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## Conventional Implicature Revisited

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## CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURE REVISITED

*ABSTRACT*

This is a critique of Grice's proposal to treat both "but" and "therefore" in terms of his account of conventional implicature.

"Therefore" and "but", the two paradigms of conventional implicature on Grice's view, are examined closely and are shown to behave in diverse ways. Firstly, "therefore" is shown to have at least two distinct uses: the explanatory and the inferential. A Gricean account is shown to be unable to satisfactorily handle the inferential use of "therefore". Secondly, "but" and "therefore", which on Grice's view are instances of the same phenomenon, are clearly shown to exhibit dissimilarities in their behaviour, demolishing his unitary treatment. Various tests are employed to this purpose. Moreover, it is pointed out that Grice is not consistent in his claim concerning what constitutes conventional implicature. His account is found to be partly implausible, as regards his treatment of "therefore", and partly inadequate, as it fails to take into account the wide ranging function of "but" - his paradigm of conventional implicature - but, instead treats its variable meaning aspects as invariable, conventional implicature.

This paper concerns itself with conventional implicature, as this was described by Grice and, in particular, with those lexical items which on Grice's view are the paradigms of conventional implicature.

Grice makes a distinction within the bounds of conventional meaning, between what is said and what is conventionally implicated. His motivation for this distinction is well known: If we have an additional, but simple and economic, mechanism for describing non-truth-conditional aspects of meaning, then a truth-conditional semantics will remain less problematic.

Unlike conversational implicatures, conventional implicatures, on Grice's view, arise from the conventional meanings of words rather than from an interplay of what is said with the conversational maxims. More particularly, Grice focuses his attention on "therefore" and "but", which he regards as the paradigms of conventional implicature.

Both "but" and "therefore" do not have their analogues in a formal logical system. Grice proposes that they both be accounted for in terms of the logical constant "&", and the non-truth-conditional aspects of their meaning in terms of conventional implicatures. According to his account, while conventional implicatures derive from the conventional meaning of the lexical items used, they are not part of what is "said", i.e., the logical content that determines the truth conditions of the sentence. He writes:

In some cases the conventional meaning of the words used will determine what is implicated, besides helping to determine what is said.  
(Grice, 1975:44)

Implicatures of this kind are conventional, apparently because they are a regular feature of what is said in the sense that what is conventionally implicated cannot be intelligibly contradicted. Were one, for example, to utter:

"He is an Englishman, he is, therefore, brave, though I do not think there is any causal connection between the two".

he would, undoubtedly, leave his audience mystified.

However, Grice wants to claim, although they cannot be intelligibly contradicted, such an explicit cancellation would fall short of rendering the utterance false were it the case that, indeed, he was English and brave. He therefore regards the utterance of (1),

(1) He is an Englishman, he is therefore brave.

as the utterance of two sentences conjunctively connected with the connective "&":

"p & q"

So (1) can be written as (2):

(2) He is an Englishman & He is brave.

But even if the implicature were contradicted, Grice wants to argue, the utterance would still be true in the case of (1), should the two conjuncts be true. So the truth-conditional meaning of (1) would be that of the conjunction, i.e., "p & q".

(1) may be uttered either as an argument or as an explanation; what the speaker does in the latter case is to propose a causal connection between two factual (true) states of affairs. What is suggested is that *p*, "he is an Englishman", can be seen as the grounds explaining *q*, "he is brave": "p, therefore q" is very similar to "q because p".

It must be pointed out that (1) has the form of an informal argument which is elliptically formulated, i.e., it has the form of an enthymeme. In any case it is quite clear that the intelligibility of an utterance of (1) depends on the assumption of a left out (suppressed) general statement<sup>1</sup> whose content is roughly that of (3):

(3) All Englishmen are brave

The construal of (1) in terms of an explanation, though not completely free from problems, does not incur any difficulties for Grice's account of conventional implicatures. The causal connection is implicated: "p & q" may be true in spite of the falsity of "q because p".

