Exploding Explicatures

Abstract:

A traditional (Gricean) view holds that there are two kinds of meaning making up the content of an utterance: what the sentence means and what the speaker conveys. This orthodox position has been rejected by views positing *three* kinds of meaning: what the sentence means, what the speaker asserts by their utterance (the 'explicature') and what she (merely) implicates. I critically examine the notion of an explicature, asking what pragmatic processes give rise to them and how they are supposed to be individuated. I suggest that the answers to these questions reveal that explicatures don't actually exist (in any interesting sense).

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Exploding Explicatures[*]

There is a fairly traditional view in philosophy of language (stemming from the work of Paul Grice) which holds that there are two kinds of meaning which together make up the complete content of an utterance: on the one hand, there is what the sentence means and, on the other, what the speaker conveys. However, in recent years this orthodox position has been superseded by the view that there are *three* kinds of meaning which make up the complete content of an utterance: what the sentence means, what the speaker explicitly asserts by their utterance and what she (merely) implicates. Following Sperber and Wilson I'll refer to the intermediate kind of content, between literal sentence meaning and implicatures, as the *explicature* of the utterance.[1] My aim in this paper is to take a closer look at the notion of an explicature, asking (in §2) what pragmatic processes might give rise to them and (in §3) how they are supposed to be individuated. My argument will be that advocates of explicatures face a tough job in answering both these questions and I'll suggest that these difficulties may be instructive. Perhaps, I'll contend, the problems show us that explicatures don't really exist in any interesting sense, in which case the door is open for a return to the simple binary model of Grice (and Kripke).[2] Thus (in §4) I'll sketch a model of communication which appeals only to the traditional Gricean two-way distinction. Let's start, however, by setting out the alternative views here.

1)   Three Approaches

There are three positions on how to understand the total signification of an utterance that I'd like to sketch here: the traditional view from Grice, a close variant of Grice's view (from

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[1] Kent Bach uses the term 'impliciture' for this level of content.

[2] Of course, there is a trivial sense in which explicatures obviously exist, if we mean by the term just 'whatever content the speaker directly communicates'. My claim is rather that explicatures *as standardly defined* (i.e. as some minimally pragmatically enriched content which yields what the speaker directly asserts and from which implicatures must be derived, see §1) do not exist. See §4 for further discussion.

semantic Minimalism) and an alternative view from Pragmaticism. As we will see, although Pragmaticism is sympathetic to many aspects of the Gricean approach it takes a very different view on how to understand utterance content and communication.

1.1)   The Gricean Model

As ever, the starting point for any discussion about speaker meaning and communication is the seminal work of Paul Grice. Grice proposed a division between two different elements which go together to deliver the complete content of an utterance: (a) what is said and (b) what is implicated. For Grice, the notion of 'what is said' is a technical one, which doesn't necessarily track our intuitive judgements of what a speaker says in uttering a given sentence. Instead, what is said for Grice is given by compositional linguistic meaning (word meaning plus structure) together with some limited contextual processes (namely, disambiguation and reference assignment for indexicals and demonstratives). It is this kind of content which, according to Grice, gives us what the speaker asserts. However, in addition to this directly asserted content, Grice recognised that a speaker may convey a number of further propositions less directly. These propositions are what the speaker implicates. On the Gricean model there are three different kinds of implicature (conventional implicatures, generalised conversational implicatures and particularised conversational implicatures) and there is a different story to be told for each, but in general the idea is that a grasp of what is said, together with general knowledge about how conversation works, allows a hearer sometimes to infer alternative implicated propositions. So, on Grice's model, we have a two-fold division between what the speaker asserts (which is close to something like the standing meaning of the sentence) plus what she merely implicates (where this may be a range of propositions); though Grice didn't use the terms 'semantics' and 'pragmatics', theorists often take Grice's binary distinction to map to the semantics/pragmatics divide.

Grice's approach has, of course, been hugely influential, but it has also been criticised on a number of fronts. I'll touch on just two possible areas of concern here: first, it has been objected that Grice's model lacks psychological plausibility. On the Gricean model, a hearer first grasps what is said by the speaker, then she realises that to maintain her view of the speaker as a good and co-operative conversational partner she cannot take what is said to be the content the speaker aimed to communicate. Thus the hearer proceeds to infer some alternative proposition(s) as that which is communicated by the speaker. However the suggestion is that this laborious process does not match on-line comprehension of communicative acts. For instance, work on scalar terms suggests that we sometimes proceed to a pragmatically enriched reading (e.g. taking 'some' not to mean *some and possibly all* – it's logical reading – but rather to convey the pragmatically strengthened reading *some and not all*) at a local level. That is to say, we arrive at the enriched reading before the whole sentence is heard and thus clearly before the hearer could be in a position to grasp what is said by the sentence (see Chierchia et al 2012). Or again, in certain cases of figurative language, it seems hearers do not first calculate the literal meaning of the sentence produced and then proceed to a non-literal interpretation (i.e. they don't first grasp what is said and then infer what is implied), instead the figurative meaning is conveyed directly (see Gibbs' 1994 'direct access metaphors'). Given these kinds of cases the suggestion is that Grice's model cannot provide an account of on-line utterance interpretation. So, if that is the kind of account we want, the Gricean framework must be rejected.

A second worry for the Gricean model is that Grice's claim that asserted content lies with (a) seems misplaced. Often what is asserted by a speaker is content that has been pragmatically enriched in various ways. For instance, the speaker who says 'There is nothing to eat' perhaps asserts that *there is nothing appealing to eat in this house*, while the speaker who says 'Jill drank five beers and drove home' perhaps asserts that Jill drank the beer *and then* drove home. If this is right, it seems we need a notion of assertion which admits more content than merely that recoverable by words and structure, plus disambiguation and reference assignment, alone.

