Tautology as presumptive meaning*

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Ever since the seminal work of Paul Grice, tautologies such as Business is business have been discussed from a number of angles. While most approaches assume that tautological utterances have to do with the operation of conversational maxims, an integrated analysis is still lacking. This paper makes an attempt at analysing tautologies within the framework of Levinson (2000), who proposes a distinction between three pragmatic levels, namely Indexical Pragmatics, Gricean Pragmatics 1, and Gricean Pragmatics 2. It is shown that observations of Ward and Hirschberg (1991) on the exclusion of alternatives, the claim of Autenrieth (1997) that the second NP in nominal equatives is predicative, and the recent insights of Bulhof and Gimbel (2004) on ‘deep’ tautology, may be fruitfully integrated within Levinson’s framework. The gist of this paper is to show that tautologies are not as tautological as once thought, because implicatures influence their truth conditions. Data are drawn from the author’s corpus of authentic German examples.

Keywords: conversational implicature, deep tautology, nominal equative, predication, tautology

1. Introduction

Grice (1989: 33) analysed tautologies such as War is war as “totally noninformative”, utterances that flout the first maxim of Quantity. Therefore, a Gricean inferencing pattern is triggered that derives implicatures such as ‘There is nothing one can do about it’ or the like (cf. Levinson 1983). Exactly how this inference comes about, has been the object of many analyses in recent years (cf. Gibbs and McCarrell 1990; Ward and Hirschberg 1991; Farghal 1992; Okamoto 1993; Miki 1996; Autenrieth 1997). Other approaches have questioned whether the conveyed meaning of tautologies is implicated at all. According to Wierzbicka (1987), tautologies cannot be explained on the basis of Gricean principles alone, because many tautologies are language-specific constructions following a certain semantic pattern. For example, tautologies containing an abstract noun, such as War is war, Business is business,
etc., express a sober attitude towards human activities. Thus, tautologies by and large have a conventional meaning, and the language-specificity of many tautologies is supported by their non-translatability. While Wierzbicka’s approach was adopted by some authors, e.g., Davis (1998) in his fundamental attack on Grice’s theory, others remained sceptical, e.g., Fraser (1998) (cf. Wierzbicka 1988).

A fresh look at tautologies revealed that they are not as non-informative or conventional as assumed by proponents of “radical pragmatics” (Levinson) or “radical semantics” (Wierzbicka), because they are predicative in nature. For Autenrieth (1997), the utterance *Bachelors are bachelors* is to be interpreted as a statement of the form: ‘For all bachelors: Common sense knowledge of bachelors is to be applied’. Conversely, Bulhof and Gimbel (2001) state that, in so-called ‘deep tautologies’, such as *Tyranny is tyranny*, protesters make a statement to the effect that the denotation of *tyranny* is to be understood in a non-vague sense.

While these approaches considerably differ with respect to their theoretical frameworks, they widely agree that tautologies somehow are connected with implicatures. However, in current debates on the semantics/pragmatics interface, tautologies are hardly mentioned. This holds for the neo-Gricean approach of Levinson (2000), as well as for the relevance-theoretic approach of Carston (2002), to name only the two most important frameworks, let alone other theories (see Bianchi 2004; Szabó 2005). Despite severe differences due to the role of truth-conditional semantics and the set of necessary principles (Q-, I-, and M-principle vs. principles of Relevance), Levinson and Carston agree that some version of an underdeterminacy view is correct, i.e., the assumption that propositions are systematically underdetermined and have to be enriched by genuine pragmatic processes. This leads to the crucial question whether tautologies fit into this picture.

My overall aim in this paper is not to contribute to the semantics/pragmatics debate from the point of view of tautologies. Rather, I will try to integrate existing knowledge on tautologies within the framework of Levinson’s Theory of Generalised Conversational Implicature (Levinson 2000), a framework that, because of its degree of explicitness and its broad coverage of empirical data, serves as an adequate testing ground.¹ I will show that the basic insight of Ward/Hirschberg (1991), according to which nominal tautologies have something to do with the exclusion of alternatives, is on the right track and may be reconstructed within Levinson’s framework. The observations of Autenrieth (1997) on the predicative status of the second NP, as well as the findings of Bulhof and Gimbel (2001) concerning ‘deep’ tautologies, fit into this picture too. The scope of this paper is, however, restricted in that it deals — as the majority of the literature does — with equative nominals of the type ‘(Art) NP be (Art) NP’ only.

The organisation of the paper is as follows. In the next section, the general properties of tautological utterances are summarised, and the predicative analysis
is defended. In Section 3, the Theory of Generalised Conversational Implicature with its three level-architecture of pragmatics is sketched, and the different levels are discussed with respect to tautologies. Section 4 contains the conclusions.

2. Towards a predicative analysis for nominal equatives

2.1 Defining tautology

The notion ‘tautology’ is used both in logic and in linguistics. In propositional calculus, tautologies are defined as complex valid statements. For example, *It rains or it does not rain* \((p \lor \neg p)\) and *If she does it, she does it* \((p \rightarrow p)\) would qualify as tautologies. Simple nominal equatives such as *War is war* are defined in predicate calculus (Reichenbach 1947). This latter view of tautologies is also found in linguistic analyses, where tautologies are more generally conceived as statements that are true with regard to every possible situation. The linguistic standard example *War is war* is a tautology in this sense, because in all possible situations, it will be true; however, it is not a tautology in the sense of propositional calculus. Note in addition that analytical truths or definitions do not count as tautologies in the linguistic sense.