Leaving aside the explanatory use of (1) as unproblematic, or at least as less problematic,<sup>2</sup> let us now concentrate on the inferential use of (1): "p, therefore, q" need not express merely an explanation, as has been seen; it can also express an argument, and this is the inferential use of (1). In this latter use (1) is meant, uttered and construed as an argument if there is no independent evidence to the effect that he is brave, but, instead, the premises of the argument provide evidence for the truth of its conclusion (i.e., "he is brave"). Here, again, as is the case with the explanatory use, the assumed major premise is (3).

We assert a set of propositions to be true, and then these propositions are presented as grounds for accepting the truth of a further proposition, in the sense of

"p, therefore, I infer that q".

The question of the truth or falsity of this proposition,

"he is therefore brave",

does not arise, except as a direct consequence of the assertibility of the premises. Therefore, the assignment of the truth-value of

"p, therefore q"

by means of the logical constant "&", i.e., in the form of the conjunction

"p & q",

does not seem to be plausible in the case of arguments, since the truth-value of "p, therefore q" in this case, depends not only on the truth-values of the two propositions *p* and *q*, but also upon whether *p* constitutes adequate grounds for asserting *q*.

It need not be pointed out, of course, that since (3), in spite of its form, is neither an analytic statement, nor a law, then the conclusion "he's therefore brave" cannot necessarily be a truth validly deduced.

It is quite clear, therefore, that the inferential use of "p, therefore q" incurs a difficulty for Grice's account: How can we independently determine the truth-values of the two conjoined propositions and account for the non-truth-conditional aspects of the meaning of "therefore" in terms of conventional implicature since it is this very "therefore" that warrants the inference that *q*?

I would now like to take issue with Grice on yet another score. His two paradigm cases of conventional implicature, "but" and "therefore", do not receive a uniform treatment, as would be required of instances of the same phenomenon. To be more specific, with regard to "but", he says that there is a conventional implicature of a contrast between poverty and honesty, or between *her* poverty and her honesty in his example (4).

(4) She is poor but she is honest.

First, it should be noticed that if it is maintained that the contrast is made between *her* poverty and *her* honesty, (i.e., "p but q", *p* contrasts with *q*, or there is a contrast between *p* and *q*), then the lexical item "but" is seen as capable of generating conventional implicatures operating within the confines of the uttered sentence, that is, what is said. If, on the other hand, it is argued that the contrast implicated is between poverty and honesty in general, then the conventional implicature is generated by appeal to a general statement, and is, therefore, seen as operating outside the boundaries of what is actually uttered. This is a significant difference that should not go unnoticed as it does by Grice and others.

Moreover, whereas in the "but" example this suppressed general statement is brought out in the shape of conventional implicatures, i.e., this general statement constitutes what is conventionally implicated, this does not seem to be the case with "therefore". The conventional implicature, in this case, as explicated by Grice, does not bring out any assumed general statement.

Yet, it must be acknowledged, that it is because of the accepted validity of this premise that the alleged conventional implicature is operative in this case. How would something like "President Reagan is tall and therefore the grass needs mowing" fare? The fact remains that what are characterized as implicated meanings in each case seem to be different linguistic facts.

Another point of divergence between the behaviour of "but" and "therefore" is noticed when they are within the scope of negation. It is clear that the negative operator must negate the semantic, truth-conditional content of the sentence that falls within its scope rather than the conventional implicatures, and this condition seems to be met with regard to "but", as can be seen in (5):

(5) It is not true that she is poor but she is honest,

i.e., in

"- (p but q)"

It is quite clear that (5) cannot be uttered with the purpose of just denying the implication. For example in a talk-exchange of type (6),

(6) A: She is poor but honest.  
B: That's not true,

B has committed himself to the falsity of "p and q" and not to the falsity of the conventional implicature conveyed by A's utterance. This point is brought out clearly in (7) and (8):

(7) A: She is poor but honest.  
B: That's not true.      { She is not at all poor.  
                                      She is not honest.  
                                      She is neither poor nor honest.

(8) A: She is poor but honest.  
\*B: That's not true. There's no contrast between poverty and honesty.