1.2) The Minimalist Model

One model which sticks very closely to the Gricean framework whilst apparently avoiding the two worries raised above is the Minimalist model (see Borg 2004, 2012, Cappelen and Lepore 2005).[3] On this model we again have a binary division, though minimalists prefer not to use the label 'what is said' for the (a) side of the divide (given the temptation to confuse this with a more intuitive notion of 'what the speaker says' and given its clear speech act connotations). So the division here is the more Kripkean one between:

(a) what the sentence means

(b) what the speaker means

Just as for Grice though, (a) is held to be given by compositional meaning together with very limited pragmatic input (disambiguation and reference assignment). This kind of content gives us what is literally expressed by the sentence relative to the context of utterance (what Minimalists take to be semantic content), while (b) gives us what is conveyed by the speaker (pragmatic content). The difference between these two types of content is given, at least for some minimalists, in terms of the different kinds of cognitive processes involved in their recovery.[4] According to Minimalism, then, what the speaker means is usually some kind of pragmatically enhanced content, it includes multiple propositions (and the range of propositions included is often indeterminate), and both minor and major alterations to what the sentence means can be

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[3] It is important to note that the Minimalist model is not the only possible alternative to the traditional Gricean framework which we might choose to adopt here. In particular, little in what follows will turn on the core Minimalist assumption that all well-formed declarative sentences express propositions (rather than sub-propositional content). While it might be difficult to maintain the view that sentence meaning can be asserted by speakers (if that meaning is sub-propositional), the rest of the model to be described in this paper could it seems accommodate the view that sentence meaning falls short of propositional content. However, as an *ad hominem* point, it is worth noting that the view that sentence meaning is sub-propositional strongly correlates in the literature with the view that utterance content contains both explicatures and implicatures (it is, for instance, endorsed by Sperber and Wilson, Carston, Bach and Travis). Clearly this is the case because, if one thinks sentence meaning is sub-propositional, there is then an easy divide to be drawn between the complete proposition which results from fleshing out the sub-propositional fragment and any other propositions arrived at via inference from that fleshed out proposition. This way of looking at things will be the focus of §§2-3.

[4] In Borg 2004 literal meaning is held to be computationally recovered by a discrete, informationally encapsulated, modular language faculty, while non-literal content – speaker meaning – is recovered by abductive, general reasoning processes which are able to draw, in principle, on anything the agent knows.

countenanced as part of what is conveyed.[5] Unlike the Gricean model, however, the minimalist is

willing to allow *assertion* to go with either (a) or (b), or indeed with both. Depending on the kind

of communicative exchange agents are engaged in, speakers may assert only the literal meaning

of the sentence they have uttered (e.g. certain legal exchanges) or it may be that they assert a

range of pragmatically enhanced propositions (either as well as having asserted (a) or, as in

sarcasm, instead of asserting (a)).[6]

The Minimalist version of the binary view apparently avoids the worries raised for the

Gricean model above: it avoids the apparent cognitive expense of Grice's model since it does not

claim that hearer's must recover the complete proposition expressed by a sentence before

proceeding to recovery of speaker meaning (instead, Minimalism allows semantic operations to

feed out to other systems in real-time, as it were, as bits of information are generated) and it

avoids the challenge that what is asserted often goes beyond mere sentence meaning (since it

allows assertion to go with (a) or (b)). However, as is well-known, these kinds of benefits come

at a cost. For instance, Minimalism notoriously argues that (so long as we are realistic about the

kinds of contents semantics is capable of generating – namely ones which are often extremely

general – and so long as we've got our account of syntactically represented indexicality in order –

for instance, recognising that expressions like 'left' and 'right', and maybe others, have a

genuinely indexical aspect to their meaning) the content delivered by (a) for declarative sentences

is *always* propositional content. Many theorists view this claim as indefensible (e.g. Bach 2007).

Furthermore, although minimalism avoids one kind of challenge concerning psychological

plausibility, it is open to another version of this objection, for many theorists have argued that

the kind of minimal propositions Minimalism posits for (a) lack psychological reality (Recanati

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[5] See Cappelen and Lepore's 2005 discussion of 'speech act pluralism'. Note that Cappelen and Lepore maintain that sentence meaning is *always* part of what the speaker asserts, but this is not the position assumed here.
[6] Camp 2012 argues that sarcasm is not a case of assertion at all, with the contrary propositions being implied but not asserted (so a speaker who utters 'Jack is a fine friend' merely pretends to assert the literal proposition and thereby implies the negated one). However, as will be discussed in §4, I would prefer to drop the distinction between assertion and 'mere' implication, talking instead of 'degrees of assertion'. Under such a model, sarcasm might still count as assertion and our speaker might be held to have asserted (more or less strongly depending on the context) that Jack is not a fine friend.

2010). Connected to this objection, and most important from the perspective of the current paper, the final worry for both the Gricean and the Minimalist model is that they overlook a crucial division *within speaker meaning*. It is a mistake, according to this line of thought, to lump all non-literal content together in one undifferentiated bag. Instead, we should recognise that there are two kinds of pragmatically enhanced content: one to which a speaker directly commits herself by saying what she does, and another which may still be communicated but in some less direct way. What we need, according to this model, then, is a division *within* the realm of pragmatic meaning.

1.3) The Pragmaticist Model[7]

According to those I'll classify here as 'Pragmaticists' (like Sperber and Wilson, Carston, Bach, Recanati, and perhaps Travis) what we have is a three-fold divide between (a) linguistically encoded content, (b) the explicit content of an utterance (the *explicature* to use Sperber and Wilson's term), and (c) what is implicated. Linguistically encoded content is the standing meaning of the sentence and it is always, often, or sometimes sub-propositional content (depending on which kind of Pragmatism one prefers). For instance, since no pragmatic processes at all lie within (a) on this model, any sentence containing an indexical, demonstrative or tense marker will have only a non-propositional, character-level content at (a). Explicatures, on the other hand, are the complete propositions speakers directly communicate. They are pragmatically enhanced developments of (a) involving reference assignment for indexicals and demonstratives together with certain 'free pragmatic effects'.

