A Relevance-Theoretic Analysis of Implicature in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman

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Abstract :

   Relevance theory (henceforth RT) is one of the modern pragmatic theories which combines both pragmatics and cognition. It tackles the pragmatic phenomena differently from other theories. One of these phenomena is implicature. The focus of this study is to discuss the idea of implicature from RT's perspective, using relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure as a model adapted from Moeschler (2007) version of Wilson and Sperber's (2004) model of comprehension procedure to analyze implicature in Arthur miller's *Death of a Salesman*

   This paper is divided into two parts; the first is the theoretical discussion of RT and a detailed explanation of

implicature and its kinds, and the second is the analysis of Arthur miller's *Death of a Salesman* according to RT's model. The analysis begins with presenting the selected text, then the context, lastly the derivation of implicature.

تحليل التضمين حسب نظريه الصلة في مسرحية موت بائع متجول لاثر ميلر

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الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الصلة، التضمين، الافتراض الضمني، التضمين القوي/الضعيف

الملخص :

تعد نظريه الصلة احدى نظريات علم التداولية الحديث والتي تجمع بين التداولية والادراك العقلي .تتعامل نظرية الصلة مع ظواهر التداولية بطريقة مختلفة عن باقي النظريات في هذا المجال .احدى هذه الظواهر هي التضمين. و تركز هذه الدراسة على ظاهرة التضمين من منظور نظريه الصلة. واعتمدت الدراسه عمليات الاستيعاب حسب نظرية الصلة كنموذج تم تبنيه من موشلر (٢٠٠٧) الذي بدوره تبناه من ولسن و سبيربر (٢٠٠٤) في لتحليل استخدام التضمين في نص ادبي مختار.
هذه الدراسة مقسمة الى جزئيين. الاول يتناول نقاشاً نظرياً حول نظرية الصلة بالإضافة للتضمين و انواعه. والثاني يقدم تحليلا لمسرحية (موت بائع متجول) لأرثر ملر (١٩٤٩) . التحليل يبدأ بتقديم النص المختار ثم السياق المتصل به ، واخيرا التوصل للتضمين المتعلق به.

1.Introduction

Bataller (2002:9) states that RT is a cognitive theory proposed to study human communication. Walaszewska and Piskorska (2012:1) claim that RT offers an explanation of how communication works on the basis of cognitive processes which combine new information with contextual effects that equal the efforts consumed in processing them. In other words, according to RT, the speaker needs to draw and hold the hearer's attention. If it is applicable that attention is spontaneously drawn to the most relevant input, then, the success of communication requires the hearer to consider the utterance as relevant enough to be worth for the processing effort (Freeman and Smith, 2013:274).

In order to arrive at any cognitive effect, utterances need to be interpreted properly. Rouchota and Jucker (1998:2) state that Sperber and Wilson consider utterance interpretation as a process of forming a hypothesis in which it is confined to the principle of Relevance. If the addressee arranges a hypothesis to interpret the utterance and it is found to be consistent with the principle of relevance, s/he can consider it as the intended interpretation and stop processing.

RT tries to provide a new technique to interpret ostensive stimuli and specifically utterances. Seen from another aspect , RT theorists claim that, using the comprehension procedure (heuristic), the audience can arrive at the most rational interpretation that satisfies their expectations of relevance. Wilson and Sperber (2004: 613-15) state that although the process might seem quite simple, still there are a few steps in the process. One of these steps is to derive implicature. There comes the need to tackle implicature form RT's perspective.

2. RT's Implicature

Haugh (2002:117) states that the first mention of the concept of implicature was by Grice in the William James Lectures more than three decades ago (Grice 1967, 1989). It is a well-known fact that Grice used the concept to introduce a new theory of communication to deal with the implied meaning of utterances. Still not all pragmatists were fully satisfied with Grice's implicature. Opponents of Griceanism claim that the concept is too large and encompasses a wide range of pragmatic phenomena. The idea that if something is not said, it has to be an implicature was not accepted among all pragmatists (Carston 1998a: 477, cited in, ibid).

Moreover, Kreb (2010:19) adds that implicatures in RT have a different characterization than Grice's. Even though, it is related to the implicit content of the encoded information and can only be picked up by inference. Therefore, Huang (2007:195, cited in ibid) suggests the use of the term 'r-implicature' for representing implicature within RT, in order to avoid any kind of confusion with Grice's concept of (conversational) implicature. Prominently, there are differences within the understanding of implicatures within RT. One of these differences is that there is no need to deal with the Gricean classification of implicature, i.e., conventional implicatures or generalised conversational implicatures. Rather, implicatures are divided into two subdivisions: implicated premises and implicated conclusions, as well as strong and weak implicatures (Clark ,2013:217). In the same respect, Haugh (2002: 119) argues that RT, when it comes to the concept of implicature, is basically a reductionist theoretical approach for two main reasons:

Firstly, it reduces all pragmatic principles that have been proposed to underlie the generation of implicature by Griceans and neo-Griceans into a single 'Principle of Relevance'. Secondly, it reduces all the different species of meaning in the Gricean/neo-Gricean framework (such as what is said, conventional implicature ,short-circuited implicature, generalised conversational implicature, particularized conversational implicature and so on) into just two broad categories: Explicature and implicature.