Ward and Hirschberg (1991) as well as Autenrieth (1997) proposed to distinguish between disjunctions, conditionals, equatives, subordinate sentences and relative sentences as the major types of tautological constructions. To these, I add coordinated tautologies with the form ‘a is a and b is b’, for example *Work is work and holidays are holidays*. In (1), the major types of tautological constructions are illustrated:

(1) Types of tautological constructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disjunctions</td>
<td>(either) (p) or not (p)</td>
<td>Either she will come or she won’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditionals</td>
<td>if (p) (then (p))</td>
<td>If he does it, he does it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equatives</td>
<td>(a) is (a)</td>
<td>War is war./Good is good./Today is today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>(p) because (p); when (p), (p)</td>
<td>I get angry, because I get angry./When she will come, she will come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentences</td>
<td>whatever (p), (p); (p), what (p)</td>
<td>Whatever will be, will be./I say what I say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative sentences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated</td>
<td>(a) is (a) and (b) is (b)</td>
<td>Work is work and holidays are holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tautologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most researchers accept that there are several types of tautological utterances to be distinguished. However, linguistic analysis has concentrated largely on the nominal equative type, where finer syntactic patterns (e.g., with or without articles, with definite or indefinite articles, NP in the singular or plural) have been identified. Thus, a general pattern of the nominal equative type is ‘(Art) NP be (Art) NP’, with be being appropriately inflected. By and large, I will follow this tradition of focusing on the nominal equative type, while trying to point out where different patterns of realisation influence the overall interpretation of a tautological utterance.

2.2 Four topics in the analysis of equative nominals

Discussion up to now has dealt mainly with the following dimensions of analysis that are shortly taken up in turn:

– Universality vs. language specificity
– Conventionality vs. implicature
– Predicative status of the second NP in ‘(Art) NP be (Art) NP’
– Illocutionary force

Universality vs. language specificity. Tautologies of the equative type exist in many languages. However, according to Wierzbicka (1987), every such construction has a language-specific, conventional meaning. These constructions are not easily translatable; i.e., “some English ‘tautological constructions’ have no literal counterparts which can be used or interpreted in many other languages” (Wierzbicka 1987: 96). A case in point is the English example Boys will be boys (meaning ‘That’s the kind of unruly behaviour you would expect from boys’, cf. Levinson 1983: 125) and its translatability into French and German:

(2) a. ??Les garçons sont les (des) garçons.
   b. ??Les garçons seront les (des) garçons.
   c. ??Les garçons seront toujours les (des) garçons.

(3) a. ??Knaben sind Knaben.
   b. ??Knaben werden Knaben sein.
   c. ??Knaben bleiben (immer) Knaben.

The original acceptability judgments given by Wierzbicka (1987: 96) are the following: The French examples (2a, b) are “nearly incomprehensible”, (2c) is “understandable”, but “puzzling”. Similarly, for the German examples, where (3c) is characterised as “more readily interpretable”, with a hint towards meaning differences in comparison with the literal English equivalent. (Apart from the somewhat old-fashioned word Knaben — Jungen would be a better translation — I consider (3a–c) as quite acceptable translations.)
If true, this shows that some tautological constructions are language-specific indeed. But it does not show, contrary to what Wierzbicka assumes, that their meaning may not (partly) be derived on the basis of Gricean principles, because in Grice’s theory, implicatures arise in addition to ‘what is said’.² Note that the overall meaning of a tautological construction may not be exhausted by the semantic pattern assigned to it. Furthermore, non-translatability per se is not a convincing argument, because it is evident that many language-specific constructions cannot be translated in a one-to-one fashion. Hence the general pattern may be realised in several languages, the instantiation of this pattern may be language-specific. For example, there is a correspondence between A wife is a wife (or Wives are wives) and the Japanese Okusan wa okusan da (Okamoto 1993: 437), and Boys are boys corresponds to Arabic il-walad walad (Farghal 1992: 226).

Non-translatability may have several sources. Roughly, it may have to do with language-specific constructions, or it may have to do with the language-specific vocabulary. In the latter case, it comes as no surprise that language-specific stereotypical meanings of the lexical items involved play a major role. This is a possible source of the alleged non-translatability of tautological constructions. Moreover, it has been shown that some tautologies are translatable indeed (Fraser 1988; Ward and Hirschberg 1991). For example, German Geschäft ist Geschäft is a correct translation of Business is business.

What Wierzbicka (1987) has correctly pointed out is that the specific form of a tautology influences its overall interpretation. Certain tendencies of this type have been empirically proven in an early experimental pragmatics approach by Gibbs and Carrel (1990). For example, the use of a modal construction, e.g., Boys will be boys, has an influence on the degree of acceptability of a given tautology. But the weakest point of Wierzbicka’s analysis is the assignment of semantic patterns, as her critics have convincingly argued.