Free pragmatic effects are contextual effects on what the speaker says which are not triggered by anything in the syntactic or lexical form of the sentence. They are not bottom-up, mandatory contextual processes (like the saturation of an indexical with its referent) but rather

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[7] Terminology in this debate is difficult, but I use the term 'Pragmatism' (Neale 2007) rather than the perhaps more usual 'Contextualism', since it remains controversial exactly what Contextualism claims (e.g. whether it claims that pragmatic intrusion entails that words – rather than speakers – mean different things in different contexts); this issue is discussed in Borg 2012a.

are triggered solely by the conversational setting in which the sentence is produced. They are thus top-down, entirely optional processes. So, for instance, the provision of a referent for the indexical in an utterance of 'I've eaten' is a bottom-up, mandatory pragmatic process – the presence of the word 'I' tells us, first, that we must look to a context of utterance to secure a value for this expression and, second, it mandates which aspect of the context must be appealed to (namely, the producer of the token). On the other hand, the recognition that the person who utters 'I've eaten' in a certain context means that they've eaten *recently* marks a free pragmatic effect – an optional pragmatic alteration of the linguistically given content based on features of the conversational context in play. Or again, if I were to utter 'This steak in raw' in a restaurant, having just been presented with a particularly bloody piece of meat, I would be understood as asserting not the literal meaning *this steak is uncooked* but rather a pragmatically modulated meaning along the lines of *this steak is undercooked.* Arriving at this meaning is a top-down process (driven solely by high-level, conversational considerations) and it is fully optional (in other contexts, an utterance of 'this steak is raw' could express just the literal, unenhanced meaning). We'll look further at the notion of free pragmatic effects in §2, but the claim is that what a speaker directly asserts on at least some occasions is not the impoverished literal meaning of the sentence she produces but some suitably pragmatically modulated content – a content close to the literal meaning of the sentence uttered but refined or enriched in certain ways so as to provide a complete proposition.[8]

Finally, implicatures are indirectly conveyed content, inferred from the explicature of the utterance. For instance, consider the following case (due to Carston 2009: 35):

A: 'How was the party?'

B: 'There was not enough drink and everyone left'

Via a combination of bottom-up saturation and top-down free pragmatic effects, hearers are able to construct an explicature for B's utterance along the following lines:

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[8] Bach 1994: 124 'Implicature…is a matter of saying something but communicating something else instead, something closely related to what is said'.

(B1)　Explicature: there was not enough *alcoholic* drink *to satisfy the people at [the party]ᵢ* and *so* everyone *who came to [the party]ᵢ* left *[the party]ᵢ early*.

This in turn allows hearers to infer a further proposition as that which the speaker has implicated:

(B2)　Implicature: the party was no good.

According to Relevance Theory (which is perhaps the most popular way to be a Pragmaticist), there exist a continuum of non-literal or loose use cases, ranging from relatively minor alterations of literal meaning at one end of the spectrum through to more radical departures, as with some figurative uses, at the other. So for instance, to take an example from Wilson 2011: 180, the speaker who says metaphorically 'Robert is a computer' directly asserts the proposition that *Robert is a computer**, where 'computer*' is an ad hoc concept formed by broadening the literal meaning of 'computer' to allow it to include people in its extension. This explicature can then give rise to a range of further implicatures such as that Robert lacks feelings, Robert processes information well, etc.

　　Clearly, then, explicatures have an important role to play in the Pragmaticist framework, but beyond the examples above, how exactly should we think of them? In the literature, the primary definition (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1986: 182, Carston 2009: 41) of an explicature is as follows:

i.　An explicature is a pragmatically inferred development of logical form, where implicatures are held to be purely pragmatically inferred (i.e. unconstrained by logical form).[9]

However, explicatures are also functionally characterised in a number of different (and potentially divergent) ways, as follows:

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[9] Sperber and Wilson 1986: 182 allow for explicatures to come in degrees: 'An assumption communicated by an utterance *U* is explicit (and hence is an *explicature*) if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by *U*, where explicitness is a matter of degree: the greater the contribution of encoded meaning the more explicit the explicature is and the greater the contribution of pragmatically inferred content the less explicit it is'.

ii. Explicatures are what the speaker intends directly to communicate; Sperber & Wilson 1986: 183, Carston 2009: 36.

iii. Explicatures are the first content hearers recover via relevance processing; Sperber & Wilson 1986:184-5.

iv. Explicatures provide the essential premise for inferring further (implicated) propositions; Carston 2009: 41.

v. The explicature is the proposition on which S's utterance is judged true or false; Carston 2009: 36.

In the next two sections I'd like to consider each of these ways of understanding what an explicature is, asking if they yield a firm theoretical notion. In §2 I'll explore the canonical definition of explicatures given in (i) and argue that it fails to yield a robust individuation of explicatures. Then in §3 I'll consider the additional understandings of explicatures from (ii)-(v) and suggest that none of these succeed in providing a firm footing for the notion either. The conclusion of the next two sections then will be that the notion of an explicature is, as things currently stand, compromised. If this is right, we have two options: we might try harder to find a criterion by which to individuate explicatures or we might try to develop a theory of communication which doesn't need them. While nothing in this paper shows that the first option is impossible, in the final section I will briefly pursue the second option and examine what a theory of communication without explicatures might look like. First, however, let's consider the problems that advocates of explicatures face.

2)   Explicatures as Developments of Logical Form?

Explicatures are held to be pragmatic developments of logical form, but not all pragmatic developments of logical form are held to be explicatures. So we need an answer to the question of when a pragmatic development of logical form constitutes an explicature and when it doesn't.

This question arises in two ways I think: first, is there a limit on the *kinds* of free pragmatic effects which contribute to explicatures? Second, for any kind or kinds of free pragmatic effects which can contribute to explicatures, which instances of these kinds are explicature-generating (i.e. does every instance of a given kind result in an explicature or only some? And if only some, which ones?). I'll consider these questions in turn.

2.1) How many kinds of free pragmatic effects are explicature generating?

