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Literal meaning: A first step to meaning interpretation

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Abstract

Some traditional accounts view literal meaning (LM) as the central component in the process of meaning interpretation. This paper supports this view while adding that LM is the first but not the only piece of evidence available to the hearer of the speaker's meaning. After critically evaluating examples from previous studies and my own examples, the study concludes that discourse comprehension is a sequential and graded process. To understand the significance of LM as evidence in the process of meaning understanding, the study has to reconsider the notion of evidence according to Relevance Theory (RT) and define the vigorously debated term of LM. The results from this study suggest that literal meaning is initial and context is subsequential; while both co-determine the speaker's meaning in implicature, the latter enriches the speaker's meaning into a higher order speech act in explicature.

Key words

literal meaning, context, evidence, explicature, implicature

1. Introduction

The literal-non-literal divide has always been a concern of the theory of meaning (Giora, 1999). Some views of meaning interpretation adopted literalness as the source of meaning recognition (Grice, 1975; Katz and Fodor, 1963; Frege, 1966; Davidson, 1979; Dascal, 1987; Giora, 1999). Others were more biased towards the role of context (Searle, 1979; Gibbs, 1984; 1989; 2002; Wilson and Sperber, 2012). Grice (1975) sets out his account of meaning from the act of *what is said*. He argues that meaning understanding is based on the assumption that the speaker and hearer observe some maxims and principles of communication. When these maxims or principles are flouted, the hearer conversationally implicates the speaker's meaning from *what is said*. Dascal (1987) argues that the conventional interpretation of a sentence, no matter how minor, guides interpreters to the contextually appropriate interpretations of the speaker's meaning. A more recent study by Giora (1999) reported findings (similar to the findings by Swinney [1979]; Gernsbacher [1990]) that lexical meaning (retrieved from the lexicon) is "always accessed, and always initially, regardless of context" in interpreting metaphors, idiomatic expressions and irony. Factors such as frequency, familiarity and conventionality were found to increase the degree of lexical saliency, giving lexical meaning priority over context in meaning interpretation (Giora, 1990).

Other accounts were biased towards the role of context in meaning understanding. Gibbs (2002, p.482) argues that the "the pursuit of literal meaning in theories of linguistic meaning and understanding is a fruitless exercise". Gibbs's argument is in favour of the direct access view, which claims that "listeners need not automatically analyze the complete literal meaning of linguistic expressions before accessing pragmatic knowledge to figure out what speakers mean to communicate" (Gibbs, 2002, p. 460). More recent accounts such as RT embrace the priority of context to derive relevant assumptions.

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According to RT, human cognition tends to allocate the most relevant and available inputs by applying a less costly and more beneficial path of meaning processing at the time to achieve positive contextual effects.

In this study, meaning interpretation is neither solely form-based nor context-initial. Applying literal meaning alone “implies a highly non-pragmatic analysis of what is said” (Gibbs, 2002, p.460). The view that context is initial is also implausible as, I assume, communication is always evidence based. My aim is to argue that meaning understanding is an integrative, sequential and graded process that always sets out from a salient piece of evidence. This study integrates literal meaning (LM), context and the notion of evidence to explain meaning interpretation. I presume that meaning interpretation is sequentially guided by LM as the most salient piece of evidence and contextually enriched to the point that the speaker’s meaning is explicit to the hearer. In this study I will critically evaluate examples from previous studies and my own examples. The examples from previous studies are discussed in light of their original contexts to pinpoint any differences from my analysis.

A definition of LM has always been the concern of a number of studies (Searle, 1978; Dascal, 1987; Gibbs, 1989). Presenting a clear definition of LM therefore should be one of my concerns in this study. Before I do this, in the following section I will re-examine the notion of evidence in RT as another important concept to explain meaning understanding as a sequential and graded process. The last two parts of the study will apply this argument of meaning understanding to implicature and explicature.

