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The linguistic pragmatics of terrorist acts

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ABSTRACT. This paper applies the principles of linguistic pragmatics to a selected example of political debate. Specific pragmatic constructs are located and described (conversational implicature/presupposition), with evidence for their theoretical validity provided. This description serves as an input into a consideration of the existence, nature, order and rhetorical impact of these constructs within the selected political debate, providing a contribution to both pragmatic theory and the analysis of political rhetoric.

KEY WORDS: argumentation, implicature, inference, linguistics, politics, pragmatics, presupposition, rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is a relatively new area of concern within linguistics; although the term itself has been around for some time, being originally attributed to the philosopher Charles Morris and his tripartite distinction between syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. Pragmatics was defined as the 'relation of signs to interpreters', a definition which is still perfectly functional, despite the controversy surrounding the aims, processes and delimitation of pragmatics (see Green, 1989; Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983). Arguments and descriptions concentrating on what is and what is not pragmatics are readily available elsewhere (see Bates, 1976; and more recently Horn, 1988; and Wilson, 1990) and I do not want to repeat the issues here. In this paper the term is being used in the sense of core Anglo-American pragmatics, as outlined in Levinson (1983: with the possible exception of Chapter 6).

One of the main concerns of Anglo-American pragmatics is with the nature of inference; in classic Gricean terms with what we mean, not necessarily with what we say (see Lycan, 1986, for an overview of inference types). Political language would seem to be a core site for the exercise of inferential production, not only because messages may be constructed and sent inferentially, allowing politicians to avoid explicit statements, but also because inferences are not statements of fact, they may always be denied (or cancelled), which would seem to make them particularly useful for political discourse.

In this paper the aim is twofold, first to explore, through a basic example taken from the British House of Commons, the way in which political

inferences are constructed, and the way in which such inferences may be highlighted and explained using core pragmatic concepts (see Wilson, 1990, Chapter 2); second, to consider the interrelationship between those inferences highlighted; the evidence for their existence; their logical connection; and the theoretical arguments for their construction. In doing this I take the argument beyond that of simply describing the operation of pragmatic constructs within a specific 'live' context (although this is in itself interesting and a necessary starting-point: see below, also Wilson, 1990, Chapter 2), I highlight how a consideration of the ordering and interaction of different inference types may contribute to issues of both pragmatic theory, and discussions of political rhetoric.

While it is not a central aim of the paper to explore the core political aspects of certain pragmatic choices within the linguistic system, the paper may, nevertheless, also be seen as a contribution to our developing awareness of the role of linguistics in the analysis of political language. In order to provide an adequate linguistic critique of political praxis, and linguistic evidence of ideological orientation one must be able to pin-point the linguistic clues that provide for an analytic interpretation. This paper reveals how certain pragmatic constructs may act as clues to interpretation within one specified context.

The example I consider here is taken from a question and answer session which took place as part of a debate on Foreign and Commonwealth affairs within the British House of Commons on Wednesday 7 May 1986. The debate, as a whole, covered a variety of issues; the section I am specifically interested in, however, concentrated on Nicaragua. In particular I focus on questions directed to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe) on United States military aid to the Contras in Nicaragua (answered in the first instance by Mr T. Eggar, Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs) and questions on the issue of international terrorism (see Appendix).

POLITICAL INFERENCES

Although the questions I focus on seem to attend to two different issues, i.e. military aid vs. international terrorism, these issues were linked by a number of questioners who suggested that America's support of the Contra rebel group was an example of state-sponsored terrorism. This suggestion was developed, in part, in relation to the United States' bombing of Libya, which had taken place previously that year; an action justified by the United States in terms of Libyan support for international terrorism.

Several of the speakers asked questions in this parliamentary session which suggested that the United States' actions indicated hypocrisy. The argument was that it was hypocritical for the United States to claim that they carried out the bombing of Libya as a response to that country's involvement in international terrorism when they themselves (the Americans) supported the Nicaraguan Contras who, in the opinion of some members of the house,

were in fact terrorists. This position is summed up in the question put by Mr Dennis Healey:

Mr Healey: Did the government remind President Reagan at the Tokyo summit that his proposals for military aid to the Contras involved the United States in a most blatant form of state terrorism, because the Contras have engaged in horrifying atrocities, including torture and mutilation, against innocent women and children . . . Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, so long as President Reagan supports such activities, he has no right whatever to claim to be an opponent of state terrorism? (*Hansard*, Wednesday 7 May 1986: 136).