Traditionally, theorists have recognised two distinct kinds of free pragmatic effects:

     (i) unarticulated constituents

     (ii) modulation

Unarticulated constituents (UCs) are supposed to be additional bits of content which are provided to the proposition expressed from the context of utterance, even though nothing in the syntactic form of the sentence demands these additions.[10] The classic example of a UC is the provision of a location for the use of a weather predicate. So, for instance, if Jones looks out of her window in Oxford and says 'It's raining' the suggestion is that she expresses the proposition that *it is raining where Jones is,* or that *it is raining in Oxford,* even though no element in the sentence expressly triggers the incorporation of a location (Recanati 2002). Or again, theorists have suggested that pragmatically enhanced readings of logical vocabulary might be traced to the operation of UCs, so that the temporally-ordered reading of 'Jill got married and had children' as *Jill got married and then had children* might be explained by the presence of a UC. Finally, one of our earlier examples of a free pragmatic effect – interpreting an utterance of 'I've eaten' as *I've eaten recently* – would seem to be a case of adding new, pragmatically provided material to the proposition expressed, i.e. to be an instance of a UC. Modulation, on the other hand, is a pragmatic process whereby the meanings of elements already present in the logical form of the

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[10] It is, perhaps, fair to say that in the early days of debates about free pragmatic effects it was the notion of unarticulated constituents that was centre stage (e.g. see Perry's seminal 1986 article), although modulation is clearly present in, for instance, Sperber and Wilson 1986. It also seems to be the notion of a UC which fits most comfortably with the notion of 'a development of logical form' (see §3).

sentence are modified. For instance, our earlier example of 'This steak is raw' being understood as meaning that *this steak is undercooked* was an instance of modulation – the literal meaning of 'raw' was replaced, due to conversational demands, with an ad hoc, loosened meaning *raw** which includes slightly cooked items in its extension. Or again, when someone utters the sentence 'I need a red pen' while marking they may be held to express the modulated concept *red**, a more restricted or narrow concept (than the literal meaning of 'red') which perhaps contains only objects which write in red ink in its extension.

Together, then, these two free pragmatic effects of unarticulated constituents and modulation address the worry that linguistic semantics underdetermines asserted speaker meaning, since via their operation we can contextually complete and refine bare literal meanings to yield what the speaker directly asserts. However one question we need to ask is whether we really need two distinct kinds of pragmatic process here, i.e. do we really need *both* unarticulated constituents *and* modulation? For it seems at least in principle possible that every effect handled by a UC could instead be handled by modulation.

For instance, take the classic case of locational elements for weather predicates, traditionally handled as UCs. One alternative option would be to treat the meaning of weather terms as already specifying a location (so that, say, 'rain' means *rain-at-l* for some contextually determined value of *l*). In this case any reading of 'It's raining' which lacked a determinate location (e.g. Recanati's 2002: 317 weathermen example) could be understood as a case of pragmatic loosening: 'rain' comes to express the modulated concept *rain** meaning simply *rain* or *rain somewhere or other*. A second option would be to treat the meaning of 'rain' as lacking a contextually specified location (so that 'rain' means $\exists x <rain, x>$ or *rain punkt*) and then explain location-specific readings as arising from pragmatic narrowing, whereby 'rain' comes to express an ad hoc concept *rain** meaning *rain-at-l* for some contextually specified value of *l*. At least prima facie then it seems that the work traditionally reserved for UCs could in principle be

carried out by the more general mechanism of modulation.[11] This might be thought to be a good thing since (again, at least prima facie) a process which can only operate over extant elements in the LF would seem to be at least somewhat more constrained than a process which can introduce entirely novel elements into the LF. Thus a modulation-only story might appeal to a Pragmaticist who is concerned to show that her appeal to pragmatics is not excessively liberal.[12] Whether or not all appeals to UCs can ultimately be replaced by appeals to modulation remains, however, a somewhat open question since it is currently not clear exactly what the constraints are on broadening and narrowing of senses. Perhaps there is a reason to think that 'rain' cannot be broadened or narrowed in the ways envisaged above, or to think that the move from the simple conjunctive reading of 'and' to a temporally or causally ordered interpretation cannot be the result of some kind of conceptual narrowing, but certainly as things stand it is not clear why the Pragmaticist should resist these kinds of moves. Yet whether they opt for one mechanism for free pragmatic effects or two, Pragmaticists face a second, more fundamental question, namely: given either kind of free pragmatic effect, which instances of it contribute to explicatures and which to implicatures?

2.2)   Which instances of free pragmatic effects contribute to explicatures and which to implicatures?

Given that Pragmaticists want to preserve the distinction between directly expressed content (the explicature) and indirectly conveyed content (implicatures), it is clear that not all free pragmatic effects should be treated as contributing to directly expressed content – at least some such effects yield only implicatures. So, the question for the Pragmaticist is how to hold apart these two: is there a way, beyond a simple appeal to intuition, to tell when a free pragmatic effect generates an explicature and when it generates an implicature? Without such a mechanism, as

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[11] Deirdre Wilson has suggested (pc) that perhaps the only real role for UCs might be to accommodate meta-linguistic moves.
[12] Or it might not appeal – Carston and Hall 2012: 62 suggest in passing that a narrowing account of weather predicates would be 'counter-intuitive'.

Stanley 2002 argues, free enrichment could turn out to be excessively liberal, for instance allowing an utterance of (1a) to directly express (1b):

1a. John likes Sally.

1b. John$_1$ likes Sally and his$_1$ mother.

While some Pragmatists have objected to Stanley's particular examples on pragmatic grounds (see Hall 2008), still it seems his point holds good: unless Pragmaticists can find a way to constrain the operation of free pragmatic effects, they risk allowing that (given the right circumstances) any content at all can be directly expressed. Yet this would seem to erode the desired distinction between explicatures and implicatures.

In response to this concern Pragmaticists have proposed a number of tests for isolating explicatures from implicatures. Probably the most promising of these is the 'Scope Test' (see, for instance, Carston 1988) whereby an element introduced via free pragmatic effects counts as part of an explicature only if it falls under the scope of logical operators such as negation or conditionals. In this way, for instance, the temporally ordered sense of 'and' (introduced via UCs or modulation) must form part of the explicature of an utterance of 'Jill drank five beers and drove home' because there appears to be a truth-conditional difference between 'If Jill drank five beers and drove home then she can be arrested for drunk driving' and 'If Jill drove home and drank five beers then she can be arrested for drunk driving'.[13] However, although the Scope Test is attractive it does not seem that it can be decisive in holding apart explicature and implicature content since, as Carston and Hall 2012 point out, the scope test applies to sentences at a type level, whereas the explicature/implicature distinction operates at the token level: what counts as the explicature of some utterance *u* may differ from context to context, but claims about the content which falls under the scope of an operator in a sentence would seem to be context-

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[13] A similar kind of appeal to the judgements of truth and falsity surrounding utterances can be found in the truth-evaluation tests of Recanati 2004: 15 and Noveck's work on scalars, e.g. Noveck 2004.

invariant.[14] Furthermore, it seems that some elements of content which prima facie we do not want to count as part of an explicature will also fall under the scope of operators. So for instance, as Camp 2012 points out, it seems that both metaphor and sarcasm can embed within conditionals (e.g. 'If she is the cream in your coffee then you should marry her', 'If you come up with one more brilliant idea like that then you'll be fired'). Thus scope effects alone seem unable to differentiate explicatures and implicatures.