Moreover, by accepting A's utterance as true, B is not thereby committing himself to the truth or falsity of the implicature.

Let us now consider "therefore" when it is included in the scope of negation: Consider (9),

- (9) - ( $p$  and therefore  $q$ ),  
It is not true that he is an Englishman and therefore brave.

If the meaning of consequentiality in "therefore" is only implicated, and not asserted, then this meaning must not be negated when "therefore" lies within the scope of the negative operator. And quite clearly the negative operator in (9) must negate the conjunction, i.e., at least one of the two conjuncts. But is this so? Consider (10) as a rejoinder to (1):

- (1) He is an Englishman, he is therefore brave.  
(10) That's not true. Why should you think that he is brave because he happens to be an Englishman? He is brave because he is a philosopher.

Clearly, one may negate just this meaning of consequentiality that is allegedly conventionally implicated by the use of "therefore", and nothing else.

If, indeed, what we understand by "therefore" in (1) is merely conventionally implicated, and not part of the semantic meaning of the sentence, then it should be possible to evaluate it - for example, accept the two propositions as true - and then reject the implications in a separate evaluation. In other words, it should be possible to reply to (1) with (11):

- (11) That's true. But I don't agree that he is brave because he is an Englishman.

Besides, it should be possible to reply to (1) with (12):

- (12) That's true,

without thereby committing yourself to accepting the conventional implicature as well.

However, the putative implicature of "therefore" is so central to the sum total of what is conveyed by (1) that we tend to reject it, (1), as false on the grounds that we do not happen to agree with this implicature. One might just

as well wonder whether a truth-value assignment to (1), irrespective of what is putatively conventionally implicated by "therefore", would, indeed, be in order.

We now turn to two tests Grice employs on his examples of implicatures, those of detachability and cancellability:

With regard to (4)

- (4) She is poor but she is honest,

he says that the implicature is detachable and even cancellable (1967:92) though he acknowledges problems. The main thrust of his argument, that what is conveyed by "but" is implicated, is, however, that it leaves the truth-value of what is said conveniently unaffected. A reasonable expectation will be that all examples of conventional implicatures, i.e., instances of the same phenomenon, exhibit a similar behaviour when they are subjected to the same tests.

Applying the cancellability test to (1) we get (13).

- (13) He is an Englishman, he is therefore brave, though of course, I do not mean to imply that there is any causal (or other) connection between the two.

It would seem that (13) involves a contradiction of some sort. The contradiction in (13) lies between the assertion that the speaker does not mean to imply that there is any causal connection between the propositions made, that he is an Englishman and that he is brave, and the meaning of "therefore". This contradiction does not follow from our knowledge of the world or of any such pragmatic factors - in that case we would not be talking about a contradiction - but is a direct consequence of our knowledge of the meaning of the word "therefore".

Evidently the issue depends on the nature of the contradiction. If the contradiction is semantic, then what is contradicted must comprise part of what is said rather than what is implicated. In other words, if  $p$  semantically entails  $q$  then " $p$  & not -  $q$ " is a contradiction in the sense that there is no possible world in which it is true.

If, on the other hand, the contradiction is pragmatic then it need not be part of what is said. If  $p$  pragmatically implies  $q$ , then " $p$  but not- $q$ " is a con-

tradition only in the sense that asserting "not-*q*" conflicts with an aim or purpose the speaker is supposed to have in asserting *p*. But "*p* and not -*q*" could be true in some possible world.

What should be examined, therefore, is the nature of the contradiction involved. Let us consider (13a), instead of (13), as the cancellation of the implicature in (1),

- (13a) He is an Englishman and, he is therefore  
brave, but there is no connection between the two.

(13a) seems to be close to a semantic contradiction. What then about (13)? According to Grice (1967) the vehicle of implication with regard to the parallel case of (4),

- (4) She is poor but she is honest,

can be said to be either "the speaker", or "the words the speaker used". It seems that it does not make sense to ask whether Grice would like to claim that what is implicated in (4) is

- (a) that there is a connection between being English and being  
brave,  
or (b) that the speaker implicates that there is such a connection,

since the expression "implicated" cannot be reiterated as in (b).