Tim Eggar, speaking for Her Majesty's Government, made the following statement:

Mr Eggar: I think the right hon. Gentleman is trying to draw a parallel between the United States' action in Libya and its action in Nicaragua, which simply does not stand up to any examination. Gaddafi has committed the Libyan Government to organising and directing a world-wide campaign of terrorist violence against innocent people outside Libya. In Nicaragua, the Contras and the Nicaraguans have resorted to armed struggle against their own Government. *The Contras do not seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in third countries.*

I want to explore, for the moment, that portion of Mr Eggar's claim italicized above. My suggestion is that it carries a pragmatic inference, or implication, which seems at variance with the case I believe Mr Eggar would have wanted to make. The problem is this: to claim that the Contras do not carry out terrorist acts in third countries does not, in itself, deny that they carry out terrorist acts, merely that they do not carry out such acts in third countries. Further, if we accept this as a possibility, and if we focus directly on the phrase 'in third countries', which is generally used to mean something like 'in countries other than one's own' (see below), then it is perfectly reasonable to interpret what Mr Eggar has said as implying that 'the Contras carry out terrorist acts in *their own country*'.

This seems odd on any interpretation of Mr Eggar's aim in responding to Mr Healey, since in one sense it gives credence to those very claims which Mr Eggar is attempting to deny. One might object, however, that the interpretation we have arrived at, or are suggesting, arises because we have taken the sentence out of context. This is not valid criticism, however. First, because the very same option would remain rhetorically available for anyone listening to Mr Eggar's response, and we cannot seriously believe that in the House of Commons, as a forum for confrontational debate, that such an option would be ignored where it is given (intentionally or not). Second, and more importantly, there is nothing within the total context of the response, nor indeed the sequential context of the question and the response, which acts to explicitly block the implications I have identified (see below).

Mr Eggar has claimed that the Contras differ from the Libyans in that the Libyans carry out terrorist acts world-wide, while the Contras do not. If one were accusing the Contras of carrying out terrorist acts world-wide then Mr

Eggar would be correct, there would be no comparison between them and the Libyans. But this is not what Mr Healey claimed, he claimed that the Contras were terrorists, and Mr Eggar has not explicitly denied this.

What evidence is there, however, to support the interpretation I have proposed. In order to present such evidence, we look at two core pragmatic concepts which would seem to be useful in helping us resolve the puzzle of Mr Eggar's response: (a) 'presupposition'; and (b) 'conversational implicature'.

Both these concepts are the focus of some controversy (the reader will find an excellent summary of the main issues in the controversial history of presupposition in Levinson, 1983; see also Burton-Roberts, 1989, Carston, 1987; Gazdar, 1979; Green, 1989; Horn, 1988; Kempson, 1979; Oh and Dineen, 1979), and in considering the implications within Mr Eggar's response we are, to some extent, considering the relative relationship between these implication types as they contribute to our overall understanding of the pragmatic context.

INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATION

On the basis of the above argument I am suggesting that two inferences arise from what Mr Eggar has said. Basically my claim is that he has (a) not denied that the Contras are terrorists and (b) allowed for a possible inference that the Contras are terrorists in their own country. Looking at both of these in a logical manner, it would seem to be the case that if one could prove the inference in (b), then the inference in (a) follows naturally; that is, if one is saying that the Contras are terrorists in their own country, then one is explicitly not denying that the Contras are terrorists.

Consider first, then, an argument for case (b). The argument here will be that the possible inference in (b) is a type of 'conversational implicature'. In order to make the case for a conversational implicature we will focus on Mr Eggar's use of the phrase 'in third countries'.