Carston and Hall (2012:71) add that implicatures are contextual implications which mean that it is part of the speaker-meant. In other words, it falls within the speaker's communicative intention. Consider the following example:

(30) a. Who's eaten my chocolate egg?

   b. Not me. Mary mentioned needing a chocolate fix.

B's utterance contextually implies that Mary is probably the person who ate A's chocolate egg and this implication is , obviously , implicated by B because it would be very difficult for A to satisfy his expectations regarding the relevance of B's utterance without inferring this conclusion. Most notably, this implicature is inferentially justified by the explicature of the utterance together with highly accessible contextual assumptions which includes the fact that people who need a chocolate fix are likely to eat whatever chocolate they can find and it seems that A's chocolate egg was within Mary's reach. Clearly, this implicature depends on a specific context, and in particular, the preceding question.

Haugh (2002: 120) asserts that implicature within RT is restricted to the level that it can only encompass particularised conversational implicatures.

3. Types of Implicature
3.1 Implicated premises and implicated conclusions.

According to Sperber and Wilson (ibid), "implicated premises must be supplied by the hearer, who must either retrieve them from memory or construct them by developing assumption schemas retrieved from memory". The audience can identify them if the retrieved premises lead to suitable understanding consistent with the principle of relevance, and that they are the most easily recovered premises to do so. However, implicated conclusions are "deduced from the explicatures of the utterance and the context". The thing that enables the audience to recover such conclusions as implicatures is that the communicator must have expected the audience to derive them since the communicator intends that his/her utterance to be relevant as much as possible to the audience. Thus, implicated premises and conclusions are both recognized as parts of the first inferable interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance.

Closely related, Grundy (2000:112) adds that deriving an implicature from an explicature is considered as a two-step process which requires a contextual assumption (implicated premise), before the consequent contextual implication (implicated conclusion) can be inferred. Furthermore, Clark (2013:288) argues that implicated premises are "inferred from the presumption of relevance and the fact that utterance has been made". In other words, each utterance comes with a contextual assumption and a presumption of relevance. While implicated conclusions , on the other hand, are "inferred from the explicatures of the utterance and contextual assumptions" (ibid).

Normally, it is assumed that the processing of new information, particularly verbally communicated information, is to be used with a selected set of background assumptions in which together constitutes the context (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 137-138 cited in, Haugh, 2015:75). The same goes for both implicated premises and conclusions, because they are closely related to each other in the following way: "given the constructed context, i.e., the implicated premises, the explicit meaning of the utterance logically warrants the implicated conclusions" (Allot, 2013:77). Considerably, the derivation of implicated premises and conclusions involves contextual assumptions intended by the communicator and a contextual implication implied within the encoded information (Huang, 2012:29). To illustrate, let's consider example (31):

(31) Car salesman: Are you interested in test-deriving a Roll Royce?

John: I'm afraid I'm not in test-driving any expensive car
John's reply may yield the following two implicatures:

(32) a. A Rolls Royce is an expensive car.

b. John isn't interested in test-driving a Rolls Royce.

(huang 2007: 195, cited in ibid)

Here, (32a) is an implicated premise and (32b) is an implicated conclusion of john's reply. Obviously, (32b) follows deductively from (32a) combined with (31) and this analysis is generally accepted. Furthermore, implicated premises are considered as one step to enrich the content of the utterance to arrive at the appropriate explicature. Recanati (2004:48) provides the following exchange:

(33) A: Why didn't you invite me to your party?

B: I only invited nice people.

Clearly, B's includes the assumption that A is not nice. Thus, A can conclude the reason for not inviting him/her. B's utterance provides a relevant answer to A's question only if this is assumed to be relevant.

3.2 Strong and Weak Implicature

Wilson and Sperber (2004: 620) claim that the recovery of strong implicature is " essential in order to arrive at an interpretation that satisfies the addressee's expectations of relevance" while the recovery of weak implicature , simply " helps with the construction of such an interpretation, but is not itself essential because the utterance suggests a range of similar possible implicatures, any one of which would do". Likewise, Kreb (2010: 20) claims that strong implicature is necessary for the audience to understand the communicator's meaning, whereas weak implicatures are not, since weakly communicated assumptions can involve an unlimited sets of implicature based specifically on the audience understanding.