The most recent candidate for constraining the operation of free pragmatic effects comes from Hall 2008 and Carston and Hall 2012 who propose that 'the ultimate arbiter' (2012: 71) for what constitutes an explicature and what an implicature is the derivational distinction between local and global pragmatic inference – an effect which modifies a subpart of the linguistically encoded meaning counts as part of the explicature, while one which operates on fully propositional forms contributes to implicatures. This proposal would explain why Stanley's example above could only ever count as an implicature, since the move from *John likes Sally* to *John₁ likes Sally and his₁ mother* apparently involves an entirely new proposition being simply stapled on to the original content via conjunction introduction. However, on reflection, it's not clear that locality can really do the work required here either, since some local enrichments apparently capture implicature content. So consider the following exchange:

A: Do you want to have dinner?

B: I'm going to the cinema.

The question we need to ask is: how should B's utterance content be modulated? It seems there are several options available here. For instance, we might choose to pragmatically narrow the concept of GOING-TO-THE-CINEMA to GOING-TO-THE-CINEMA-TONIGHT. Such a narrowing would be licensed in order to make B's response relevant to A's inquiry and to allow A to then infer (as an implicature) the proposition that *B is unable or unwilling to have dinner with me*

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[14] Carston and Hall also consider other extant options for the criterion by which we divide explicatures from implicatures, but they offer what seem to my mind to be compelling reasons to reject them all, before turning to their own posititve proposal, to be examined below.

tonight. On the other hand, however, it seems perfectly possible that we might choose to narrow the concept of GOING-TO-THE-CINEMA to something like GOING-TO-THE-CINEMA-AT-A-TIME-THAT-MAKES-HAVING-DINNER-WITH-A-IMPOSSIBLE. Both of these are, it seems, perfectly local effects, but only on the first will it be an implicature of what B says that she cannot have dinner with A (on the second it looks like something she directly asserts). Once again, then, it seems that it is not the mechanism introduced to constrain the operations of free pragmatic effects which is really doing the work here but rather a background appeal to our intuitions about what the speaker has directly committed herself to versus what she has merely indirectly conveyed.[15]

If this is right, then it seems that none of the proposals currently on the table for distinguishing free pragmatic effects which give rise to explicatures from those that give rise to implicatures are fully robust. In which case there are three options available: on the one hand we might decide to reject the call for an objective criterion or test by which to hold apart explicatures and implicatures, relying instead on a direct appeal to intuitions. Second, we might continue the hunt for a more robust test. Third, we might see whether a feasible theory of communication could be developed which appeals just to the binary distinction (stressed by Grice and Kripke) between what sentences mean and what speakers say.

The first option looks problematic as a way to ground a difference in kind between explicature and implicature since the intuitions to be appealed to seem to diverge widely. For instance, Sperber and Wilson, on the one hand, and Bach on the other, are likely to take very different stances on what constitutes the explicature/impliciture of an utterance like 'This pen is

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[15] It might be objected that the second modulation really does involve an additional proposition being conjoined, expressed here via the relative clause. However I think this would be a mistake: first, although we might express the concept via the relative clause the proposed model is that it is the concept itself which is being loosened or narrowed, so while expression of the content might 'require a lot of words', to put it crudely, there is no reason to think this couldn't still be a perfectly atomic concept. Secondly, other, less complex modulations would cause exactly the same problem; e.g. I'M GOING TO THE CINEMA AT DINNER TIME TONIGHT. Third, canonical instances of modulation often require quite complex expression. For instance, consider Grice's classic case of the driver who runs out of gas and is told 'There is a gas station around the corner': here Pragmaticists have been quite happy to maintain that what is explicitly asserted is that *there is an open gas station relatively close around the corner*. But it is hard to see why that would count as an explicature while *there is a gas station relatively close around the corner which is open* would not.

red'. For Bach holds that pragmatic input to the *impliciture* (his term for the content between sentence meaning and implicatures) in this case is limited to supplying a referent for 'this' (so his intuitive assessment should be that 'this is red' directly asserts a proposition like <α, is red>). Sperber and Wilson, on the other hand, hold that both reference assignment and modulation for 'red' is required to yield the explicature (so their intuitive judgement should be that the explicature is something like <α, is red in respect f>). Furthermore, to the extent that we can get ordinary interlocutors to appreciate the distinction between explicatures and implicatures, it is not clear that we will get consistent judgements. For instance, take Sperber and Wilson's recent example:

> A: We can't afford dinner at La Cantina.
>
> B: I have money.

Sperber and Wilson suggest (draft) that B directly expresses that *I have a relatively significant amount of money* (B's utterance wouldn't be true if she had only 10c to her name, for instance) and that she thereby implies that she can afford to pay for dinner at La Cantina. However, Sperber and Wilson's view on this example is at least open to question, for it seems a reasonable intuition to have that B directly expresses the claim that *I have enough money to pay for dinner at La Cantina*. So if all we have to go on here are intuitions, we will need to know exactly whose intuitions count, why and when.

I suspect then that it is the second alternative which most Pragmaticists will want to pursue and nothing in this paper entails that the search for a more robust criterion is necessarily doomed. However, I do think that we should at least be open to the possibility that the failure to find a workable test thus far may in fact be instructive – perhaps we have failed to find a workable test for holding explicature-generating pragmatic effects apart from implicature-generating ones because there is no such division in kind for a test to latch on to. If that were the case, then in fact we would have no option but to pursue a theory of communication which doesn't rest on such a distinction. I'll turn to the question of what such a theory might look like

in §4, but first I want to offer some further support for the idea that perhaps the theoretical notion of an explicature does not map to anything in reality. To see this, I want to return to the functional characterisations of explicatures given in §1.3 and show that they too face problems.