1.1 Evidence

Evidence should be reconsidered for the aim of this study. According to Wilson and Sperber, RT is a cognitive account of meaning understanding that seeks “to explain how the hearer infers the speaker’s meaning on the basis of the evidence provided” (2002b, p.250). A piece of evidence makes a stimulus easy to understand, triggers the desired cognitive effect a speaker aims at, and holds the audience’s attention for further cognitive effects (Wilson and Sperber, 2002a; 2002b). Evidence, according to RT, is behavioural, cognitive or linguistic, in order to confirm, reject, strengthen or further strengthen an assumption. It is also inductive, introspective, sufficient, insufficient, direct or indirect, initial or conclusive (Sperber and Wilson, 1995; 2002).

In RT, evidence is highly contextualized; that is, it is a context-driven to context-based understanding of the speaker’s meaning. It is too all-encompassing and non-conclusive a term to operate adequately in the process of meaning interpretation in this research. A piece of evidence in RT involves what the speaker makes manifest to the hearer. As such, it provides a variety of assumptions, and all of them are possible at the time of speaking. To explain this point, consider the following example as given in Sperber and Wilson (1993):

- (1) a. *Peter took out his key and opened the door.*
 b. *Mary injured her leg and sued Peter.*

According to RT, the interpretation of the utterances in (1) above is guided by the interpreter’s background knowledge of why/how keys/doors are used/opened. The process is deductive from the interpreter’s knowledge of why keys are used and how doors are opened. In (1a) the assumption is specific as the key generally has one function, which is to open a door. The conjunction *and* therefore implicates that the key was used to open the door. This interpretation is consistent with the interpreter’s knowledge of the world, and therefore it is the only possibility ahead. If we take example (1b), however, the process of building assumptions is more sophisticated. To wit, some possible assumptions are: *because* Mary injured her leg, she sued Peter; *after* Mary injured her leg, she sued Peter; *though* Mary injured her leg, she sued Peter; the acts of *injuring the leg* and *suing Peter* are independent acts where none of the relations through the linking words *because*, *after* and *though* apply. One, therefore, can make further assumptions depending on one’s knowledge of the world, experience, cultural orientation, etc. In support of this conclusion is Sinclair’s (1992, p. 120) suggestion that:

The source of the assumptions which the bearer can select to function as context for the interpretation of an utterance is the hearer’s cognitive environment. This cognitive environment consists of all the assumptions about the world which an individual holds at any particular moment. The cognitive environment includes a wide variety of assumptions, including

assumptions derived through perceptual processing of the external environment and assumptions derived from memory. Memory itself is a vast store of varied information, including information derived through processing of earlier parts of the discourse, various kinds of social and cultural knowledge, and all kinds of encyclopaedic information.

The reason why we have many assumptions in this example, I believe, is because our selection and operation of the notion of evidence in RT is loose and unsystematic. Considering all the assumptions of the speaker's meaning valid, in (1b), causes the process of meaning interpretation to become bogged down and therefore reduces the chances of achieving relevance. A salient piece of evidence is necessary to limit the assumptions by the hearer to the most relevant ones, and nothing could be as salient as the LM of the utterance at the time of speaking. To understand how LM could act as a piece of evidence, in the following section, I will present my definition of LM before I explain how it is applied to discourse comprehension in the subsequent parts of this study.

1.2 What is LM?

LM, according to Recanati (2004), is a combination of the sentence meaning and *what is said*. Context and LM represent *what is implicated* (Recanati, 2004). In this research, context has two types: micro-context and macro-context. Micro-context is immediate and static, such as deictics or the subset of group members of a lexical item which are employed, consecutively, to disambiguate a reference or help assign the right sense to a word or an expression. In this sense, the micro-context is intuitive as it helps the hearer recover the speaker's utterance into a complete proposition at the cognitive level. Macro-context is part of what is implicated. It is dynamic as it varies according to the interpreter's culture, background information, or the environment of the speech situation. In this sense, the macro-context is discursive. Based on this conceptualization of context, LM as used in this study is a combination of the coded utterance and the micro-context. The following points characterize how LM and context are employed in this research:

1. LM comprises the coded utterance and the micro-context. It is the first piece of evidence available to the interpreter at the time of speaking and the point where he/she forms his/her first assumption of the speaker's meaning.
2. The macro-context is a subsequent stage of meaning interpretation where the interpreter confirms his/her first assumption about the speaker's meaning.
3. The process of meaning interpretation when there is an utterance is necessarily bottom-up, that is, from the intuitive phase to the discursive one. It is only top-down when there is no coded utterance, as in non-strategic silence.