By necessity, therefore, we conclude that what is implicated in (1) is (a). If, however, this is the case, what form should the cancellation of the implication in (1) take? According to the conclusion reached, this cancellation would be as in (13a). This reasoning indicates that the contradiction involved in (13a) seems to be close to a semantic contradiction. If the sentence "There is a connection between his Englishness and his bravery" is only an implicature of (1), then (13a) seems to be the correct form of words to use to deny one's commitment to the implicature. But (13) only has a use if (13a) is not a logical contradiction. So if (13a) is a logical contradiction (13) has not a use.

It is argued here that cancellability of an implicature should not result in contradiction. If it does, then the implicature is spurious if the test is to be taken seriously. The worrying point is that since truth-values are assigned to utterances in Grice's system, i.e., to a full identification of what is said, it follows that truth-valuation takes place not at an abstract level, but at the

level of real conversation where the co-operative principle is -latently or actively- in operation. This fact necessarily brings into conflict utterances like (13) with the co-operative principle. Employing the detachability test, however, (1) can be restated as (2):

- (2) He is an Englishman and he is brave,

and, further, (1) would have the same truth-value as (2). But is this possible in the inferential use of (1)?

Furthermore, we could consider what results (2) would yield, were it to be reported. Consider (14):

- (14) She said that he was an Englishman and that he was brave.

Would one who had uttered (1), intending it as an argument, consent to this form of report on his utterance? Indeed, were it to be proved that the referent of "he" was not an Englishman, wouldn't one be prone to retract his utterance on the grounds that if the first conjunct was false so was the second? This utterance then would resemble the conditional rather than have the form of a conjunction. In any case, (14) does not seem to report the utterance of (1) truly, though it does that of (2). But isn't arguing so tantamount to saying that part of what was said in (1) was not reported in (14)? For if what was not reported was only what had been conventionally implicated in (1), one would neither balk at (14), nor rule it out as a false report.

It must be made clear, however, that our concern here is with the report of (1), when this is meant as an argument. It may be recalled that a true or satisfactory report need not report all the assertions made in a speech. However, it should report those parts of the speech that are crucial for conveying any further assertions in the spirit in which they were made. Moreover, as argued by Zwicky (1971:74-75), "a satisfactory report conveys the meanings of a speech and not its presuppositions or its possible messages or possible inferences from it. This is a property of the verb 'say'...".

If conventional implicatures do not constitute part of what is said, then we are entitled to conclude that they have no place in a report of a speech with "say" as the reporting verb. If, however, Zwicky's condition is deemed to be too strong, then, relaxing it, it can be expected that the inclusion or not of a conventional implicature should not affect the meaning and the truth-value of what is reported. Yet, we have seen that it does. Moreover, the inclusion of the alleged conventional implicature renders the report more satisfactory and



complete in any case. This fact adduces additional evidence against the construction of an account of those aspects of meanings in terms of conventional implicatures.

If (1), on the other hand, was meant as an explanation then, though (14) might not be looked on as false, it would nevertheless frustrate the very purpose of the utterance. Note that in this case (15), is a more satisfactory report of (1) than (14) is.

To see the whole issue from the other side of the coin, (16),

- (16) She said that he was an Englishman and that he was therefore brave,

should constitute a true report of (2) if (1) is equivalent to (2). Yet, it is doubtful whether one who had uttered (2) would, quite happily, consent to (16) as a true report of what he had said, especially if (2) was intended as the assertion of two independent propositions, unconnected, apart from the obvious connection that they were both predicated of the same individual. Wouldn't we be inclined to say that the report (16) was false on the grounds that part of what was reported as having been asserted, i.e., that he was an Englishman? Yet, the inclusion in the report of a conventional implicature should not be capable of falsifying it; but this seems to be the case with (16).

One is inclined to conclude that indeed what is conveyed by "therefore" cannot be conventionally implicated, since a prerequisite for the assignment of the status of implicatures to any aspects of what is conveyed in an utterance is that they do not affect the truth-values of the utterances which include them.