3)   Rejecting the Functional Definitions of Explicatures

As we saw in the last section, the core definition of an explicature is 'a pragmatic development of logical form'. However the last section suggested that, as it stands, this definition is problematic: first, there is a question about how many kinds of free pragmatic effects can contribute to these 'developments of logical form'. If it turns out that really there is only one device in play – modulation – then we might think that the notion of 'development' in play here becomes somewhat attenuated, since we are no longer thinking of adding elements to the LF to get up to the level of a proposition (as with unarticulated constituents) but merely modulating existing parts of LF. Secondly, and more seriously, there is the question of which instances of free pragmatic effects give rise to explicatures and which to implicatures – that is to say, how free pragmatic effects are to be constrained so as to yield just explicatures. Unless and until we have a robust criterion for assessing pragmatic effects as explicature- or implicature-relevant the notion of 'a development of logical form' is too weak to individuate the level of content which Pragmatists want. However, as we noted in §1.3, alongside the primary definition of an explicature there are also a number of collateral definitions to be found in the literature: explicatures are said to be what the speaker intends to communicate directly, the first content hearers recover via relevance processing, the essential premise for inferring further (implied) propositions and the proposition on which a speaker's utterance is judged true or false. Perhaps, then, these additional ideas can help to make the notion of an explicature more robust? As we will see, however, the problem is that it is not at all obvious that there is any content which fulfils all of these roles and which can thus play the role of the explicature.

3.1   Explicatures as what the speaker intends directly to communicate

Clearly, (at least typically) when speakers say things it is because they want to communicate things, so should we take explicature content to be that content which the speaker has it in mind to communicate directly? My worry with this proposal is that, in many cases, the speaker may not have any very definite content in mind to communicate – thoughts (at least as far as the underdetermination cases we are concerned with in this paper go) may be just as underdetermined as utterances, in which case explicatures need not be psychologically real for the speaker. For instance, when someone utters 'I want a red pen' it seems perfectly possible that she has not, contra Wilson 2011: 181, internally specified what kind of red pen she wants. She may simply not have thought whether she wants the pen that writes in red ink, or says 'red' on it, or has a red lid, etc.[16] This could be the case *even if* on being presented with one kind of red pen (say one which is red on its casing but which writes in black ink) she replies 'I didn't want that kind of red pen'. What this reflects is a perfectly general cognitive process of sharpening up our mental states after being presented with things that require us to sharpen in certain ways. Compare the case where we are in Oxford and I say 'I want to travel to London'. If you then tell me that there is a bus to London from the end of the street, I can then tell you that I don't want to take a bus. Given my other beliefs (about how slow buses are, etc.) and desires (I prefer train travel), I'm in a position to sharpen up my original claim: I want to travel to London but not by bus. Yet none of this shows that the content of my earlier thought needed to contain something about buses – indeed just consider how great the cognitive burden would be if our thoughts needed to incorporate relevant possibilities at the very outset, we would be unlikely to be able to move beyond entertaining a single thought. It would seem then that what the speaker has in

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[16] Wilson 2011: 181: 'when a teacher marking an essay says "I need a red pencil", she will certainly have some specific sub-type of pencil in mind, and in order to understand her, the hearer must infer what particular type of red pencil this is.' We should note however that elsewhere Sperber and Wilson do explicitly allow for indeterminate intentions: in 1986: 55-6 they discuss the example of ostensive sniffing of sea air being used to communicate some indeterminate content about the quality of the air and in recent work they stress the possibility that communicated content may be indeterminate (Sperber and Wilson, draft).

mind need not in any way match the kind of content attributed as an explicature (at least if we are to understand by 'explicature' Sperber and Wilson's technical notion, rather than just 'whatever it is that the speaker has it in mind to communicate').

3.2)   Explicatures as the first proposition the hearer entertains via relevance processing

As is well-known, according to Relevance Theory, utterances come with a promise of optimal relevance and, in their search for the meaning of the utterance, hearers try out possible interpretations of the utterance until they reach one that crosses the threshold of relevance (i.e. which yields sufficient cognitive effects for a cheap enough processing cost). However, as with speakers, there is a question about whether or not explicature content (of the kind suggested by Pragmaticists) really is or need be entertained by hearers. Instead it seems at least possible that all hearers may entertain is some more removed pragmatic content (i.e. content that would count as an implicature not an explicature). So, consider the cinema example from §2.2 again. If I ask you to have dinner with me tonight and you respond with 'I'm going to the cinema' I think I know pretty immediately, just given the literal meaning of the sentence produced in this context, that you can't or won't have dinner with me. I don't have to entertain some intermediate proposition which slightly pragmatically enhances this literal meaning by specifying exactly when or where you are going to the cinema, I just know. I asked you a question, you chose not to answer it explicitly, and that, together with the literal meaning of the sentence you produced, is enough to tell me that your answer was 'no'. What carries the weight here are our social practices about asking and answering questions, not some slightly-pragmatically enhanced proposition. There is just what the sentence means, the conversational context in which that sentence was uttered and the speaker meaning that those two things gave rise to.

3.3)   Explicatures are the propositions which warrant recovery of implicatures

This connects closely to the point above: although it is clear that explicatures can play a crucial role for us *as theorists* in clarifying the inferential relation between the literal sentence meaning and the ultimate speaker meaning, it is not clear that this route need be realised in the mind of the interlocutor. Just as the Gricean model (where hearers arrived at implicatures only via inference from what the sentence said) seemed too cognitively onerous, so, the suggestion is, the Pragmatist model (which requires hearers to always grasp an explicature and then use this to infer their way to implicatures) places too great a cognitive burden on hearers to count as a theory of on-line utterance processing. Sometimes – with people we don't know or situations we are unfamiliar with – we need to do this kind of thing, to consider various stages of what the speaker might have meant, starting with slightly pragmatically enhanced contents and inferring our way to propositions which get closer to the ultimate point of what the speaker was saying, but most of the time, I want to suggest, we can just grasp the literal meaning and that, together with sensitivity to a vast range of social and other information, is enough to get us all the way to full speaker meaning. When the mother says to her child, who has grazed his knee and is making a big fuss, 'You are not going to die', I suggest that hearers know that she is telling the boy to calm down, to stop making such a fuss, etc., *without* their first having to entertain the proposition that 'the addressee is not going to die *from that injury'* or that 'the addressee is not going to die *imminently'*. When my friend tells me 'Robert is a computer' I can see (given the content of our conversation thus far) that she means Robert lacks feelings *without* first entertaining some ad hoc concept COMPUTER* of which Robert falls in the extension.