The phrase, 'in third countries', can be said to mean *in countries other than one's own*, or more simply, *not in one's own country*. This results, in part, from the fact that *in third countries* may be seen as an idiomatic expression, or as what Cowie (1988) has called a 'fixed expression'. Within such expressions, individual lexical items to some extent lose their semantic independence, contributing instead to a holistic phrasal interpretation. For example, 'third' is normally associated with a specific position in a numerical sequence, but in the phrase *in third countries* it is not picking out the next member in a sequence, but rather any member of the set of countries other than one's own. We can see this in the analogous context of the legal phrase 'third parties'. Here third indicates any party other than those involved in the dispute. Interpreting the adverbial phrase *in third countries* in this way creates what looks like a simple bilateral relationship.

third countries \longleftrightarrow not one's own country
 one's own country \longleftrightarrow not third countries

On closer inspection this exclusive relationship disappears. For example, it is possible to say the following without contradiction:

1. The Contras seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in their own country and indeed in a number of third countries.
2. The Contras seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in third countries and indeed in their own country.

Clearly, the relationship between *third country* and *not one's own country* is more than simply one of semantics, in that the two do not seem intersubstitutable in any sense of synonymy.

If *third countries* implies *not one's own country*, then, on the surface, the adverbial phrase is behaving in the same way as a word like *some*, which is said to imply *not all*. Both the adverbial phrase and *some* are similar in that they imply the negation of another form:

3. (a) Some of the boys enjoyed the party.
(b) *not all of the boys enjoyed the party.*
- (a) We play football in a third country.
(b) *not our own country.*

They are also similar in that they both provide implications which can be cancelled:

4. (a) Some, if indeed not all, of the teachers were sacked
(b) We will visit a number of third countries and of course our own country

The ability to cancel certain inferences is a feature of a number of implication types, both conversational implicature and presupposition included. This feature of inferences is referred to as defeasibility, and we will have more to say about it when we look at presuppositions; for the present, while it clearly indicates we are in inference territory it does not offer any guarantee of the type of inference we are dealing with.

IMPLICATIONS: SCALAR AND CONVERSATIONAL

In order to try to resolve the question of what kind of implication we are dealing with, I want to consider, in some more detail, the links between the phrase *in third countries*, and the description of a form like *some*, which, as we have noted, has a number of features in common with the adverbial *in third countries*.

The behaviour of a form like *some* is normally accounted for in terms of what are called 'scalar implicatures', a specific type of implication developed by Gerald Gazdar (1979) from the original work of Paul Grice (1975).

Grice's work is based on the assumption that when people interact they are guided by a basic principle of co-operation, and that under this principle of co-operation operate a series of maxims which guide conversational behaviour:

The co-operative principle. Make your contribution, such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

The maxims.

- (a) *Quality*—try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically: (i) do not say that which you believe false; and (ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- (b) *Quantity*: (i) make your contribution as informative as required for the current purposes of the exchange; and (ii) do not make your contribution more informative than required.
- (c) *Relevance*: make your contributions relevant.
- (d) *Manner*: (i) avoid obscurity; (ii) avoid ambiguity; (iii) be brief; and (iv) be orderly.

Where any of these maxims is flouted within interaction, it is assumed that the co-operative principle is still in operation, and that one consequence of this is that the hearer is required to search for meaning beyond the surface structure in order to make sense of what is said. For example:

- 5. (a) What time did Bill get home?
- (b) Well the pubs were closed.

On the surface, the response in (5) does not seem to supply information about the time Bill got home, as requested by the question, and in this sense speaker (b) has failed to maintain the maxim of relevance. However, as most readers can work out, the answer supplies much more information than is available from a semantic analysis of the surface structure alone. What speaker (b) indicates is that he does not know exactly what time Bill got home, but what is known is that it was later than X, X being the time at which pubs close. In this example, the hearer flouts the maxim of relevance in order to create what Grice calls a *conversational implicature*, the implication in this case that *Bill was home later than X*.

Building on Grice's basic model Gazdar (1979) has argued that certain lexical items form scales in terms of the way in which they relate to each other. For example, *all* entails *some*, and *some* 'implicates' *not all*. The relationship between *some* and *not all* is one of implication (a scalar implication in Gazdar's terminology) because it can be cancelled without contradiction (as with several other implication types, see below). In terms of a scale such as {A1, A2, A3 . . .} we would say that if one uses {A2} one implicates \sim {A1}, or if one uses {A3} one implicates \sim {A2} and \sim {A1}.