On the other hand, "but" does not seem to behave in quite the same way. Consider (17),

- (17) He said that she was poor and (she was) honest,

which can be the report of (4). Indeed, (17) is not only a true and satisfactory report of (4), but it also seems to share the same truth-value with (18):

- (18) He said that she was poor but (she was) honest.

Moreover, in (18) the source of what is conveyed by "but" need not be the speaker of the *oratio recta*. This source can be sought either in the original speaker or in the reporter, or indeed in someone else connected with the discussion; "but" can be understood either as having been uttered by the original

speaker of the utterance, or as having been added by the reporter. Understood in a loose sense it can function transparently. To clarify this point, consider (18a):

- (18a) He said that she was poor but he (also) said that she was honest (too),

in which the elements "he (also) said" reinforce the status of the second clause, which is that of a report. "But" falls outside the scope of the reporting verb, which is repeated, and serves to conjoin the two clauses as two separate reports.

In contrast, "therefore" can function only opaquely, so to speak; that is, it can be understood only as within the scope of the reporting verb as can be seen in the following example:

- (19) She said that he was an Englishman and (she said) (that) (he was) therefore brave.

"Therefore" cannot be added by the reporter as "but" can be.

In this connection it can be noted that the reported clause in (20),

- (20) He said that she was poor but (that she was) honest, though I wouldn't agree there was a contrast between the two,

must be recognised as the quotational form of someone else's words if we are to understand the reference of the second clause; i.e., (20) must be understood as (21):

- (21) He said (that) "she was poor but she was honest".

But even if (20) is given a (semi-)quotation reading it is not obvious that what is conveyed in it is absolutely clear. Indeed, if the utterer of (20) wished to express his difference of opinion on the matter, he had better be explicit, as in (22) or (23):

- (22) He said that she was poor but that she was honest, though I do not see why she should have to be dishonest just because she was poor,

or

- (23) He said: "She is poor but she is honest", but... ..(as in (22)).

(24), on the other hand, does not pose such problems:

- (24) He said that she was poor but (that she was) honest though he (himself) didn't imply a contrast between the two.  
 (26) She said that he was an Englishman and that he was therefore brave though she (herself) didn't imply a connection between the two that the one followed from the other.

In (25) the pending attribution of the implicature generated by "but" to the original speaker of *oratio recta* is averted. But this does not hold for (26); (26) involves a contradiction.

The diverse linguistic behaviour of "but" and "therefore" in *oratio obliqua* seems to be determined by the fact that they each have a distinct structural status. According to Fries (1952) "but", but not "therefore", belongs to a group in which all words are "signals of 'levelling', of connecting two units with the 'same' structural function", as "all the words of this group stand only between words of the same part-of-speech class or subgroup" (p. 95). "But", therefore, is capable of bringing the reported clause "that she is honest" down to the same structural level as, either that of the clause "that she is poor", or that of "he said that she is poor". Figures 1 and 2 represent the distinct structure of "but" in each case.

It follows, therefore, that "but" can operate to invoke a general proposition or belief which can be imputed either to the original speaker, or to the reporter, or to a related person in the same discourse. By contrast, "therefore" involves the assumption of a general belief which can be imputed only to the utterer of the sentence and not to the reporter. This is indicative of the presence of closer ties between *p* and *q* in "*p* therefore *q*" than there are in "*p* but *q*". It also seems possible to claim that the general statement assumed in "*p*, therefore *q*" is invoked via the stated connection between its two propositions so that what is said, including those aspects of meaning that have been claimed to be conventional implicatures by Grice, can be confined within the bounds of what is actually uttered. In this respect, too, "but" and "therefore" seem to be distinct as regards their conventional implicata.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to report (1) as in (27):

- (27) She said that he was an Englishman and that  
       he was brave and that he was brave because  
               he was an Englishman.  
       or { the one followed from the other.  
       or { there was a causal connection  
           between the two,

or as in (28): "She said that he was brave because he was an Englishman".  
 (Katz, 1972: 446)

On the other hand, if we apply the same methods to "but", we end up with odd reports of what was initially said.