According to RT, implicatures can be more or less strongly communicated; the level of strength depends on how much the implied meaning is intended by the communicator. At the same time, the communicator might access a wide range of other possible weaker implicature, but interestingly none of these weakly communicated assumptions might be intended more specifically than any others (Carston and Hall, 2012:71). They (ibid) offer the following example:

(37) A has been devoting her time and energy for many weeks to helping B with his dissertation. Finally, she says:

It's up to you now.

Certainly, there can be several implications, among them:

a. I have given you enough help with your dissertation.

b. I cannot give you any more help.

c. you need to take responsibility for your own work.

d. you should not continue to ask me for advice; you have the ability to complete the dissertation.

There might be other implications. However, there is no conclusive evidence that any of these weak implicatures are intended by A's utterance, still B needs to derive them to assume A's utterance to be relevant (ibid). Another significant aspect of strong/weak implicature is that relevance theorists use this distinction to differentiate RT's account of implicature from the Gricean's account.

Added to the above mentioned, Sperber and Wilson (1987:706, cited in , Jodlowiec, 2008 :69) state:

An utterance that forces the hearer to supply a very specific premise or conclusion to arrive at an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance has a very strong implicature. An utterance that can be given an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance on the basis of different – though of course related –sets of premises and conclusions has a wide range of weak implicatures. Clearly, the weaker the implicatures, the less confidence the hearer can have that particular premises or conclusions he supplies closely reflect the speaker's thoughts, and this is where indeterminacy lies.

4. Data Analysis
4.1 The Model

The model used for data analysis is Moeschler's adapted form (2007:86) based on Wilson and Sperber's (2004) model of comprehension procedure. He (ibid) presents the whole model through the following hierarchy:

a. basic explicature

b. higher-level explicatures

c. implicated premises

d. strongly implicated conclusion

e. weakly implicated conclusion.

Notably, context has been added to the original model because it is believed that context is an essential item for analyzing implicature. The relevance-theoretic comprehension procedures involve both arriving at explicature and implicature. The explicature needs both decoding and inference with the use of reference assignment, saturation, disambiguation, free enrichment etc, while implicature is basically a non-demonstrative inference. However, the main focus of the study is using implicature for analyzing literary texts. It is worth mentioning that the items of the model will be underlined, while, the exact words of the texts will be written in italics when mentioned within the paragraphs.The following is an illustrative figure for the adapted model:
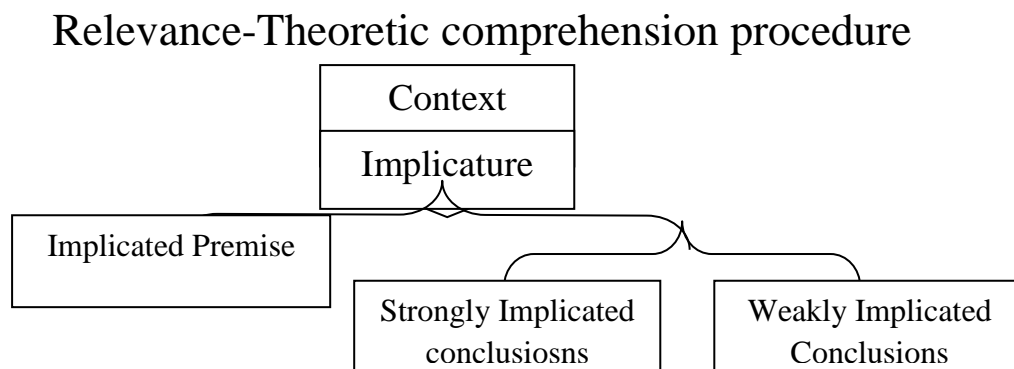
Relevance-Theoretic comprehension procedure

Figure (1) RT's Model

4.1 Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

The main character is Willy Loman. He is a sixty year's old salesman who carries the weight of many losses. Thus, he departs the present time to the past a few times through the play as a classic sign of severe depression. The relationships between the Loman's family are so messed up. Biff and Happy, the boys, are all a failure. Linda, the mother and wife, has almost a passive role in the play. Act one opens when Willy comes home and his return marks the beginning of the last day in his life. He talks to Linda about how tired he is and how he lost control while driving. Act two opens in a restaurant where the father and sons plan to meet, but eventually , the scene ends with a fight between Willy and Biff and willy starts having flash backs of past incidents. Act two ends with Willy's suicide.

The last requiem shows the reactions of the characters, Happy's anger; Biff realizes that he had the wrong dream all the way long and Linda cannot comprehend the fact that Willy is gone. One of the main themes of the play is the importance of personal attractiveness according to capitalist at that time, and that the reason behind the Loman's failure is their believe that being well liked is what matters. Besides, the play reflects the conflict between reality and illusion, in addition to capitalism which represents the American dream, and Family.