Accepting this basic model for the moment, we could argue, in the case of countries, that there is a simple scale such as the following: {third, one} (where *one* refers to *one's own country*). Adhering to scalar principles, *one* should implicate \sim {third}, which is in fact the case (see above). The problem here, however, is that {third} does not (as would be expected on using normal scalar principles) entail {one}, in fact it explicitly excludes it:

6. (a) The Contras seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in third countries.
 (b) * The Contras seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in their own country.

In the case of our simple scale of countries we have what we might call *relationship of negative bi-directionality*, i.e. that the use of any member of the scale implies the negation of the other in any direction. For example, {third} implies \sim {one}; equally, {one} implies \sim {third}. This is a similar, though a more formal, account of what I referred to above as a bilateral relationship; we are now in a position, however, to explain this relationship. It is argued that some forms have a bi-directional scalar relationship, where one implies the negation of the other. These are implicatures, none the less, and can therefore be cancelled as in (2) above.

This does not, in itself, tell us how we get the implication, *the Contras carry out terrorist acts in their own country*, from Mr Eggar's statement. The answer is that since {third} implies \sim {one}, \sim {third} implies $\sim\sim$ {one}; and by a standard formal rule of double negation we get {one} from $\sim\sim$ {one}. Consequently, when one says *not in third countries* one implies *in one's own country*, the implication here being a variation of a scalar implicature.

If we accept this argument, however, we must also be able to show that this type of scalar implicature fulfils the necessary requirements for being a conversational implicature in a standard Gricean sense. While the establishment of specific tests for implicature have proved controversial (see Sadock, 1978; Lycan, 1986), it would, nevertheless, be worthwhile to consider how our claims stand up to the original tests laid down by Grice.

There are four basic tests for implicatures: (i) *defeasibility* (that they may be cancelled in certain contexts); (ii) *calculability* (that they can be worked out: see the explanation of (5) above); (iii) *non-detachability* (the implicature is attached to the semantic content of what is said, not to the form. In this sense implicatures are different from presuppositions); and (iv) *non-conventionality* (the implicature is not part of the conventional meaning of linguistic expressions). Let us focus on each of these in turn, and consider in what sense the claim that *in one's own country* is a conversational implicature which can be derived from the adverbial *not in third countries*.

(i) *Defeasibility*. We have already noted above that *not in third countries* does provide the inference, *in one's own country*, and that this inference may be cancelled by the addition of a clause giving something like, *not in third countries, nor in one's own country*. Clearly, this is a case of defeasibility.

(ii) *Calculability*. In this case we must assume, using scalar principles, that if Mr Eggar had evidence that the Contras carry out terrorist acts in their own country, or that they do not carry out terrorist acts at all, then he should have said so (according to Gricean principles). He did not, however; consequently, we may assume that he may not be sure, or lack evidence, that the acts that the Contras are performing are terrorist acts: a not unreasonable claim, since it is sometimes difficult to draw the line between terrorism and democratic struggle (see below).

(iii) *Non-detachability*. The question, here, is can we generate the same

inference (in one's own country) using a different lexical expression? This seems quite possible as we can see in the following examples:

7. (a) The Contras do not carry out terrorist acts in other states.
- (b) The Contras do not carry out terrorist acts over the borders of other countries.

In each case the implication that the actions are carried out within one's own country remains intact.

(iv) *Non-conventionality*. In this case we would have to claim that *not in third countries* can have a semantic meaning different from *in one's own country*. Clearly, this is the case in that, compositionally, one could use the phrase *not in third countries* to refer to actual multiples of three.

8. We will attack every third county to the West.

As I noted above, these tests are a matter of some controversy, and Sadock (1978) has suggested that even if all these tests are taken together, other features may still be required to identify implicatures. However, for our purposes I believe we have fairly strong evidence that the meaning relationship between *not in third countries* and *in one's own country* is one of implicature.

WHY DO WE NEED PRESUPPOSITIONS?

Accepting that we have proved, to some extent, that Mr Eggar's response carries a specific implicature type, and that this implicature indicates that the Contras are terrorists in their own country, then the other inference noted above, i.e. that the Contras are terrorists, follows logically. I suggest, however, that we can make a case for this being an independent inference type, in particular I argue that it is a specific type of inference known as presupposition.