According to Wierzbicka, tautological patterns show syntactic variation (e.g., definiteness, number), variation of the semantic type of nouns (abstract, human, etc.), and ordinary semantic ambiguity. But no mechanism is given that shows the assignment of semantic interpretations to these patterns in detail. As Fraser (1988: 217) put it, Wierzbicka “provides no indication of how many patterns might be required, nor how to go about identifying them”. Moreover, the assigned semantic patterns appear to be ad hoc. For example, the pattern ‘N<sub>abstract-singular</sub> is N<sub>abstract-singular</sub>’ is instantiated by War is war. These patterns are connected — and this is the core of the radical semantics analysis — with a “sober” attitude toward complex human activities and “inevitably negative aspects of this activity which must be understood and tolerated”. But on the one hand, this attitude is connected with constructions like The law is the law, and on the other hand, a construction like Love is love is typically not connected with such an attitude. These cases can be multiplied.
Conventionality vs. implicature. It goes without saying that some tautological constructions, e.g., *Enough is enough*, are idioms or have a frozen lexical meaning. Of these constructions, then, it is adequate to say that their overall meaning is identical with their conventional (lexical) meaning. However, there is a productive use of tautological constructions that cannot be conventional, for the simple reason that they are new. Here are two examples, taken from the context of the Tour de France 2005:

(4) a. “Die Regeln sind die Regeln. Mal sind sie gegen dich, mal profitierst du von ihnen.” (Wiesbadener Kurier, 15.07.05)  
   ‘The rules are the rules. Sometimes they are against you, sometimes you profit from them.’  
   b. “Es gibt bestimmt viele schöne Rennen, aber die Tour ist die Tour. Da kommt nichts drüber.” (Frankfurter Rundschau, 27.06.05)  
   ‘Surely there are many beautiful races, but the Tour is the Tour. There is nothing equal to it.’

Moreover, these tautological utterances give rise to specific implicatures. Note, in addition, that even the use of conventional tautological constructions is context-dependent. Thus, there is a context-dependent additional meaning that is not reducible to their alleged conventional content.

(5) Speaker A: Ken bought the enterprise for next to nothing.  
   Speaker B: Business is business.  
   Context, 1: +> ‘That was very clever of Ken.’  
   Context, 2: +> ‘There is nothing one can do about it.’

In contrast, typical idioms do not have additional meanings dependent on the context of utterance. For example, if speaker B had replied with *I don’t give a damn about it* in (5), this would only have the conventional meaning that the speaker does not care about the reported fact.

Quantity vs. relevance. The prevailing opinion certainly is that tautologies somehow are connected with implicatures. If so, one has to look for the maxim or the set of maxims that come into play. While in the standard Gricean approach the first maxim of Quantity (“Make your contribution as informative as is required [for the current purposes of the exchange].”) is invoked, Ward and Hirschberg (1991) argue that in addition to the maxim of Quantity, the maxim of Relevance (“Be relevant.”) plays also a role. For example, if someone utters ‘a is a’, then it follows that all alternative utterances of the type ‘a is b’ are not relevant. Thus, in uttering ‘a is a’ the speaker observes the maxim of Relevance.

In Autenrieth’s (1997) approach, tautologies are informative, because they have a predicative structure; consequently, the maxim of Quantity plays no role.
in her analysis. Therefore, she assumes, in accordance with Ward and Hirschberg (1991), that the maxim of Relevance is used. But, where Ward and Hirschberg (1991) pursue a sort of focusing approach (the focus is on the chosen element “a”, and all alternatives to “a” are excluded), Autenrieth (1997: 19) argues that the irrelevance of the excluded alternatives is not sufficient for the explanation of the relevance of a given tautological utterance. In her analysis, the adequate selection of the stereotypical meanings of the predicative NP is governed by Relevance. For example, in the contexts of (6) and (7), different stereotypes become relevant:

(6) Speaker A: Do you really want to travel through Europe with that old crate? Speaker B: Why not? A car is a car.

(7) Speaker A: It’s not true that I pollute the environment; my car is fitted with a catalytic converter. Speaker B: Come on, a car is a car.

The relevant stereotypical meaning in (6) is that cars are means of transport; in (7), the relevant meaning is that cars are harmful to the environment.

It is obvious that reference to specific Gricean maxims is dependent on one’s favoured pragmatic framework. However, not much attention has been devoted to a careful analysis of the maxims needed in the interpretation of tautologies. Thus, it is open to further dispute what kinds of maxims are involved.

**Predicative status of the second NP in ‘NP is NP’**. While Wierzbicka (1987) has emphasised that the form of an equative nominal influences the semantic pattern associated with it, the internal syntactic structure of equative nominals appears to have gone largely unnoticed. However, Autenrieth (1997) argues convincingly that in a tautological structure ‘NP is NP’, the second NP is obligatorily used as a non-referential predicate. But if the two NPs are not simply juxtaposed, but play a different syntactic role, this should have an effect on their semantic interpretation. I will discuss this approach in the next section. One caveat, however, is in order: Autenrieth (1997) elaborates her approach with respect to German data; thus, it remains to be seen, whether her analysis works also with data from other languages.

**Illocutionary force**. If tautological constructions had a language-specific fixed meaning, as the radical semantics approach assumes, it follows that their illocutionary force potential somehow should be restricted. Thus, an utterance such as *War is war*, because of its conventional meaning, would be used as a statement expressing the sober attitude of the speaker towards wars (or the war in question) in all contexts of utterance. In contrast, the radical pragmatics approach which assumes a greater variability of tautological meaning would be more compatible with a whole range of illocutionary forces potentially associated with tautological constructions in use.
That the illocutionary force of tautological constructions may change in different contexts is easily shown. For example, in (5) above, in context 1 the tautological speech act is a compliment, but in context 2 a (somewhat sarcastic) comment. And in (6), the tautology is a justification, while in (7), it is a reproach. This variability in illocutionary force assignment may be easily explained if it assumed that the specific implicature derived influences the specific illocutionary force. For example, the force of a compliment goes with an admiring attitude towards Ken’s business practices. Or the force of a reproach goes with a pejorative attitude towards cars. To be sure, the exact relation between illocutionary force and implicature is a difficult one (cf. Dascal 1994; Meibauer 2006), and it cannot be dealt with here in any detail; however, an adequate theory of tautology should be able to offer an answer.