We believe we have shown that "but" and "therefore", both claimed to be paradigm cases of the same linguistic phenomenon on Grice's theory, do not behave uniformly as should have been expected. Moreover, not only does "therefore" seem to be more easily amenable to a semantic treatment but it also poses, as we have seen, greater problems for an account of its meaning in terms of conventional implicatures as these have been explicated by Grice. Concluding, the above findings can be stated as points A to D below:

- A. Conventional implicatures of "therefore" are operative within the limits of what is actually uttered. This has not been shown to be the case with respect to "but".
- B. Conventional implicatures of "therefore" can be negated. This has not been shown to hold for conventional implicatures generated by "but".
- C. Conventional implicatures, in general, are not cancellable. In particular, with regard to "therefore", it has been shown that cancellation of the implicature results in contradiction, a feature characteristic of truth-functional aspects of meaning.
- D. Conventional implicatures of "but" are detachable without any consequences for the truth-value of the conjunction. This is not true of the conventional implicata of "therefore". Conventional implicata of "but" in reported utterances can be "lost" or cancelled in a sense. Conventional implicatures of "therefore" remain attached to the conjuncts it conjoins. They cannot be cancelled or "transferred".

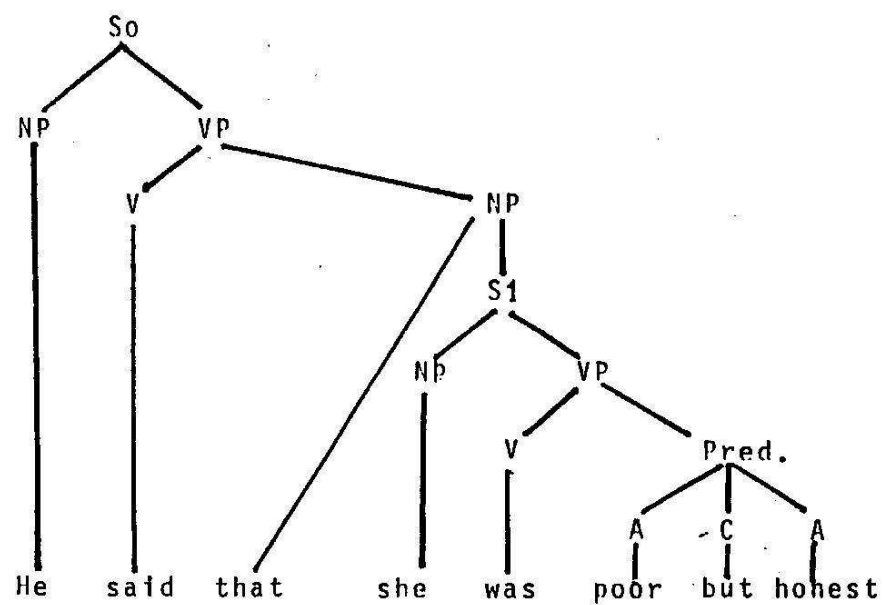
On the assumption that these points are correct, it is evident that "but" and "therefore" differ on more than one count as regards their conventional implicatures. In view of this fact they cannot be characterized as instances of the same linguistic phenomenon. Besides, while it is clear that part of the meaning of "but" is conjunctive -and therefore "but" has this aspect of its meaning in common with "and"-this is not true of "therefore"<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the question that one may posit is what the justification is for accounting for "therefore" in terms of the truth-functional conjunction.

Moreover, I have argued that the conventional implicatures of

"therefore" cannot be justifiably excluded from its truth-functional meaning, as I have shown that they affect the truth-valuation of what is said.