Presuppositions are inferences which are said to have certain structural qualities. In early studies it was noted that they were elements of meaning which seemed to survive under negation (Strawson, 1950; and Gazdar, 1979; Kempson, 1979; Wilson, 1975). For example, (b) is assumed to be true in both (9) and (10):

9. (a) John regrets beating his wife.
- (b) John has beaten his wife.
10. (a) John doesn't regret beating his wife.
- (b) John has beaten his wife.

This behaviour under negation distinguishes presuppositions from other elements of meaning such as 'entailments', that is aspects of meaning logically derived from a sentence relative to its assumed truth value. For example, if (11) is true then (11a) and (11b) will also be true. If (11) is false, however, as in (12), then (11b) will not be true, but (11a) may still be true; that is it will survive in the context of negation. (11b) is an entailment while (11a) is a presupposition.

11. John managed to stop in time.
 - (a) John tried to stop in time.
 - (b) John stopped in time.
12. John didn't manage to stop in time. (from Levinson, 1983:178)

Put more simply, when we interpret (11) we assume that (11a) and (11b) are both true, but when we interpret (12) we assume only that (11a) is true. The reasoning behind this is that it is a contradiction to say something like (13), but perfectly acceptable to say something like (14):

13. *John didn't manage to stop in time and he stopped in time.
14. John didn't manage to stop in time but he did try.

Although survival under negation is a basic feature of presuppositions, it is problematic in that in a number of negative contexts presuppositions can themselves be cancelled by the addition of a further clause as in (15):

15. John didn't manage to stop in time because he didn't even try.

A further quality said to be associated with presuppositions is that they are linked to specific aspects of surface structure, 'presupposition triggers' as they are sometimes referred to (see Levinson, 1983: 181–4, for a range of examples). Taking these basic (if somewhat controversial) facts into account let us return to our selected example from Mr Eggar's statement, and compare its negative form with its positive form:

16. (a) The Contras seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in third countries.
- (b) The Contras do not seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in third countries.

One implication which seems to survive in both contexts here is that 'the Contras carry out terrorist acts', which suggests that such an implication is a presupposition. Further evidence for this claim can be provided when we consider that in (16b) one can deny such an implication (an example of defeasibility):

17. The Contras do not seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in third countries because they do not carry out terrorist acts.

As we have already noted, presuppositions have yet another defining quality above and beyond defeasibility; it is claimed that they are 'triggered' by specific linguistic elements (see, for example, the case of the verb *regret* in 10a), and there is evidence of this in this case; compare Mr Eggar's statement in both its positive and negative forms with the adverbial phrase removed:

18. (a) The Contras seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts.
- (b) The Contras do not seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts.

It is clear, then, that the implication that *the Contras carry out terrorist acts* does not survive under negation, in fact it is explicitly denied. Consequently, the argument is that the implication *the Contras carry out terrorist acts* is a *presupposition* of Mr Eggar's statement. The evidence for this claim is based

on the following facts: (a) the implication survives under negation; (b) it is defeasible; and (c) it is tied to a specific aspect of surface structure, in this case the adverbial phrase *in third countries*.

WHOSE IMPLICATURE IS IT ANYWAY?

We now have two different arguments, both based on the use of the adverbial phrase, which lead us to very similar conclusions. In terms of ordering, as we have noted, the implicature that 'the Contras carry out terrorist acts in their own country' would seem to allow us to logically derive the presupposition that 'the Contras are terrorists'. Despite this, however, according to the principles (admittedly controversial: see Van der Sandt, 1988) laid down for the location of presuppositions as inferences, they can still be located independently. The question is, is there a need for both inferences, the conversational implicature and the presupposition, in processing Mr Eggar's response? Within pragmatics both a positive and negative answer seem possible, depending on whose theory you believe.

Gazdar (1979), for example, is one of the few analysts to take account of the fact that more than one inference at a time may be generated by an utterance. He has suggested the following ordering for inferences as they are added to the context within interaction: (1) the entailments of the uttered sentence; (2) the clausal conversational implicatures; (3) the scalar implicatures; and (4) the presuppositions. According to Gazdar, presuppositions are added last; and presumably where they do not clash with previous inferences they are added to the context. The operating constraint of the ordering is that a proposition may only be added to the context where it is consistent with those propositions already in the context. On the surface this would seem to work in the case of Mr Eggar's utterance in that the presupposition, to some extent, complements the implicature. Certainly, there is no clash between being a terrorist and being a terrorist in one's own country.