Clearly, whether this idea of a route to conveyed content which does not go via a special class of explicatures is plausible or not will depend on whether we can make sense of a theory of communication which works this way – one which doesn't posit explicatures as intermediaries on route to recovery of the point of an utterance. This is a question I'll return to in §4, but at least prima facie I would suggest that we have little reason to think that the cognitive processes

whereby hearers recover implicature (or, as I'd rather say, 'non-literal') content always or indeed often match the route employed by theorists to warrant implicature recovery.

3.4) Explicatures as the proposition by which a speaker's utterance is judged true or false

I want to suggest that soliciting judgements of truth and falsity for utterance content as a way to ascertain explicature content is inappropriate, for it influences the very phenomenon it is supposed to be uncovering (there is, we might say, a kind of 'quantum effect'). To see this, let's return to Carston's party example from §1.3:

A: 'How was the party?'

B: 'There was not enough drink and everyone left'

Recall that the suggestion earlier was that the explicature of B's utterance was:

(B1)   Explicature: there was not enough *alcoholic* drink *to satisfy the people at [the party]$_i$ and so* everyone *who came to [the party]$_i$* left *[the party]$_i$ early*.

So the question we need to ask now to test this assessment is: in what circumstances is B's utterance true? For instance, we might ask if it is true if there was enough alcoholic drink at the party but it was held in a locked cupboard? And is it true only if everyone left early in the evening or early for a really wild party? Assuming that we think what B said was still true in the first circumstance but also true only if everyone left early in the evening then the explicature content should perhaps be:

- there was not enough *easily available alcoholic* drink *to satisfy the people at [the party]$_i$ and so* everyone *who came to [the party]$_i$* left *[the party]$_i$ after an hour*.

But now we can ask, is what B said true in a situation where there was plenty of crème de menthe available at the party, or where those hosting the party didn't leave? Perhaps in answer to those questions we need something like:

- there was not enough *easily available and attractive alcoholic* drink *to satisfy the people at [the party]ᵢ* and *so* everyone *who came to [the party]ᵢ as the result of an invitation* left *[the party]ᵢ after an hour.*

In asking these questions I want to suggest that we prompt the audience to sharpen the original content of the utterance in various ways, but these moves reflect *decisions* about how to sharpen content not an uncovering of material which is already present. As already suggested above (§3.1), this kind of practice doesn't give us any reason to think that the content which gets added in response to the queries was in some way already present in the original assertion itself.[17]

If this is right, it suggests that none of the functional characterisations of explicatures can serve to shore up the canonical definition of 'a development of logical form', since we do not need the notion of an explicature to explain what is in the speaker's mind, or the hearer's mind, nor to explain our judgements of truth and falsity. Clearly some of the things a speaker can communicate via her production of a sentence *s* are intuitively 'closer in meaning' to the literal content of *s* and some of the things she might convey are, in some sense, 'further away', but it seems to me that there is no reason to think that it is those which are closer in meaning which have a special status or are always those which are directly asserted. Given the right context and background between two speakers, when I say 'There is nothing to eat', why shouldn't it be the case that the propositions I intend to assert and the ones you immediately recover are simply the literal meaning *there is nothing to eat* and the non-literal content *I want to get take-out for dinner*? Why assume that I had it in mind to assert directly some other proposition, like *There is nothing desirable to eat in the kitchen,* from which my ultimate meaning was to be inferred? And why think that you had to entertain such an intermediate content on way to recovery of my intended content? What I want to suggest is the possibility that there are simply no such things as explicatures (in any interesting sense of the term) – there are just all the things speakers say, which stand together as

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[17] As Soames 2009: 15 objects, '[o]f course…we could always have said more, but surely this is no reason to think that we have in effect already said more'.

the conveyed content of the utterance. I've followed tradition so far in this paper by referring to the supposedly 'less directly conveyed content' as 'implicatures', but what I really want to suggest is that the explicature/implicature divide be rejected and that we treat all content enhanced by free pragmatic effects simply as the 'non-literal content of the utterance'. Since we can't find any reliable way to hold apart explicatures and implicatures, I think we would do better to revert to the traditional Gricean picture where we just have two things – what the sentence means and what the speaker says. It is this possibility that I want to consider in the final section.[18]

4)   The Binary Model and Communicated Content

The suggestion I want to make then is that we should posit only one divide in kind with respect to linguistic meaning, drawing a dividing line between literal and non-literal content for communicative linguistic acts, and allowing that, on the non-literal side there may exist a multitude of conveyed contents, none of which need necessarily be inferred from any other. Literal meaning is given simply by word meaning and structure, perhaps together (as Minimalists claim) with limited pragmatic input to disambiguate items and to assign reference to syntactically marked context-sensitive terms.[19] Of course, however, by uttering a sentence with a given literal meaning a speaker may communicate something very different, and amongst the things a speaker may non-literally express some contents may well be expressed more directly than others. But what dictates the degree of directness of expression is *not* something about how close in meaning the communicated content is to the literal meaning, nor whether or not it is only a development of logical form, nor its place in an inferential chain, etc. Rather what matters is the kind of

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[18] Thus I want to take really seriously a point Pragmatists have made (as noted in §2.2): explicatures – in the sense of the content the speaker directly asserts – must be determined on a token level. Yet it seems to me that recognizing such token-level context-variability is in serious tension with the official Pragmatist claim that explicatures must be close to literal meaning, that they are constrained developments of logical form, etc. If we take seriously token-level variability we should reject the search for some formally defined, technical notion of 'explicature'.