Let us shortly summarise our findings. In the remainder of the paper I will proceed from the hypotheses that there are crosslinguistic as well as language-specific aspects of tautologies; that tautologies are connected with implicatures and illocutionary forces; and that in equative tautologies of the type ‘(Art) NP be (Art) NP’, the second NP has a predicative status.

2.3 Elaborating the predicative analysis

In this section, I will review Autenrieth’s predicative analysis, provide further arguments, and point out problematic aspects.

First of all, note that the so called “Gleichsetzungs-nominativ” in German such as (8a, b) has the same form as the tautological constructions in (9a, b), i.e., use of the NPs in the singular without an article.

(8) a. Karin ist Krankenschwester.
   ‘Karin is a nurse.’

b. Fritz ist Hesse.
   ‘Fritz is Hessian.’

(9) a. Krankenschwester ist Krankenschwester.
   ‘Nurse is nurse.’

b. Hesse ist Hesse.
   ‘Hessian is Hessian.’

In both cases, the string ‘ist X’ (‘is X’) is the predicate. However, this parallel is suggestive for German, but is not supported by French data. Here, it is possible to say Jean est (un) docteur and Un docteur est un docteur, but not *Docteur est docteur.5

Second, tautological constructions cannot be answers to questions that ask for referents, but can be answers to questions that ask for properties:
(10) Speaker A: Wer von den Leuten hier im Raum ist dein Vater?  
‘Who of all the people here in this room is your father?’  
Speaker B: *Oh, mein Vater ist mein Vater.  
‘Oh, my father is my father.’

(11) Speaker A: Was ist dein Vater für ein Mensch?  
‘What kind of person is your father?’  
Speaker B: Oh, mein Vater ist mein Vater…  
‘Oh, my father is my father.’

This is evidence for the predicative character of the second NP.

Finally, tautologies do not embed non-restrictive relative sentences. In English, non-restrictive relative sentences with who are only possible with referential predicates in the embedding sentence (cf. Doron 1983: 148):

(12) a. John is Mr. Smith, who I was telling you about. (referential predicate)  
b. *John is a man, who I was telling you about. (non-referential predicate)

According to Autenrieth (1997: 24), the same holds for German non-restrictive relative sentences with reference to persons. Note that the modal particle (MP) ja marks the sentence as non-restrictive:

(13) a. Der Mann dort drüben ist Herr Schmidt, über den ich ja schon mit dir gesprochen habe.  
‘The man over there is Mr Schmidt, about whom I MP already was talking to you.’  
b. *Herr Schmidt ist ein Mann, über den ich ja schon mit dir gesprochen habe.  
‘Mr Schmidt is a man, about whom I MP already was talking to you.’

This observation serves as a test for the predicative character of the second NP in tautological constructions (the MPs eben and halt in the embedding sentences are irrelevant):

‘My father is MP my father, who MP in the past was a soldier.’  
b. *Die Kinder sind halt die Kinder, mit denen du ja morgen in den Zoo gehen willst.  
‘The children are MP the children, with whom you MP will visit the zoo tomorrow.’

Sentences (14a, b) show that the non-restrictive relative sentences are not compatible with the tautological embedding sentences, this being an argument for the predicative status of the second NP.
I would like to argue that the predicative analysis is further supported, once other tautological constructions are taken into account. These constructions show that tautologies are basically considered as informative, their informativity being dependent on their predicative nature. Consider negated and coordinated tautologies. Quite surprisingly at first glance, tautologies may be negated, as in (15):

(15)  a. “Die Stones sind nicht die Stones.” (Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 20.01.95)
    ‘The Stones are not the Stones.’
 b. “Natürlich sind Türk en nicht gleich Türken.” (ZEIT, 30.09.04)
    ‘Of course, the Turks do not equal the Turks.’
 c. “Alge ist nicht gleich Alge.” (Wiesbadener Kurier, 10.01.05)
    ‘Alga does not equal alga.’

What is denied in these examples is the applicability of the (stereotypically interpreted) predicate. In these cases, it is implicated that one should make a distinction between the “old” Stones and the “new” ones, between different social groups within the Turkish people, etc. More explicitly, the meaning of (15a) can be paraphrased ‘The Stones haven’t, at the present time, the properties the Stones had at a previous time’, or, more formally, ‘The Stones at t₁ are not the Stones at t₂’. Let the stereotype be that the old Stones (say in the DECCA years) are young, sexy, etc., then it is obvious that these properties are not applicable to the Stones in the year 1995, let alone in 2008.

These paraphrases lend support to the predicative analysis, for what is negated here, is the predication in the positive counterpart. A purely semantic approach that views tautologies as judgments of identity would predict that it should not be possible to assert the negation of a tautology. However, this would imply the absurd view that a thing cannot be identical with itself. Consequently, the semantic approach would run into trouble here, while for the predicative approach, the negated tautologies pose no problem.⁷

It may be further asked what the status of the temporal indices in the paraphrase is. In terms of implicature theory, one could think of some sort of semantic or pragmatic enrichment. There are numerous proposals in the literature under the headings of unarticulated constituents, explicatures, implicatures or the like, as discussed prominently in the debate on and-conjunction, cf. Carston (2002: 222–264), but here I do not want to go into that discussion. Note in addition that it is possible to say something like The old Stones are the old Stones, and the new Stones are the new Stones. This leads us to the next set of examples, namely coordinated tautologies:

In (16), we have examples for coordinations of tautologies:
(16)  a. “Doch Munch ist Munch und Oslo ist Oslo.” (Wiesbadener Kurier, 02.10.04)
   'Yet Munch is Munch and Oslo is Oslo.'
   b. “[…]; der Erkenntnis, das Sex Sex sein kann und Liebe Liebe und sich
   beides in den verblüffendsten Kombinationen mischt, […].” (ZEIT
   Literatur, November 2004)
   'the insight that sex may be sex and love love and both mix in the most
   amazing combinations.'
   c. “Urlaub ist Urlaub und Krankheit ist Krankheit […].” (Darmstädter
   Echo, 21.06.05)
   'Holidays are holidays and illness is illness.'