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Figure 1



### Performative Analysis

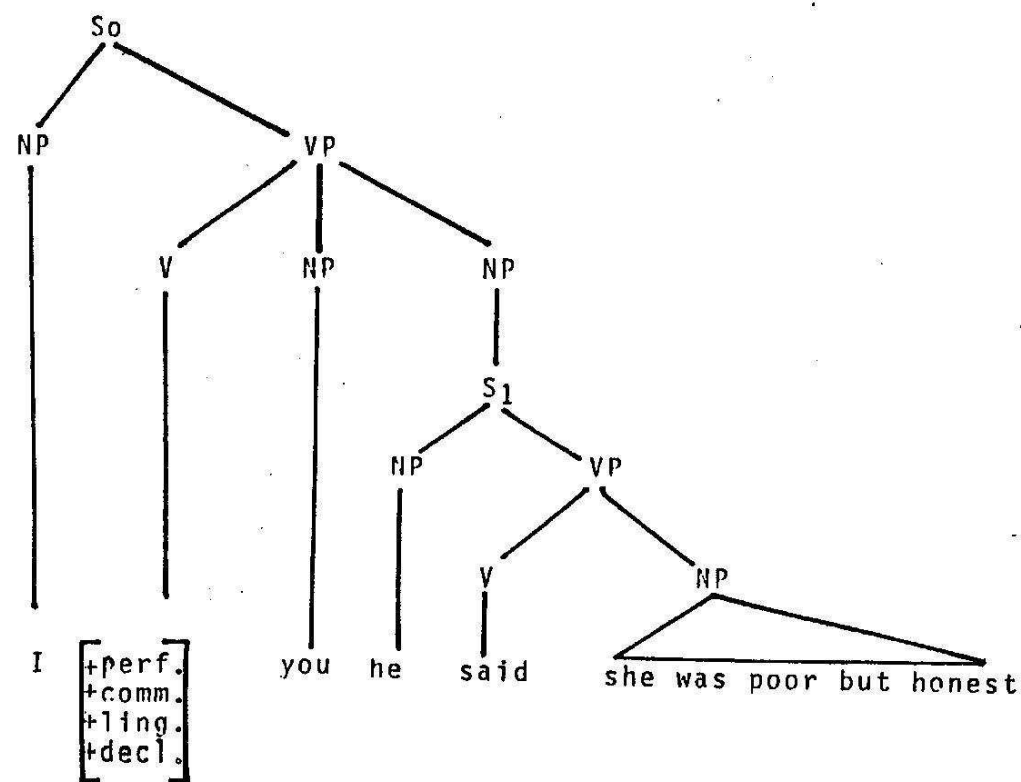
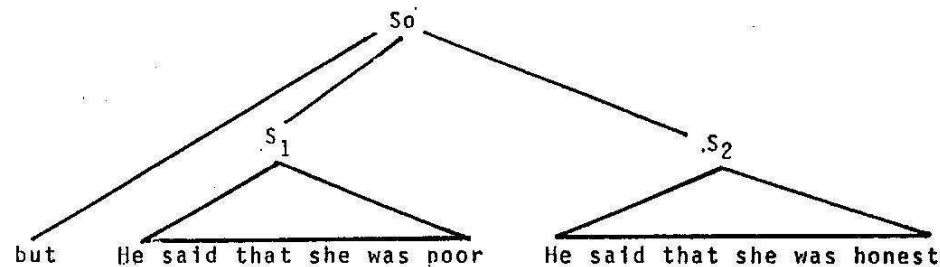
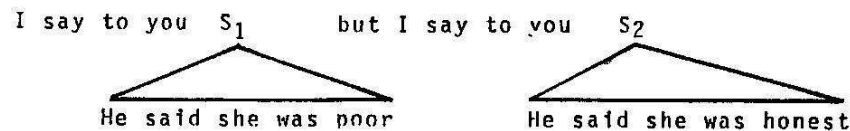




Figure 2



### Performative Analysis



### NOTES

1. However, in actual discourse this may not be so, as the general statement may precede rather than be suppressed.
2. For problems of (1) which cannot be handled within Grice's account, see Kitis (1982).
3. See, for example, sentences like "*p* and therefore *q*" or negative sentences in which the second conjunct has to be conjoined by "and" as in  $\neg(p$  and therefore  $q)$ . This is indicative of the absence of any conjunctive aspects of meaning in the case of "therefore".

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