In the following section, I will explain the significance of LM in meaning interpretation. The main objective of this section is to argue that LM has priority over context. The subsequent section will argue that the process of meaning interpretation is sequential; this section will examine meaning communication by employing LM as the first piece of evidence in implicature and explicature.

1.3 LM and meaning interpretation

Examples (1) and (2) below explain that LM is initial and significant to utterance interpretation.

- (1) *If I tell you about my 'friend' in English, you will expect that sooner or later you will discover the sex of the friend, because you know that third-person pronouns in English indicate gender. If I go on and on to refer only to "my friend" or "they," you will begin to suspect that I have reason to conceal the person's gender. (Slobin, 2003, pp. 159-160)*
- (2) *Imagine, for example, that the political balance in the United States shifts and Spanish becomes the official language. Americans now would have to know—in every encounter—who is tú and who is usted. That is, the language would force our attention to fine points of status and intimacy that we have not had to resolve in using the universal English you. (Slobin, 2003, pp. 159-160)*

In the first example, the absence of the gender form is unexpected or abnormal. The unexpectedness of the missing gender form arouses a suspicion in the hearer concerning the reason why it is possibly being concealed. This assumption is not possible if a gender form is mentioned. The absence/presence of this form is part of the LM of the utterance. That *there is a reason* is confirmed by the continuous absence of the third person reference from the act of communication. In order to recognize the reason why the gender form is being concealed, the hearer should draw on other resources such as the context of the utterance or his/her background knowledge of similar situations. If English did not encode gender through third-person pronouns, would the hearer assume that there was a reason for concealing the gender of the person referred to in the communication? The answer is no. We should conclude therefore that the assumption *there is a reason* is activated initially by the LM of the utterance. The absence of gender form increases the markedness of the utterance, and therefore the hearer starts the process of checking possible assumptions against other contextual premises of the speech situation to figure out the reason for concealing the gender form. In the second example, the attention to status and intimacy is not possible in English as the distinction between formal and informal second person does not exist. The English speaker does not apply any further steps to ascertain meanings of intimacy and deference as he/she will have no evidence of such function in the LM of the utterance. Unlike example (1) which requires LM be checked against other contextual aspects of the speech situation, the hearer in example (2) does not apply any other pieces of evidence, as meaning has been spelled out completely.

A conventional sign can serve a similar function to examples (1) and (2) above. Conventionality is a term associated with Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) who proposes that there is an arbitrary relationship between the sign and what it refers to. As Handl (2011, p.51) puts it, “once a speech community has incorporated an arbitrary form-meaning pairing in its collective mind, speakers are bound to it”. Conventionality as such, I contend, is equal to LM as an initial and most salient piece of evidence in meaning processing. For example, in the Arab world, coffee is normally served after a meal. The host walks around and pours coffee in little cups. If you shake the cup right and left after coffee is consumed, it means ‘enough’; if not, it means ‘more’, and the host keeps pouring refills until you do. Shaking/not shaking the cup are signs that translate in the mind of who serves the coffee as *enough* or *more*. At this point, communication is achieved, and there is no need to perform any subsequent steps to confirm this meaning as the most likely/relevant one.

2. LM in implicature and explicature

The main objective of this section is to explain the process of meaning understanding as a sequential process that always sets out from the LM of an utterance. The relation between LM and the speaker’s meaning could be explained as follows:

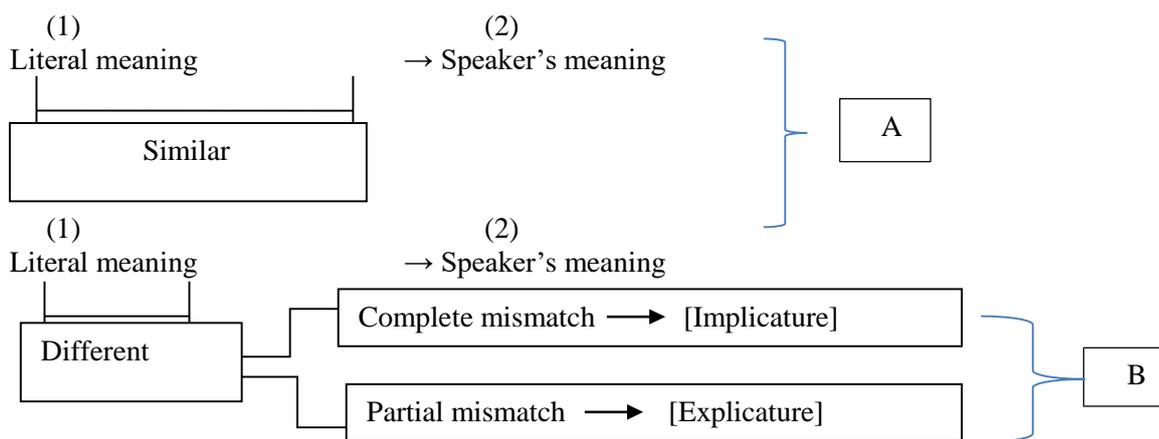


Figure 1. LM vs. speaker’s meaning

The analysis in this section follows from the general claim that a speaker says something and he/she means what he/she says, or says something and means something else. In the figure above, meaning processing undergoes at least two steps. Step (1) is the act of saying. Step (2) represents the point where the process of meaning understanding has been completed; that is, it is the point where the speaker’s

meaning is spelled out with most relevance to the hearer. In A, LM is in conformity with the speaker's meaning, and therefore no additional pieces of evidence are required. In B, LM is either partially or completely different from the speaker's meaning, and therefore a subsequent piece/s of evidence is/are required to conclude the process of meaning comprehension. A complete mismatch between LM and speaker's meaning produces implicature. A partial mismatch between LM and speaker's meaning produces explicature. In the following two sections, I will apply LM to implicature (Grice's particularized implicature), and explicature (connectives, lexical decoding and prolexic forms).

2.1 Implicature

Grice (1975) characterizes the notion of conversational implicature as primarily an act of saying that *p* implicates *q*. *By saying, in saying, when saying or even making as if to say* constitute a form of evidence that *p* implicates *q* (Grice, 1975). Implicature according to Grice is particularized or context dependent. This is called conversational implicature by Grice (1975) or just implicature by Wilson and Sperber (2003). To explain how LM initiates a sequential process to interpret implicature, consider examples (3), (4) and (5) below:

- (3) Late on Christmas Eve 1993 an ambulance is sent to pick up a man who has collapsed in Newcastle City Centre. The man is drunk and vomits all over the ambulanceman who goes to help him.
The ambulanceman says: 'Great, that's really great! That's made my Christmas!' (Thomas, 1989)
- (4) A: *Do you like ice-cream?*
B: *Is the Pope Catholic?* (Yule, 1996)
- (5) A: *Where do you come from?*
B: *It is raining outside,*

In example (3), Thomas considers this type of utterance as a case of divergence between *what is said* and *what is implicated*. She does not provide a detailed explanation of how meaning interpretation proceeds in this example. Here I will apply LM as initial to a sequential process of meaning comprehension. By uttering example (3) (in italics), the hearer is able to assign sense and reference to the constituents of the utterance (the intuitive phase). At this point the LM of the utterance is overtly present and consciously accessible to him/her at the time of speaking. Also at this point, the hearer recognizes the primary function of the utterance as assertive of a state of being. LM informs the hearer of the speaker's informative intention of the act referred to as: *Great, really great and it has made his (the speaker's), day*. As I pointed out before, LM either conforms to the macro-context of the conversation, and therefore no further pieces of evidence are necessary, or contrasts with the macro-context, and therefore another piece of evidence is required to produce a relevant interpretation. In this example, the second option applies. The macro-context contrasts with the LM of the utterance (dissatisfaction vs. satisfaction). The interpreter therefore becomes entitled to a new assumption of the speaker's meaning. As the assumptions are many, the macro-context co-determines the most likely one (relevant assumption) along with the LM of the utterance. The distinction between *what is said* and *what is implied* is abridged by the negative article (not, no, never, etc.). This selection is made through the macro-context from a subset of category members relevant to the degree and type of mismatch between the macro-context and micro-context. In this example, the negative particle/adverbial automatically becomes part of the interpreter's assumption of the communicator's intention. What is spelled out as the speaker's meaning therefore is a proposition similar to '*not great, not really great, that has not made my Christmas*'. The following figure illustrates the whole process of interpreting example (3):