The predicative analysis applies inside each of the conjoined tautologies. Then,
by way of the and-coordination, there arises an implicature to the effect that the
predicates attached respectively, e.g., to holidays and illnesses in (16c), are suf-
ficiently disjoint for the subject-NPs to be distinct in a relevant way. In other
words, the implicature is that the referents of the respective subject NPs should be
kept distinct, that they should not be confused, etc. Note that there is a tendency
towards getting “deep” implicatures here (see [23] below).

Similarly, there are several constructions whose job it is to restrict the inter-
pretation of the predicate in a specific manner:

(17)  a. “Und Eichinger wäre nicht Eichinger, wenn er nicht sofort
   Konsequenzen aus der Beantwortung dieser Frage gezogen hätte.”
   (ZEIT, 20.01.05)
   'And Eichinger would not be Eichinger if he had not drawn the
   consequences of the answer to this question immediately.'
   b. “Eine Halle ist eine Halle und kein Zirkuszelt.” (Wiesbadener Kurier
   24.12.05)
   'A hall is a hall and not a circus tent.'
   c. “Ein Ding ist nur Ding.” (ZEIT, 02.12.04)
   'A thing is only a thing.'

In (17a), one stereotypical property of Eichinger, namely to draw consequences im-
mmediately, is expressed in the antecedent of the conditional (the wenn-sentence). This shows that it is possible to make explicit relevant aspects of the predicate in
the tautology, and it shows that proper names are also connected with stereotypi-
cal meanings. In (17b) it is explicitly expressed in the second conjunct that a pos-
sible alternative is excluded. And in (17c) the speaker stresses by the use of the
exclusive focus particle nur that a thing is a thing and nothing but a thing.

In many tautological constructions, it makes a difference whether the referent re-
mains the same or is submitted to some change. Consider the following examples:
Even if VW intends to become something better than just VW (namely “Phaeton”) this will be condemned to failure (18a). Conversely, GTI remains GTI, and no Opel will ever beat it (18b). In (18c), Prince Harry asserts that he will remain himself forever and will never change. And in (18d), it is wished that Bush ceases to be Bush (the Bush we know) and becomes another (presumably better) man.

Arguably, constructions as in (18a, b, d) do not conform to the canonic pattern ‘(Art) NP be (Art) NP’. But they are relatives of this pattern, for bleiben-sentences assert a certain state (e.g., that GTI is GTI) and presuppose the previous existence of that state (Schlücker 2007). The verb aufhören denotes a change of a certain state, namely the state that Bush is Bush.

It goes without saying that all of these constructions deserve further empirical investigation. Here I will shortly discuss one objection raised against the predicative analysis. On the predicative analysis, so the objection goes, explicitly referring sentences are (incorrectly) equivalent to tautological sentences:

(19) a. Dogs are dogs.
   b. They are dogs.
   c. A man is a man.
   d. Peter/he is a man.

For example, (19b), with they as a referring expression and the sentence being true, would come out as equivalent to (19a), and (19d) as equivalent to (19c). Note, however, that in many tautological cases the reference of the first NP is generic in nature, that is, reference is made rather to an abstract class of entities than to concrete entities given in a discourse. In contrast to that, they in (19b) as well as he in (19d), accompanied by a pointing gesture, have a deictic character. On the generic reading, (19c) could be used to implicate something like ‘Men, in general, are weak and unlikely to resist authority.’ In a given context, (19d) could implicate ‘Peter is
weak and unlikely to resist authority.’ Therefore, the alleged equivalence of (19a, b) and (19c, d) is only apparent. Note in addition that not all first NPs in tautological constructions are generic. For example, it is possible to say *Your cars are your cars*, implicating thereby that it is well known that the addressee cares very much about his cars, etc. But this effect is not achieved when referential *your cars* is substituted by *they*. I conclude that these data do not pose a major problem for the referential/predicative approach to tautological constructions.

2.4 Towards an integrative analysis

As outlined above, Autenrieth (1997) has provided evidence for the fact that the second NP in nominal equatives is predicative. In her analysis, the second NP is conceptually enriched in a way that is relevant for the communicative sense of the utterance. Take (20) as an example. What matters here, is not the lexical meaning of *bachelor* which is roughly ‘unmarried adult’. What matters instead, is the stereotypical or common sense knowledge that is typically associated with bachelors.

(20) Speaker A: Peter’s checked sports shirt really does not fit to his striped trousers. 
Speaker B: Bachelors are bachelors.

Thus, bachelors are thought to be unable to dress in a nice way, etc. Autenrieth (1997: 27) proposes the following formalisation of this conceptual enrichment:

\[
\begin{align*}
\lambda P \lambda Q \ [Q(x) \to P(x)] & \text{ bachelor, } P_i \\
\forall x \ [\text{bachelor}(x) \to P_i(x)] \\
\text{For all bachelors: Common sense knowledge about the properties of bachelors is to be applied.}
\end{align*}
\]

The idea is, then, that the maxim of Relevance guides the hearer in sorting out how this stereotypical knowledge is relevant in the construction of the communicative sense of the utterance (cf. the appeal to stereotypical knowledge in the “evocation” theory of Miki 1996).

