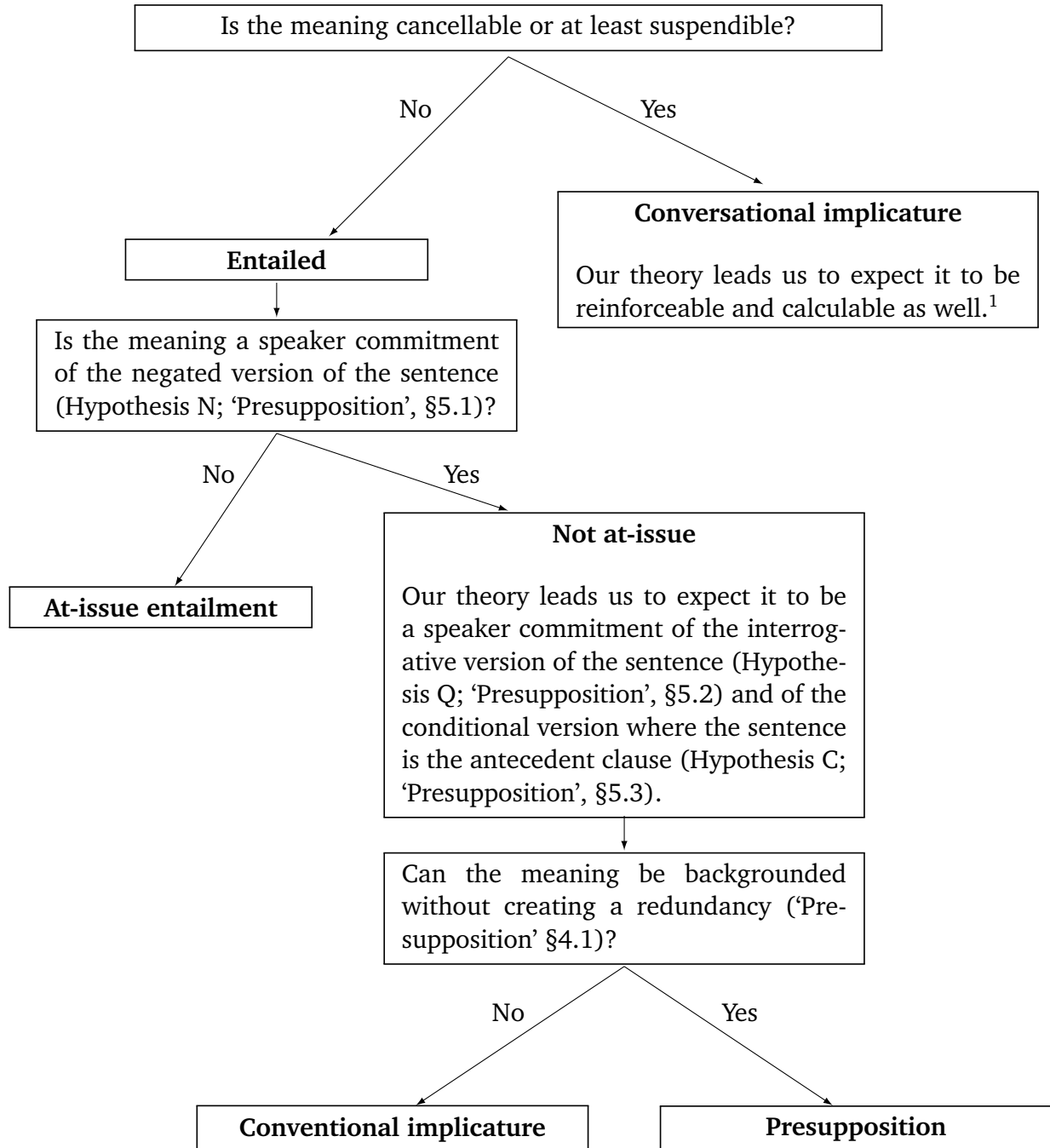# Diagnosing different kinds of meaning

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2024

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1 Diagnostic chart

Is the meaning cancellable or at least suspendible?

No

Yes

Conversational implicature

Our theory leads us to expect it to be reinforceable and calculable as well.[1]

Entailed

Is the meaning a speaker commitment of the negated version of the sentence (Hypothesis N; 'Presupposition', §5.1)?

No

Yes

At-issue entailment

Not at-issue

Our theory leads us to expect it to be a speaker commitment of the interrogative version of the sentence (Hypothesis Q; 'Presupposition', §5.2) and of the conditional version where the sentence is the antecedent clause (Hypothesis C; 'Presupposition', §5.3).

Can the meaning be backgrounded without creating a redundancy ('Presupposition' §4.1)?

No

Yes

Conventional implicature

Presupposition

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[1]Connotations are likely to fall into this category, but that might be inappropriate. In his 2014 Stanford thesis *Pragmatics and the Social Meaning of Determiners,* Eric Acton argues for an expanded Gricean framework with *associative* meanings that would cover connotations.

2   How to apply the tests

- **Cancellation**: encoding semantically the *negation* of the target meaning.
- **Suspension**: encoding semantically a *lack of knowledge* about the truth of the target meaning.
- **Re-enforcement**: encoding semantically the target meaning itself.
- **Presupposition tests**: the question is whether the speaker remains committed to the supposed presupposition if the original sentence is (i) negated; (ii) turned into a question; (iii) used as the antecedent of a conditional sentence. If the resulting sentences require that the speaker is committed to the supposed presupposition, that's evidence that the supposed presupposition is indeed a presupposition. For the conditional-antecedent test, the content of the consequent shouldn't matter.

3   Examples

(1)   Some cyclists wore spandex.

    Meaning of interest: *not all cyclists wore spandex.*

    a.   Some, in fact all, cyclists wore spandex.   (cancellable ⇒ Conversational implicature)

(2)   Kim managed to finish the exam.

    Meaning of interest: *Kim finished the exam*

    a.   #Kim managed to finish the exam, but she didn't finish it.

        (not cancellable ⇒ Entailed)

    b.   Kim didn't manage to finish the exam.

        (not a speaker commitment of the negated version ⇒ At-issue)

(3)   Sandy stopped smoking.

    Meaning of interest: *Sandy smoked in the past*

    a.   #Sandy stopped smoking — in fact, she never smoked.

        (not cancellable ⇒ Entailed)

    b.   Sandy didn't stop smoking.

        (speaker commitment of the negated version ⇒ Not at-issue)

    c.   Sandy smoked in the past, but she stopped smoking.

        (can be backgrounded ⇒ Presupposition)

(4)   Richard met Barbara, who is a linguist.

    Meaning of interest: *Barbara is a linguist*

    a.   #Richard met Barbara, who is a linguist, but Barbara is not a linguist.

        (not cancellable ⇒ Entailed)

    b.   Richard didn't meet Barbara, who is a linguist.

        (speaker commitment of the negated version ⇒ Not at-issue)

    c.   #Barbara is a linguist and David is a philosopher. Richard met Barbara, who is a linguist.

        (redundant when backgrounded ⇒ Conventional implicature)