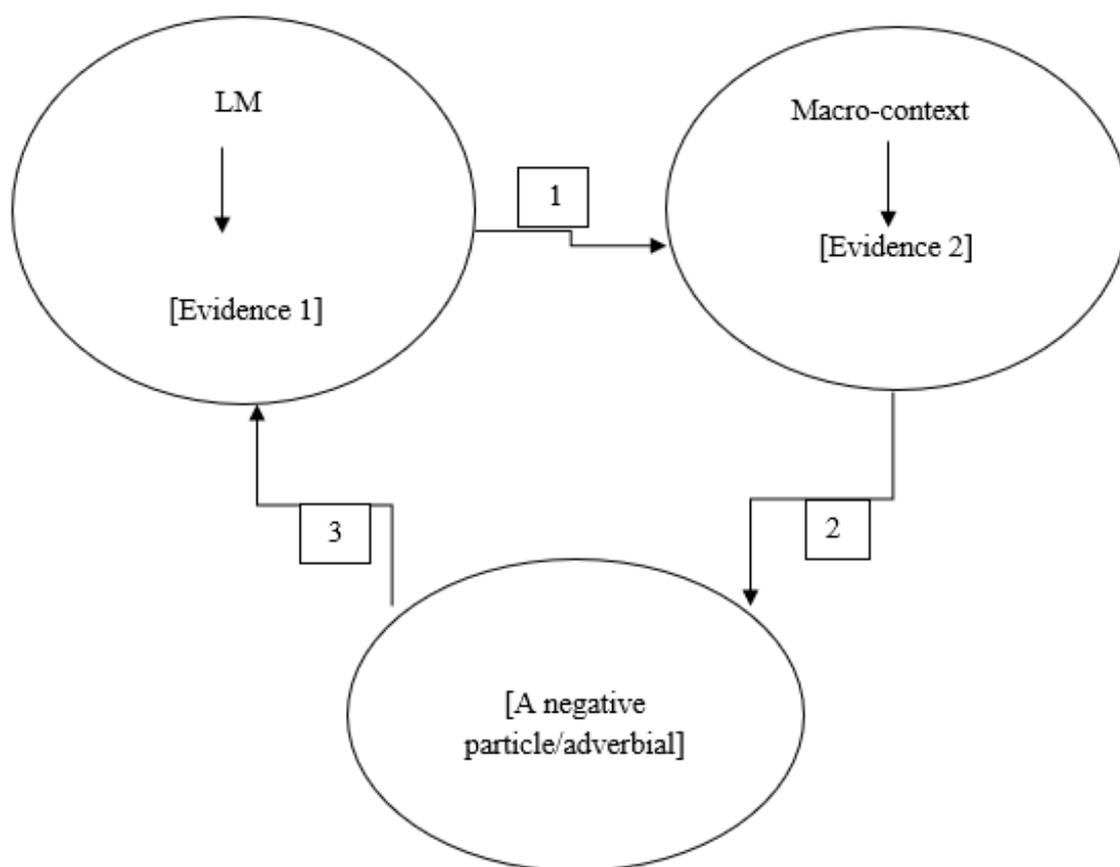


Figure 2. Literal Meaning in example (3)

Some may argue that steps 1-7 by Thomas (1989) (see below) also form one possible explanation of the process of interpreting this example. Based on the generally acknowledged claim that human cognition always adopts a path of greater economy and greater efficiency, I claim that this explanation is not possible. One tool of measurement to validate this argument is the number of steps necessary to be taken by the hearer to reach a relevant assumption of the speaker's meaning. By applying Grice's cooperative principle and maxims, the steps applied by Thomas (1989, p. 67) to interpret example (3) are the following:

1. The ambulance man has expressed pleasure at having someone vomit over him.
2. There is no example in recorded history of people being delighted at having someone vomiting over them.
3. I have no reason to believe that the ambulanceman is trying to deceive us in any way.
4. Unless the ambulanceman's utterance is entirely pointless, he must be trying to put across some other proposition.
5. This must be some obviously related proposition.
6. The most obviously related proposition is the exact opposite of the one he has expressed.
7. The ambulance is extremely annoyed at having the drunk man vomit over him.

By comparing Thomas's (1989) with my analysis of the same example, I should point to the following differences:

- While Thomas has applied 7 steps, through LM we only need 3 (as illustrated in figure 2 above). Therefore, meaning interpretation according to my analysis is rather automatic and effortless.
- The derivations concluded by Thomas are rather chimerical. That is, reviewing the recorded history of mankind for similar situations and the taken-for-granted conclusion that no similar situations occurred before are rigorous derivations. The possible assumptions therefore are

many. My analysis limits the derivations to only one possible derivation through the LM of the utterance plus context. Both of them are available for the interpreter and the resulting assumption is not chimerical in anyway.

- For Thomas, the whole process starts from the speaker's intention outward to a relevant proposition. In this study, LM is a deduction of meaning from the language form to the speaker's meaning. This seems to greatly serve the view that *what is said* has priority over *what is implicated*.
- Relevance is maximized if we follow less processing through LM. If we have to follow the derivations by Thomas, there is no guarantee that we end up with the speaker's meaning, and therefore chances of miscommunication are higher.

Yule (1996) interpreted example (4) following the cooperative principle by Grice (1975). According to Yule, B's response is a *yes* following the hearer's knowledge that the Pope is Catholic. Again this interpretation is derived by context where other assumptions are equally possible. To apply the LM of the utterance as the first step in a sequential process, A's utterance is a question that normally triggers a *yes* or *no* answer. B's utterance is also a question that triggers a similar answer. This follows from the interpreter's intuitive knowledge of question-answer pairing. At this point, there is no question-answer sequence, so a subsequent piece of evidence is required to bridge the gap between the utterances. The interpreter's world knowledge that the Pope is Catholic yields A's new assumption of B's intended meaning as *Yes, I like ice-cream*, and this is a fact that measures up to the truth that the Pope is Catholic. Though both explanations (Yule's and mine) result in the same interpretation, my analysis is more conclusive of one relevant assumption, not many ones if we have to apply Grice's maxims.

Example (5) is a case of a conventionalized sign as a piece of evidence for the interpreter's processing of meaning. Some forms of inferential patterns, as Lenci (1994) suggested, are standard to the degree they become conventionalized forms. A shift to a completely different topic is a conventional sign used to communicate avoidance of engaging in conversation. According to Dailey and Palomares (2004, p. 472), topic avoidance is "a goal-oriented communicative behavior whereby individuals strategically try to keep a conversation away from certain foci". B's utterance in example (5) tries to keep the conversation away from the topic of A's utterance. In this case, what could be irrelevant according to Grice or even requiring a lot of cognitive processing according to RT is only an instant triggering of meaning through a conventional form. Therefore, I doubt that such an example of high conventionality even measures up to the level of implicature.

2.2 Explicature

According to Wilson and Sperber (2012, p.13), explicature is "close to what might be commonsensically described as the explicit content, or what is said, or the literal meaning of the utterance". The desired end of an explicature is "a truth-evaluable proposition" (Briner, 2013) or a fleshed-out linguistically encoded semantic representation (Clark, 2013). Carston (1998; 1999 and 2003) takes explicature to refer to both pragmatically derived meaning and linguistically encoded meaning. The semantic representation of an utterance provides a skeleton for explicature through the enrichment of its form (Blakemore, 1992).