On the whole, I find this approach convincing. Note however that, while in Autenrieth’s analysis the conceptual enrichment of the second NP plays a major role, Bulhof and Gimbel (2001) argue that it is non-vagueness that is the decisive factor in so-called “deep tautologies” such as in (22):

(22) Speaker A: Don’t worry about oppressing those people, they are just poor Africans. 
Speaker B: People are people.

The definition of deep tautology put forward by Bulhof and Gimbel (2001: 287) runs as follows:
(23) **Deep tautology**

The non-vague sense of noun-phrase *A* may be asserted in a deep tautology ‘*A* is *A*’ if the speaker intends to convey

a. [monotonicity condition] once an entity satisfies a set of conditions sufficient for being *A*, additional properties cannot remove it from the set of all *A*s, and/or

b. [binary condition] being an *A* does not admit of degrees.

A tautology ‘*A* is *A*’ becomes deep if *A* satisfies these conditions and its use draws attention to this satisfaction.

The question arises whether these approaches, i.e., stressing the stereotypical knowledge on the one hand, stressing the non-vague meaning on the other, are compatible with each other. I will show that this is indeed possible if the focusing approach of Ward and Hirschberg (1991) is taken serious.

The gist of Ward and Hirschberg’s (1991) approach is to assume that equative tautological utterances are regularly connected with the exclusion of alternatives. They give the following definition (Ward and Hirschberg 1991: 513):

(24) (…) equative tautological utterance of the form ‘*a* is *a*’ may be used to convey that alternative utterances of the form ‘*a* is *b*’ (where ‘*b*’ identifies either some property of ‘*a*’ or some distinct equivalence to ‘*a*’) or ‘some *a* is *b*’ (where ‘*b*’ identifies properties or equivalences of some subset of ‘*a*’) are not relevant.

Take (25) as an example (modelled after 16b). In applying the definition in (24), we see that (25b), as an alternative utterance to (25a), is not relevant. Note that the coordinative construction in (25c) expresses this explicitly.

(25) a. Sex is sex. (a is a)

b. Sex is love. (a is b)

c. Sex is sex and love is love. (a is a and b is b)

How the derivation of the tautological implicature might work, is illustrated by the following pattern of inference (Ward and Hirschberg 1991: 511):

(26) Assume that a speaker (S) has produced a tautological utterance to a hearer (H), say in the form of an equative such as *War is war* […]. Then H may reason as follows:

– S has affirmed a tautological utterance of the form ‘*a* is *a*’ […], which appears to add nothing to our mutual beliefs in general, and, in particular, nothing to our mutual beliefs about ‘*a*’;
Assuming that S is observing the Cooperative Principle, then, by the maxims of Quantity and Relation, S has said as much as s/he truthfully can that is relevant about ‘a’;

S might have produced utterances of a similar form, say ‘a is b’ (where ‘a’ and ‘b’ are distinct, modulo referring expressions), which could have added something to our mutual beliefs about ‘a’;

S chose not to utter such alternatives;

Thus S implicates that these alternatives are not relevant for the purposes of the exchange.

Since there are nearly infinite many alternatives possible, the relevant alternative must have a certain degree of expectedness. Furthermore, the exclusion of the relevance of alternatives does not give us an idea of how the tautological implicature, i.e., ‘Awful things may happen, but there is nothing one can do about it’, etc. is to be derived. However, the idea that tautologies have something to do with the exclusion of alternatives that are salient in the context of utterance is still attractive, and it gains support by the existence of tautological constructions that stress the distinctness of referents as well as their non-changeability (see examples 15–18 above).

We can summarise now the foregoing hypotheses. First, the second NP in a tautological construction of the type ‘NP is NP’ is predicative in nature and is to be understood in a stereotypical way (Autenrieth 1997). Second, second NPs in a tautological construction are submitted to the monotonicity and/or binary condition in the case that a speaker in the assertion of ‘NP is NP’ draws attention to their satisfaction (‘deep tautology’) (Bulhof and Gimbel 2001). Third, in a tautological construction ‘NP a is NP a’ , it is implicated that alternative utterances of the type ‘NP a is NP b’ are not relevant (Ward and Hirschberg 1991).

3. Tautology within the theory of presumptive meaning

3.1 A sketch of Levinson’s presumptive meaning approach

Levinson (2000: 188) proposes a model of the semantics/pragmatics interface that is designed to solve “Grice’s circle” and account for “pragmatic intrusion” (cf. Meibauer 2006). Grice’s circle arises when ‘what is said’ both determines conversational implicatures and is, at the same time, determined by conversational implicatures (Levinson 2000: 186). According to Levinson, there are at least five phenomena that show the influence of Generalised Conversational Implicatures (GCIs) on sentence meaning (Levinson 2000: 172–187). These are disambiguation, indexical interpretation, reference assignment, ellipsis unpacking, and generality narrowing.
Levinson's model contains three pragmatic components, namely Indexical Pragmatics, Gricean Pragmatics 1 and Gricean Pragmatics 2, and two semantic components, namely Compositional Semantics and Semantic Interpretation (model-theoretic interpretation). The output of Compositional Semantics and Indexical Pragmatics is input for Gricean Pragmatics 1. The output of Gricean Pragmatics 1 is input for Semantic Interpretation, and its output (“sentence meaning, proposition expressed”) is input for Gricean Pragmatics 2, whose output is “speaker meaning, proposition meant by the speaker”.