However, another way of looking at this situation leads to an alternative view, one in which, if the presupposition is processed at all, the use of the presupposition does not merely complement the implicature, but may actually extend the overall inferential interpretation.

If we look at the 'relevance theory' of Sperber and Wilson (1986) for example, the argument here would be that the presupposition is adding information which can already be derived from the implicature alone, and therefore, within relevance theory, to process the presupposition as well would generate extra processing effort. Sperber and Wilson (1986) suggest that where extra processing does take place there should be some informational pay-off, i.e. we should, generally, know more after the extra processing than we did before, through the generation of further implications for example.

We might speculate on such implicational possibilities here. The fact that Mr Eggar has refused to explicitly deny that the Contras are terrorists may indicate that the British government is hedging its bets, or that it genuinely

believes the Contras are terrorists, but that they are not in the same category as the Libyans, or perhaps simply that the government don't want to be drawn into a debate on a definition of terrorists and terrorism, not only because these are difficult political areas to define, but also because any statements on terrorism by the government might be used relative to their own terrorism problem in Northern Ireland (this is in fact what took place later in the debate, see Wilson, 1990).

Whether these are possibilities or not, they have a certain ad hoc feel about them, and in terms of the parliamentary context in which the utterance occurs some of these further implications may not be particularly helpful. The fact that extra processing may be available does not of course guarantee that it will take place (see Wilson, 1990, Chapter 4), and indeed one would imagine in this context that Mr Eggar might want the inferences kept to a minimum.

His choice of utterance may not have been a happy one in that case; although Mr Healey does not explicitly follow up on any of the possibilities we have raised; which may have been a result of the formal organization of debate within Parliament, where gaining access to the floor for further follow up questions proves particularly difficult. Nevertheless, the fact that inferences are not acted upon does not mean that they are not there. Whether they are there or not depends in large part on the arguments one employs for their existence, and I believe that using standard techniques we have shown that both a conversational implicature and presupposition are available in Mr Eggar's utterance. Exactly how these two inferences are processed in any ordered sense is less clear, and it is a pragmatic issue still to be resolved. For the present I want to offer some tentative speculations on the rhetorical consequences of the availability of two potential inference types.

INFERENCE POLITICAL RHETORIC AND PREFERRED INTERPRETATIONS

Let us consider again the arguments of both Gazdar and Sperber and Wilson as they relate to the context not only of pragmatic theory, but, in this case, how they relate to the construction of political rhetoric. Above I noted that in terms of the ordering of input into context Gazdar (1979) suggests that presuppositions are added last, where they do not conflict with information already available. I argued that being a terrorist (presupposition) clearly does not conflict with being a terrorist in one's own country. Nevertheless, it also does not add anything to what is already known. Assuming for the moment that hearers process both inferences in context then, in Sperber and Wilson's terms, they will have carried out extra processing with no apparent pay-off. But this need not be the case.

Let us consider for a moment what the information given by the inferences looks like:

The Contras carry out terrorist acts in their own country [implication] and the Contras are terrorists [presupposition].

Put this way, it is not so much that the presupposition complements the implicature, it is that it leads to the creation of what is essentially a tautology.

We could react to this in two ways: first we could revise our consideration of whether or not the presupposition conflicts with the implicature, arguing that the creation of a tautology is a clash and that therefore the presupposition is not added to the context (in Gazdar's terms); second, we could treat the tautology as being pragmatically relevant in itself. Within pragmatics tautologies are seen as infringements of Grice's maxim of relevance and therefore pragmatically meaningful.

There are problems with both of these possibilities, however. In the first option we must assume that the presupposition is processed before a conflict can be recognized. If this is done in real time by real people the assumption is that they will reject the tautology, leaving only the implicature in context. This would seem odd both for Mr Eggar and his opponents. For Mr Eggar's critics the presupposition adds confirmation (the complementary argument) that the government really believe that the Contras are terrorists. For Mr Eggar himself it would be odd if he wanted either the presupposition or the implicature to be attended to, since they seem to negate his argument.

