scope of reasonable re-interpretations (widens the range of accessible interpretive assumptions)
    - \* The social cost of pushing the bounds of reasonable reinterpretation

**Question:** Are there other factors that affect admissibility?

- Rivka: the hearer’s capability or competency to track the speaker’s intention
- Chris: the power of the hearer

## 4 Speaker meaning, common ground, conversational record

- Why is insinuation an interesting phenomenon from the point of view of pragmatics?
- Before looking at insinuation, you might think that:
  - All mutual beliefs are in the common ground
  - Everything in the common ground is on the conversational record (score)



**Figure 2.1** Intuitive, simplistic model of cooperative communication.

#### 4.1 Speaker's meaning

- Camp argues that insinuations are speaker-meant.
- 2 conditions on speaker meaning:
  1. S has an intention which plays a significant role in getting H to entertain a particular attitude
  2. S's intention to get H to entertain this attitude is open and overt
- In support of condition 1:
  - Insinuations involve as much determinate communicative intentions as any other kind of speech
  - Insinuations cannot be instances of natural meaning because they can be false even when the explicit content they “follow from” is true.
  - Insinuated content does not follow naturally from conventional content, rather it follows from the fact that S said F(P) to H in specific context C.
- In support of condition 2:
  - In typical cases of insinuation, S does intend their communicative intention to be obviously evident to both speaker and hearer.
  - The deviousness lies in being unwilling to be conversationally liable for the insinuated content or own up to the communicative intention; it is not about hiding the intention

itself (in contrast to other cases of devious speech such as subliminal advertising and covert dogwhistles)

**Questions:** Is this right? Is insinuation speaker meant? Why does this matter? (Rutger, Andre)  
Can Camp's account capture indeterminacy of content of insinuations? (Rivka)

## 4.2 Common ground

- If the intention to communicate  $M(Q)$  is manifestly obvious to both speaker and hearer and the hearer comes to believe  $M(Q)$ , it seems that  $M(Q)$  is a mutual belief between speaker and hearer.
- On traditional theories of common ground, this means  $M(Q)$  is automatically common ground
- We have already seen one reason why the common ground is defined in terms of mutual acceptance rather than belief: interlocutors can accept things for the purposes of the conversation that they don't believe.
- Camp argues insinuation shows that the distinction also goes the other way: interlocutors mutually believe things that they don't accept for the purposes of conversation ("deniability trades on the gap between what is actually manifest to both parties and what one or the other party is willing to acknowledge as manifest... this is precisely the difference between mutual belief and acceptance" (56)).
- Note that belief is not strictly stronger than acceptance on this view (not a criticism, just a note about how to think of acceptance).
- Two kinds of cases of insinuated content:
  - Sometimes (perhaps even often?), insinuated content enters the common ground. Depending on how it enters, the speaker may still not assume liability for the content (i.e. it might remain off-record).
  - In other cases, the insinuated content remains outside the common ground (in "deep shadow") and cannot be used in conversation in the way the information in the common ground is normally used. (affair example p.57)
  - What is distinctive of insinuated content (in opposition to other unmentionables) is that "‘deep’ insinuation is designed to *make* a fact, desire, or commitment manifest, and actively guides communication and action going forward, while still remaining unacknowledgable." (p.58)