(27) Levinson's Model (Levinson 2000: 188)

\[
\text{Compositional Semantics} \quad \text{\downarrow} \quad \text{Indexical Pragmatics} \quad \text{\downarrow} \\
\quad \text{Gricean Pragmatics 1} \\
\quad \text{\downarrow} \\
\quad \text{Semantic Interpretation} \\
\quad \text{\downarrow} \\
\quad \text{Gricean Pragmatics 2}
\]

Whereas Indexical Pragmatics and Gricean Pragmatics 1 are presemantic pragmatic components, Gricean Pragmatics 2 is a postsemantic pragmatic component. It seems that Gricean Pragmatics 2 deals with Particularised Conversational Implicatures (PCIs) (“indirection, irony and tropes, etc.”) whereas Gricean Pragmatics 1 deals with GCIs (“disambiguation, fixing reference, generality-narrowing, etc.”), but Levinson is not explicit here. It is at the heart of Levinson's approach to analyse GCIs, precisely because it is here, where arguments for this new model of the semantics-pragmatics interaction can be found. And this focus on GCIs goes together with a neglect of PCIs. Thus, it is left open whether the three principles assumed to derive GCIs (the Q-, I-, and M-principle), figure in the derivation of PCIs, too, or whether they are restricted to Gricean Pragmatics 1. While Levinson motivates the Q-, I-, and M-principle, he nevertheless does not exclude the possibility that something like the Gricean maxims of Quality and Relevance may also play a certain role.

Obviously, the maxim of Quality and the maxim of Relevance are not maxims that figure in the derivation of GCIs. The only comment on the maxim of Quality Levinson gives is that this maxim “plays only a background role” in the derivation of GCIs. Maybe he has the sincerity conditions for assertive acts in mind (Levinson 2000: 74). Note that Grice (1989: 34) needed the maxim of Quality to derive the implicatures in the cases of irony, metaphor and sarcasm. In contrast, Levinson argues that irony and sarcasm are cases of PCIs (Levinson 2000: 386, Fn. 2), a claim that seems somewhat premature at least when it is admitted that they usually are signalled by a specific intonation contour (Potts 2005: 212). The
maxim of Relevance is a maxim that, according to Levinson (2000: 74), derives only PCIs. However, this maxim seems to play a role when it comes to disambiguation and ellipsis unpacking (Levinson 2000: 174, 183).

What is lacking in Levinson’s framework is a consideration of conventional implicatures (CI). Obviously, it is somewhat unclear whether such a thing exists at all, at least when taking serious the criticism of Bach (1999). More recently, however, Potts (2005) has argued for the significance of conventional implicature. Drawing on an exegesis of Grice’s work, his core criteria are (a) that “CIs are part of the conventional meanings of words”, (b) that “CIs are commitments, and thus give rise to entailments”, (c) that these commitments “are made by the speaker of the utterance ‘by virtue of the meaning of’ the words he chooses”, and (d), that they “are logically and compositionally independent of what is ‘said (in the favored sense)’ […]” (Potts 2005: 11). Note, however, that tautologies are more construction based than word based, and that they are dependent on ‘what is said’. More importantly, their implicatures are context-dependent, and this fact points into the direction of conversational implicature. Therefore, the possibility of tautologies being CIs is neglected in the rest of this paper.

It is obvious that the idea of “pragmatic intrusion into what is said” is not altogether new. If seen as some sort of spelling out the idea that there are underdetermined structures that are in need of enrichment, then there is of course a family resemblance to concepts like explication (Carston 2000), impliciture (Bach 1999) and similar concepts. The detailed comparison of these approaches is beyond the scope of this paper.

What matters more is the distinction between GCI and PCI on the one hand, and, with regard to online processing, the distinction between Default and Context-Driven accounts. Usually, both issues are discussed with regard to scalar implicatures. The GCI–PCI-distinction, going back to Grice’s original work (Grice 1989), is best demonstrated by examples like the following (Levinson 2000: 16–17):

(28) Context, 1
Speaker A: What time is it?
Speaker B: Some of the guests are already leaving.
PCI: ‘It must be late.’
GCI: ‘Not all of the guests are leaving.’

(29) Context, 2
Speaker A: Where’s John?
Speaker B: Some of the guests are already leaving.
PCI: ‘Perhaps John has already left.’
GCI: ‘Not all of the guests are already leaving.’
Because the implicature (‘… not all …’) that is triggered by some arises in both contexts, it is relatively context-independent. Relative context-independence is the most prominent property of GCIs. In addition, GCIs are normally or consistently associated with certain linguistic forms. For example, if someone utters Peter is meeting a woman this evening, it is, because of the indefinite article, standardly implicated that he woman is not his wife, close relative, etc. In contrast to GCIs, PCIs are highly context-dependent, and they are not normally or consistently associated with any linguistic form.