Act I, Page 2

Linda: (hearing Willy outside the bedroom, calls with trepidation): Willy!

Willy: It's all right. I came back.

Linda: why? What happened? (Slight pause) Did something happen, Willy?

Willy: No, nothing happened.

Context

Willy, the sixty years old salesman came back from Florida. It's night. Linda wakes up to check on him and it seems that he came earlier than usual. Thus, Linda sounds worried. These hints are enough for the reader to get the right contextual assumption, hence enough cognitive effects to worth the efforts.

Implicated Premises

-Linda believes that there is something wrong.

Strongly Implicated Conclusions

-Willy is hiding something.

Weakly Implicated Conclusions

-Linda doesn't believe in her husband's words.

-Linda doubts everything Willy says.

Act I, Page 2:

Willy: I'm tired to death. (The flute has faded away. He sits on the bed beside her, a little numb.) I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda.

Context

Willy has just arrived after his long drive from work. He is obviously tired. He tells Linda that he couldn't finish the job.

Implicated Premises

-Willy fails his week assignment.

Strongly Implicated Conclusions

-Willy can't work properly anymore.

Weakly Implicated Conclusions

-Willy cannot afford neither his living nor his family.

-He cannot pay the bills.

-He feels that he is a failure.

Act I, Page 3:

Willy (after a pause): I suddenly couldn't drive anymore. The car kept going off onto the shoulder, y'know?

Linda (hopefully): Oh, maybe it was the steering again. I don't think Angelo knows the Studebaker.

Context

   Willy is talking to Linda after he came home from work. He tells her that he couldn't drive. Linda tries to make up excuses for him because she loves him.

Implicated Premises

-There is something wrong with Willy.

-Linda tries to be supportive.

Strongly Implicated Conclusions.

-Willy can't work anymore.

-Linda knows that he is ill.

-She loves Willy and doesn't want him to feel bad.

Weakly Implicated conclusions

-Willy can't keep living the way he does.

-He keeps failing.

-Linda knows that there is something wrong with willy.

- She tries to hide his failure.

Act I , page 3:

Linda (resigned): Well, you'll just have to take a rest, Willy, you can't continue this way.

   Willy: I just got back from Florida.

Linda: But you didn't rest your mind. Your mind is overactive, and the mind is what counts, dear.

   Context

Linda and Willy are talking in their room after Willy's arrival and he seems exhausted. Linda tries to make him feel better, thus, she hints that his mind must need rest.

Implicated Premises

-Willy is tired and can't work again.

Strongly Implicated Conclusions

-Linda knows that Willy is mentally ill.

Weakly Implicated Conclusions.

-Linda believes that Willy needs a long rest.

-She feels that Willy is dying.

-Willy is definitely not acting normally.

Act I , Page 5:

Willy: Why did he come here? I would like to know what brought him home.

Linda: I don't know, I think he's still lost, Willy. I think he's very lost.

Context

Willy and Linda talk about Biff who has just come home after being away for a long time. Willy doesn't seem to be pleased with Biff's presence because they always argue. Their relationship is complicated.

Implicated Premises

-Willy is not pleased with Biff's arrival.

Strongly Implicated Conclusions

-The father-son relationship is complicated.

Weakly Implicated Conclusions

-Biff is currently unemployed.

- He reminds Willy of his failure.

- Linda tries to fill the gap between Willy and Biff.

4.2 Discussion and Findings

The fact that RT can be used to analyze literary texts and the usability of the model have been proved successfully. The items of the model can be applied smoothly. Significantly, context can be considered as an essential item within the model because the derivation of all the other items depend on it. It might involve scientific hypotheses, religious beliefs, cultural assumptions, personal memories, beliefs about the mental state of the writer and so on.

Furthermore, implicated premises require using the utterance as a form of ostension presented by the writer which can be considered as an evidence to help the reader to arrive at an appropriate implicature. While the derivation of implicated conclusions and basically depend on the reader understanding. Still, strongly implicated conclusion is more like a contextual implication which needs considering both the input as well as the context.

However, the weakly implicated conclusions are considered to be the reader's responsibility because he/she might have different contexts in mind , hence , his/her understanding would be unreliable and it differs from one reader to another. Using the model for literary analysis can be beneficial for literary critics because it can provide them with new insights to understand the literary work.

5.Conclusions

1. RT can be used to interpret literary texts. Since, RT's model of comprehension is applicable to drama, it can also be used to interpret other literary genres like poetry, novel etc.
2. The way RT deals with implicature is different from Grice's.

3. The implicated premise can be resembled to particularized conversational implicature.

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