**Questions:** What is acknowledgment? What is acceptance? (Jiwoo, Laura)

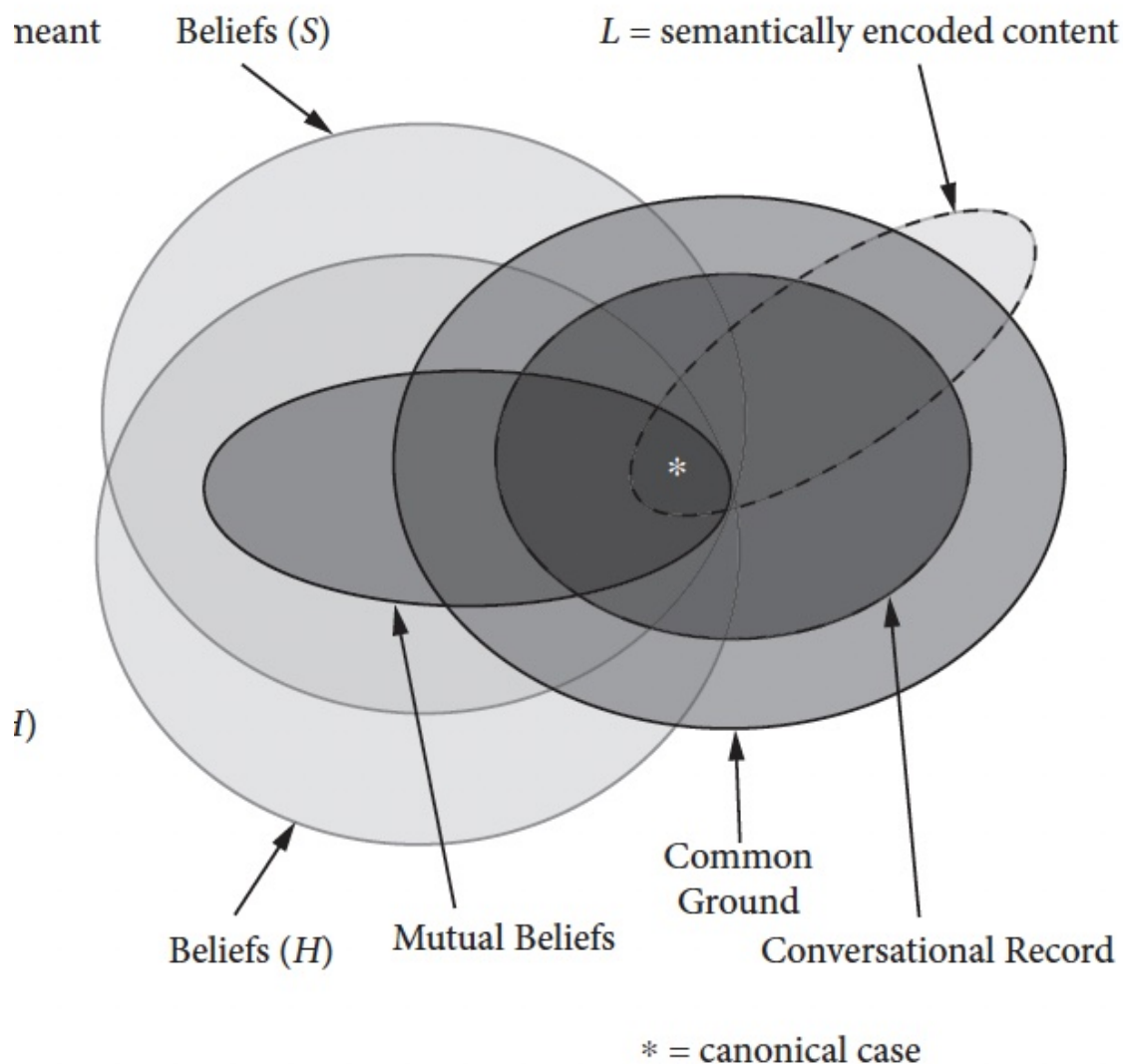
What are conversational personae? (Kristin)

Is semantics as dodgy as pragmatics? (Elliot)

## 4.3 Conversational Record

- If the common ground is defined in terms of acceptance rather than belief, can it be identified with the conversational score or record?
- The conversational record is the set of on-record commitments that can be contextually exported:
  - these are things that speakers are undeniably liable for
  - public

- objective
- normatively constrained
- Differences between the common ground and the conversational record:
  - Common ground is a social, contextually-relative phenomenon, the conversational record is a public, cross-contextually stable one.
  - Common ground tracks what we accept for the purposes of the conversation; Gricean coordination tracks what we are privately committed to (believing, doing, etc.); conversational record captures our public, cross-contextual, on-record commitments.
  - Insinuations can sometimes (in fact often) enter in the common ground, but they don't enter the conversational record.



**Questions:** What does it mean to be public? (Chris)

How should we be thinking of a normatively governed conversational record? (Kristin)

## Examples of Insinuation

- (1) Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular.
- (2) You know that Obama's middle name is Hussein. I'm just saying.
- (3) I would pick somebody who would not allow their personal opinion to get in the way of the law... Another example would be the Dred Scott case, which is where judges, years ago, said that the Constitution allowed slavery because of personal property rights. That's a personal opinion. That's not what the Consitution says. It doesn't speak to the equality of America.
- (4) Perhaps you would feel more comfortable locating in a more... transitional neighborhood, like Ashwood?
- (5) Wow, it's late! The party must have been really fun, huh?
- (6) I'm in a bit of a hurry. Is there any way we can settle this right now?
- (7) What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and brought up in my household, who let their Lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born cleric?

## Example of implicature that is not insinuation

- (8) A: (*standing by car on the side of the road*) I'm out of gas.  
B: There's a service station two blocks up State Street.