[19] Alternatively, in a non-Minimalist version of the postion, literal meaning would be given by word meaning and structure alone, with this level of content always or often falling short of the level of a proposition.

communicative exchange one is engaged in and the kind of socio-linguistic structures that support it. The speaker who says 'I have money' in reply to an utterance of 'We can't afford La Cantina' conveys a range of propositions, all of them (beyond the literal one) are conveyed indirectly as they are carried not by the linguistic meaning of the sentence alone but by the conversational and other social norms in play. Amongst these many propositions some may be more centrally meant than others (so in *this* sense alone, we could maintain talk of explicatures vs. implicatures, though continued use of the terminology in this way would be likely to lead to confusion) but, to repeat, what makes some proposition (e.g. *I have a relatively significant amount of money*, or *I have enough money to pay for dinner at La Cantina*) the proposition directly asserted is nothing to do with its status as a development of logical form, or its ability to pass a scope test, or its giving the content the speaker has in mind, or its place in an inferential chain (i.e. it is not a matter of the proposition fulfilling any of the classic definitions of an explicature). It is merely a question of what the interlocutors take the literal meaning plus the socio-linguistic practices in play to give rise to on a given occasion. Socio-linguistic structures, I want to suggest, allow a direct move from literal meaning to communicated content – on this model, understanding a language does not require understanding a way of life though understanding a speaker's communicative acts may well do.[20]

Of course, there will be an indefinite number of different propositions which might be conveyed by a given utterance in a given context (i.e. propositions which are licensed by the combination of a given literal meaning and a given context of utterance). Thus, given the multitude of propositions on the non-literal side which might be intended by the speaker or assigned by the hearer, there will need to be some threshold of *tolerance* within which differences between the propositional content each takes to have been placed on the conversational record can simply be ignored. The boundaries of tolerance, I want to suggest, will be set in context (either the context of utterance or the circumstance of evaluation), depending in part on the kind

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[20] The suggestion then is that an account of communication should make greater use of scripts (see Schank and Abelson 1977) and schemas (see Brewer and Treyens 1981) than do current Pragmatist models.

of conversational exchange in which agents are engaged. I want to agree, then, with Heck (forthcoming 2014, draft p.40) who suggests:

> [T]he process through which [speakers and hearers] determine which values to assign is not governed by a 'uniform rule' but is shaped by a common goal: successful communication…It is unsurprising that accommodation and negotiation should be central to this enterprise, and it is equally unsurprising that so many 'factors' should be involved…[T]here is in fact no limit to the information on which the speaker and her audience may draw as they attempt to converge.[21]

So, imagine I say to my son B 'You are not going to die' and the message I intend to convey is *B should stop crying*. You hear my words and, given the literal meaning of the sentence together with established conversational norms here, you take my conveyed message to be *B is making a fuss about nothing*. Here we have two different propositions added to the conversational record but it seems likely that the difference between them won't be sufficient to knock the conversation off-course. Both propositions seem to lie well within the boundaries of tolerance in this case, and this degree of difference can be accommodated without a significant loss of understanding. However, when a proposition risks falling outside the contextually determined limits of tolerance, it seems there are two options: (i) the speaker/hearer attempts to put her interpretation on the record ('I mean that…'/'are you saying…?') and interlocutors negotiate over the content to be added to the conversational record. Alternatively, (ii) the potential divergence between speaker and hearer's take on the communicated content goes unnoticed and in this case there is the real possibility of the conversation going awry. Whether we recognise it or not, in this situation communication has failed and there may well be serious consequences for the overall success of the conversation.

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[21] To clarify: I want to agree with Heck's general model of communication here, though I would demur from the account of reference assignment which is the main topic of his paper.

Given this idea of a single, literally expressed proposition versus a range of pragmatically conveyed, non-literal contents, we should allow that assertion can go with either side.[22] In certain contexts (e.g. some legal exchanges) assertion may be tied to literal meaning (this explains the legal judgement discussed by Neale 2007 where the phrase 'use a firearm' is held to cover any kind of use of a firearm, not merely use of a firearm as a weapon). More usually, however, assertion will go with some part of the non-literal content, so that someone who sarcastically says 'It's a lovely day' can be held to have genuinely asserted that it is a horrible day. Furthermore, given the right kind of context (i.e. one where tolerance allows such propositions a place on the conversational record) they might also be held to have asserted that they don't want to go on a picnic, or that they think they should have brought a raincoat, etc. We should also allow that assertion can come in degrees of strength, so that a speaker strongly asserts any proposition which lies well within the bounds of tolerance, but only weakly asserts those that push at the boundaries. This would allow us to make sense of disputes about whether a speaker did or did not assert some proposition in a given communicative act. However, while speakers can demur from any content attributed on the non-literal side without contradiction, we should also be clear that they do not have the final veto on non-literal content, i.e. on what is communicated. Instead communicated content is a public affair: if enough (of the right kind of) people think you said p by uttering u then you did indeed say p, whether you knew that uttering u would have this effect or not (consider libel cases).[23] It is in this sense that *all* non-literal communicated content might be treated as what Borg 2001 calls 'an expedition abroad', no longer part of linguistic understanding per se but instead relying on a culturally entrenched network of beliefs and practices. Yet, as I've tried to argue in this paper, this terrain of pragmatic meaning cannot be divided into 'slightly-pragmatically-enhanced-explicatures', which are directly asserted, and all the

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[22] The background view of assertion assumed here clearly has its roots in the 'conversational score-card' approach of Lewis and Stalnaker, as opposed to a norm-governed account like that of Williamson.

[23] As Cappelen 2008: 271-2 notes: '[Pluralistic content relativism] implies that speakers don't have first-person authority over what they say. By uttering a sentence, they might end up saying things they are not aware of having said – they might even end up saying things they would deny having said'.

rest, which are merely implied. Sometimes by saying 'I want a red pen' one directly asserts that one wants a pen that writes in red ink, but sometimes by uttering this sentence one directly asserts that one intends to close the factory, and sometimes one asserts both. However which of these (and indefinitely more propositions) is in fact asserted (and the degree of strength of assertion it carries) is a highly context-sensitive, pragmatic matter, not something to be settled by appeal to static notions like 'developments of logical form'. We should thus, I think, extinguish the notion of explicatures.

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