Unlike implicature, the intuitive phase is only necessary to interpret explicature as a complete proposition of the speaker's meaning in this study. Context is necessary to take the speaker's meaning a step further as a higher order speech act. So a speaker's meaning and the speech act of an utterance are completely different points of meaning understanding in this study. The LM of an utterance provides evidence of the speaker's intended meaning, and that makes the selection of the most relevant interpretation of explicature more automatic and economic than implicature. In this section, I will apply LM to connectives and lexical decoding. I will also apply LM to prolexic forms as another case of explicature. In prolexic forms, the discursive phase is as important as the intuitive one (see the example in the last part of this section)

In the case of connectives, the interpreter's knowledge of complete patterns such as action-outcome is part of the LM of the utterance. To enrich the LM of the utterance into a higher order speech act, the hearer needs to consider the macro-context as a subsequent piece of evidence, should this step become necessary. In example (6), the utterance by A does not establish a complete proposition of the speaker's meaning by itself. Recognizing that the utterance *so busy tonight* is not a complete proposition is possible through the interpreter's established knowledge of complete patterns, such as pairing action

with outcome, cause with effect, and reason with result. In the case of connectives, one counterpart of a pair (action, cause and reason) is manifest to the interpreter. This automatically and consequently triggers the other counterpart (outcome, effect and result), through selecting a connective that mostly fits the relation between both counterparts. So the LM of the utterance ends where a connective is necessary to enrich or saturate the utterance into a complete proposition of the speaker's meaning. In example (6), if *a nice movie is playing* (action), *so it should be seen* (outcome). At this point, the connective *so* is the best candidate to enrich A's utterance into a proposition that is in conformity with his knowledge of what to do if *a nice movie is playing*. The new proposition is further processed as a speech act of inviting through the macro-context of speech, for example through B's knowledge of similar situations or any other pieces of evidence available to him/her at the time of speaking. The proposition now available for B is: *A nice movie is playing tonight, so join me!* The same process applies to A of his/her interpretation of B's utterance. The assumption available to A through his/her knowledge of the reason-result pattern is: *Busy tonight, so I cannot join you*. Again, this proposition is further processed as a speech act of refusal available to the interpreter via A's experience of similar situations or any other contextual evidence made manifest by B at the time of speaking. In example (7), the hearer's established knowledge of reason-result pairing informs his/her selection of connectives such as *therefore*, *so*, or *because of that*. Once such connectives are informed, the first presumption by the interpreter of the speaker's meaning is: *Your paper is too long so you are/aren't invited to the conference*. To make a selection between *are* and *aren't*, the hearer needs to perform a process of lexical decoding (I will explain this below in my analysis of lexical decoding).

- (6) A: *There is a nice movie playing!*
B: *Gosh, so busy tonight.*

- (7) A: *Did I get invited to the conference?*
B: *Your paper was **too** long.*

In case of lexical decoding, a lexical item picks out a subset of category members that vary in terms of scalarity (strong vs. weak forms; general vs. specific forms), markedness (marked vs. unmarked forms), meaning (denotative vs. connotative forms) etc. In example (7), the selection between *are* and *aren't* is only possible through lexical decoding of the quantifier *too* (in bold in the example). The quantifier *too* invites a subset of category members that share some negative attributes; therefore the selection of *aren't* is most relevant. Example (8) (below) is another case of lexical decoding. Speaker A's desire to know the exact location of C is not conveyed in the utterance by speaker B. At this point, speaker A is conscious that the lexeme *somewhere* requires a process of lexical decoding. The adverb *somewhere* invites a subset of category members with similar meanings, such as *unspecified*, *unknown*, *uncertain*, *inexact*, etc. By triggering such forms, B's utterance becomes manifest to A as: *C lives in the south of France, but I am not sure where exactly*. Again, recognizing this proposition in the form of a higher order speech act is through the macro-context, for example, through A's expectations of B, the relationship between A and B, the relationship between B and C, or any other pieces of evidence at the time of speaking.