What is going on then? As I noted above, you cannot guarantee that certain elements of information will be processed, what you can do therefore is to try and guide processing in a particular direction, and build in contingency plans for when that action fails. Within the total verbal context of the parliamentary debate, and specifically the question and answer section we are looking at, it can be argued that Mr Eggar attends to a selected element of Mr Healey's question, the international dimension. In his response Mr Eggar rejects any comparison between the Contras and the Libyans on the scale of international terrorism. For example, the members of the set of countries or groups which are associated with the support of international terrorism does not include the Contras. Of course, this does not mean that the Contras are not terrorists, and this is what we have been discussing. However, hearers do not process every piece of information (the central point of Sperber and Wilson's theory, 1986), and where Mr Eggar can get his audience (the members of parliament, and those members of the public listening on the radio or watching on TV) to attend to only this discourse fact, then he can be seen as answering the question (on a similar point see Wilson, 1990, Chapter 4). If, however, anyone should instead concentrate on the inferences, the implication and the presupposition, and raise these within the parliamentary debate, then, because they are inferences, Mr Eggar can always deny they were intended, and that his aim was, as we have noted above, to compare like with like: international terrorists with international terrorists.

This is a defensible position, and indeed when I gave a version of this paper at a conference in 1989 several members of the audience argued that the discourse as text suggested there was no need to argue for implicatures and presuppositions. I believe this is not only a rhetorical mistake, but also a political one. As I noted above, the fact that inferences may not have been processed does not mean they are not there, and for many of us they will

remain hidden as long as we refuse to make ourselves sensitive to the possibilities. We can see one consequence of this in our example debate, did the British government at the time believe the Contras were terrorists or not? If we accept only the sequential discourse argument that Mr Eggar was contrasting like with like as mooted in Mr Healey's statement, then we fail to notice, and lose the right to question further, the available inferences I have highlighted. This weakens the quality of political debate, and makes us all the more ignorant and acquiescent for that.

The proof is in what might legitimately have been the case. First, there is absolutely nothing wrong with the following question, which could have been put to Mr Eggar: 'Are you nevertheless saying that the Contras are indeed terrorists, simply that they do not support terrorism on the international stage as does Libya?' Second, and perhaps a more significant point, if Mr Eggar wished to deny the thrust of Mr Healey's point without allowing possible inferences of the kind we have been discussing in this paper, then a very straightforward option was readily available, he could simply have said: 'The Contras are not terrorists'. This is clear and unequivocal in its intentions, it not only denies that the Contras are terrorists, but also, by logical extension, negates the thrust of Mr Healey's question, in that you cannot compare the Contras with the Libyans in the way Healey intended if the Contras are not terrorists. Mr Eggar did not use this form, however, and we might speculate on the political motives behind his actual selection; but whatever these might be, his linguistic choice has generated a number of inferences, and one of the aims of this paper has been to make clear what these are, and both how they interact *with* each other and within the context in which they are generated.

CONCLUSION

In exploring selected inference types we have shown how certain core pragmatic constructs may be seen to operate within a live political context. We have also seen that the use of more than one inference type raises issues of ordering effects and processing, which, in turn, feed back not only into questions of pragmatic theory, but also back into the communicative context itself. My aim has not been to resolve these issues, but rather to highlight their interaction within the analysis of live data, and through this to indicate the advantages of applying pragmatic theory to data, in this case political data, as well as the potential advantages for pragmatic theory of looking at real-time interactions of various types.

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APPENDIX

Selected section from Hansard, Wednesday 7 May 1986 (Nicaragua)

3. **Mr Torney** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask the European Economic Community Council to condemn any United States military aid to the Contras in Nicaragua.

14. **Mrs Renée Short** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding doctors in the Contra forces in Nicaragua being involved in the torture of political prisoners; and what action he has taken.

15. **Mr Park** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by the European Economic Community Council to the United States of America about its policy towards Nicaragua.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tim Eggar): We and our European partners have repeatedly made clear our conviction that the problems of Central America can be resolved only through a negotiated settlement based on the Contadora objectives rather than by armed forces. We have ensured that our views are well known.

As regards doctors, we have received no reports that doctors in the Contra forces have been involved in torture.

Mr Torney: Is the Under-Secretary of State aware that Congress is likely to approve of military aid to the Contra forces? Does he agree that that is contrary to international law? What does his colleague the Foreign Secretary propose to do about it?

Mr Eggar: We advocate a political solution, through the Contadora process, rather than a military solution. We believe that Nicaragua should negotiate seriously on the basis of the Contadora objectives and avoid actions such as the recent incursion into Honduras.

Mrs Short: Will the hon. Gentleman renew his efforts to obtain more information, because of reports from Nicaragua to the effect that doctors are being used for that purpose? Will he mobilise the forces of Amnesty International, and perhaps the BMA which have been instrumental in collecting a large amount of material, not necessarily from Nicaragua but from different parts of the world where doctors have been used in the implementation of torture?

Mr Eggar: We have made extensive inquiries. We have no such reports in our possession. If the hon. Lady has such information, I should be grateful if she would make it available.

Mr Park: Does the EEC intend to sit back and allow the Contadora process to be sabotaged by increasing United States involvement in the guerrilla war in Nicaragua?

Mr Eggar: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Community supports the Contadora process and believes that progress can be made through political dialogue and economic cooperation. The Twelve in the Community are in close touch with the Contadora groups. The Community's role is to provide support for the Contadora group's efforts. The economic cooperation agreements, which was signed in Luxembourg in November, offered practical support.

Sir Peter Blaker: What is the attitude of the Government of Nicaragua to the peace treaty which was proposed recently by the Contadora group?

Mr Eggar: Obviously we want Nicaragua to end its support for guerrillas in neighbouring countries and to make progress towards a genuine pluralist democracy. We believe that the suspension of certain civil rights in Nicaragua last October was a step in the wrong direction.

Mr Peter Bruinvels: What advice does my hon. Friend think the European Community Foreign Affairs Council should give to local authorities, such as Leicester, which intend to twin with Nicaragua? Will that help or hinder the Contras?

Mr Eggar: I do not think that the conduct of Leicester city council is a matter of great concern.

Mr Heffer: Will the Government inform their colleagues in America that they should consider United States history? The United States gained power after a struggle against the British, and only later did it have democratic elections. Nicaragua is in precisely the same position. Nicaragua has a democratically elected Government. The United States of America should not support those who are trying to overthrow a democratically elected Government who are carrying out policies on behalf of the Nicaraguan people.

Mr Eggar: The armed forces and nearly all the national institutions in Nicaragua are under the control of the Sandinista political party. The draft constitution under discussion in Nicaragua provides for the formalisation of these powers. Does the hon. Gentleman really believe that that is a democratic system?

Mr Winnick: If international terrorism is to be condemned, as it should be, why did the international summit in Tokyo not condemn the way in which President Reagan and the United States Administration are arming and supporting the bandits who are carrying out terrorist acts against the elected Government in Nicaragua? Why are there double standards?

Mr Eggar: There was a brief discussion among the Foreign Ministers at the Tokyo summit about the position in Central America. All the Foreign Ministers supported the efforts of the small democratic nations of Central America to make democracy work in their region. Mr Shultz reiterated the United States' continuing support for the Contadora proposals for peaceful resolution of disputes in the area.

Mr Key: I understand the American sphere of influence argument and recognise that our influence in the area is now limited to Belize, but is my hon. Friend sure that the Americans understand that there is growing concern in the United Kingdom about the Nicaraguan situation, which appears to be deteriorating?

Mr Eggar: I do not entirely accept the premise on which my hon. Friend's question is

based. However, we have made clear to the United States Government our views on the position in Central America.

Mr Healey: Did the Government remind President Reagan at the Tokyo summit that his proposals for military aid to the Contras involved the United States in a most blatant form of state terrorism, because the Contras have engaged in horrifying atrocities, including torture and mutilation, against innocent women and children, and they are now accused in the United States of drug running and of plotting the murder of an American ambassador in Central America? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, so long as President Reagan supports such activities, he has no right whatever to claim to be an opponent of state terrorism?

Mr Eggar: I think that the right hon. Gentleman is trying to draw a parallel between the United States action in Libya and its action in Nicaragua, which simply does not stand up to any examination. Gaddafi has committed the Libyan Government to organising and directing a world-wide campaign of terrorist violence against innocent people outside Libya. In Nicaragua, the Contras and the Nicaraguans have resorted to armed struggle against their own Government. The Contras do not seek to advance their cause by terrorist acts in third countries.

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