- (8) A: *Where does C live?*
B: *Somewhere in the south of France.*

Prolexic forms are marked forms of language, and they are employed to generate meaning in addition to *what is said* (Levinson, 1995; 2000). A form is prolexic when it is unnecessarily longwinded, irregularly structured or unconventionally formatted. As such, meaning becomes idiosyncratic and less predictable. The primacy of LM and the sequentiality of the process of meaning understanding can be applied to prolexic forms. Consider example (9) (below) from a press conference between the American President Barak Obama and the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on 14 April 2015. The Shiite Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) were mentioned with prolixity in the discussion about the role of the Iraqi Forces in the war against ISIS (Islamic State in Syria). The PMF are Shiites troops redeployed to stop ISIS taking over more Iraqi territory. The PMF are notorious for being sectarian and committing crimes against the Sunnis of Iraq under the pretext of fighting ISIS.

- (9) We are fighting several fights and combats against ISIL. We have won rounds against ISIL. One round we lost was in Ramadi, but I say that we lost it only temporarily and the Iraqi Security Forces and the Popular Mobilization Forces **all under the leadership of the commander in chief and the leadership of the Iraqi government** has taken control of the situation and are endeavoring very hard to liberate all the land in Iraq that is confiscated. (Translation via interpreter)

The phrase (in bold) is the first piece of evidence completely manifest to the interpreter at the time of speaking as a prolexic form. The interpreter has access to the prolexic LM of the utterance through the unnecessary choice of words such as *all*, and the repetition of the phrase *the leadership of* (in bold in the example below). To wit, is it necessary to assert that the PMF are under the leadership of the Iraqi government if they are equivalent to the Iraqi Security Forces? If the PMF are under the leadership of the Iraqi forces, then they are essentially and stereotypically part of the audiences' script of the Iraq context. That is, they have legitimacy just as the regular forces do. As this is contrary to the interpreter's expectation of normal forms, the interpreter should try to find an explanation for the speaker's choice of this prolexic form from the context of speech. At this point, another piece of evidence is required, and it is available through the interpreter's knowledge of the Iraqi context and the featured image of the PMF. Because of the negative image of the PMF, the prolixity of the expression becomes necessary to confirm the speaker's script contrary to the audience's script. The speaker's script represents the role of the PMF as legitimate and equivalent to the regular forces. The audience's possible script is that the PMF are sectarian. If this context is part of the interpreter's knowledge, communication is achieved, if not, communication is pending and the interpreter is in a state of uncertainty about the speaker's meaning. In other words, if the interpreter (in this case the source message's first recipient) cannot incorporate this context into his processing of the speaker's meaning, the hearer (the source message's second recipient) will still feel that the speaker is trying to mouth something, but he/she cannot make it out.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, in this paper I have argued that LM is initial and context is subsequential in meaning interpretation. This is an integrative view of meaning interpretation that accounts for literal form, context and evidence as the main components of any message communication. Defining the three components therefore was this paper's first endeavour; the study as such critically evaluated the notion of evidence according to RT and suggested that LM is the most salient piece of evidence to the hearer at the time of speaking. It also examined the notion of context suggesting a classification based on function. Context is either intuitive (micro-context) or dynamic (macro-context). This classification was important in my definition of LM as a combination of the coded form of the utterance and the micro-context. This definition forms the basis of my argument that meaning interpretation is sequential and graded rather than solely form based or context initial. This claim was considered in the interpretation of implicature and explicature. It was found that the LM and macro-context co-determine the speaker's meaning through a sequential process from the LM of the utterance to the macro-context. The end is a complete proposition of the speaker's meaning. This process was characterized as economical and automatic when compared with other accounts such as that of Grice (1975). In explicature, however, the LM of the utterance is more basic than the macro-context. At the intuitive phase of the utterance, an utterance is enriched into a complete proposition of the speaker's meaning, as the examples on connectives and lexical decoding suggest. The macro-context is only important if we are to take the resulting proposition a step further into a higher order speech act. This makes us believe that the terms *speaker's meaning* and *speech act* are two distinct points of meaning interpretation. While a *speaker's meaning* is more intuitive and attainable through the coded form of the utterance and the micro-context, a *speech act* is more discursive and accessed only through the macro-context of the utterance.

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