However, it has been denied that the GCI/PCI distinction is an empirical valid one. Hirschberg (1991) argued that all scales that go into the calculation of the GCIs are context-dependent, and the Relevance theorists like Sperber, Wilson, and Carston hold alike that the calculation of scalar implicatures is context-driven. While Levinson (2000) does not provide experimental evidence in support of his theory, experimental pragmaticists have recently begun to study the calculation of scalar implicatures empirically (Noveck and Sperber 2004, 2007). The design of these studies hinges on the supposition that there should be measurable differences in the computation of potential triggers of implicatures dependent on upper-bound or lower-bound contexts. In lower-bound contexts, only the lower-bound interpretation (i.e., without the implicature) is relevant (Breheny et al. 2006: 39):

(30) Speaker A: Is there any evidence against them?
Speaker B: Some of their identity documents are forgeries. (‘… at least some …’)

In upper-bound contexts, only the upper-bound interpretation (i.e., with the implicature) is relevant:

(31) Speaker A: Were all their documents in order?
Speaker B: Some of their identity documents are forgeries. (‘… some if not all…’)

Assuming that “any additional inferential activity on a word or expression is reflected in additional processing time”, “the Context-driven approach predicts that experimental subjects would tend to derive the scalar implicature in the upper-bound context while not doing so in the lower-bound contexts, and hence predicts a positive difference between the reading times for the trigger phrases […].” The Default view, in contrast, holds that, “if cancellation of a default inference is a process that requires extra processing time, the default view predicts a longer reading time in lower-bound contexts and hence a negative difference between contexts” (Breheny et al. 2006: 440).

I cannot go here into this lively debate in any detail. But we can conclude that, especially with regard to processing issues, one should be careful about
drawing the dividing line between GCI/PCI and hence between presemantic and postsemantic pragmatics. What is of interest to us is that tautology is a case where all the levels may be involved. Thus, it may serve as another touchstone for critical evaluation of Levinson’s model.

3.2 Indexical Pragmatics

Indexical Pragmatics must be active in the production and interpretation of tautological utterances, since they allow for indexicals and, moreover, are temporally marked:

(32) a. “Merkel gibt sich locker. Selbstbewuβt gibt sie zu Protokoll: ‘Ich bin ich.’” (Wiesbadener Kurier, 22.08.06)
   “Merkel behaves relaxed. Self-assured, she dictates: ‘Me is me.’”
   b. Jetzt ist jetzt.
   ‘Now is now.’
   c. Hier ist hier.
   ‘Here is here.’

It is obvious that, before one may derive the meaning of these utterances, the indexical variables must be appropriately filled. This is done by Indexical Pragmatics.

Similarly, temporal reference has to be identified in relation to the time of speaker’s utterance:

(33) a. Children were children.
   b. Children are children.
   c. Children will be children.

For example, (33a) may be uttered in a context where someone laments about the children of today and contrasts them with children in earlier times.

Note that Davis (1998: 44) argues that War was war, in contrast to War is war, does not trigger an implicature at all. But this cannot be true, for it can be easily shown that there are appropriate contexts where implicatures are derived, for example War was war. But now we have peace uttered in the context of signing a peace treaty.

An example provided by my corpus is (34):

(34) “Gestern war gestern, soll die Botschaft von Brüssel sein.” (ZEIT 19.05.2005)
   ‘Yesterday was yesterday, this shall be the message of Brussels.’

Note that usually equatives are assumed to be in the present tense, where the present tense is to be understood as having a generic meaning. This follows from the
assumption that for all times, every thing is identical with itself. However, the possibility to have other tenses shows that speakers can focus upon the change of things, as we have seen already when discussing examples (15)–(18) above.

3.3 Gricean pragmatics 1

Let us see now whether we can derive these three observations from the operation of Levinson’s principles. We concentrate on the classical case War is war. Assume that the lexical definition of war is ‘armed conflict’, as in the recent dictionary entry in Wahrig-Burfeind (2006), and that the meaning of this word is supposed to be mutually known in the speech community:11

(35)  Krieg: bewaffnete Auseinandersetzung zwischen Staaten, Stämmen oder Völkern
   ‘War: armed conflict between states, tribes or nations’ (Wahrig-Burfeind 2006)

Now imagine the following dialogue:

(36)  Speaker A: In this region, thousands of victims were killed in war.
      Speaker B: War is war.

If B intended to convey the meaning ‘War is an armed conflict’ (the meaning of the predicative NP being the lexical definition), then the tautology is “deep” in the sense of Bulhof and Gimbel. Why should have B said such a thing? An obvious assumption is that this is all she could say, given the Q-Principle (Levinson 2000: 76):

(37)  Q-principle
   Speaker’s maxim: Do not provide a statement that is informationally weaker than your knowledge of the world allows, unless providing an informationally stronger statement would contravene the I-principle. Specifically, select the informationally strongest paradigmatic alternate that is consistent with the facts.
   Recipient’s corollary: Take it that the speaker made the strongest statement consistent with what he knows […].

While the Q-Principle is obviously designed to account for scalar and clausal implicatures, these being triggered by certain lexical elements, it seems nevertheless possible to relate tautologies to the Q-Principle. Levinson (2000: 79–108) draws a distinction between three types of scales with the general form <s, w>: (a) so-called Horn scales where the left (stronger) element entails the right (weaker) item, (b) scales that are grounded in other lexical oppositions, (c) scales that are grounded in oppositions given in the context (so-called Hirschberg scales, after
Hirschberg 1991). Implicatures related to (a) and (b) are GCIs, implicatures related to (c) are PCIs. Now consider the following scale that could be relevant in a given discourse:

(38) <conflict management, war>

This is definitely not a Horn Scale, because from *This is conflict management* it does not follow *This is war*. Thus, such a scale is best seen as a scale grounding in a contrast set, i.e., type (b). The general requirements for the scales, i.e., that the items are in salient opposition, that they have the same form class, are lexicalised to the same degree, and are from the same semantic field, are fulfilled (Levinson 2000: 79–80).

In what sense may *conflict management* be stronger than *war*? The (euphemistic) lexical item *conflict management* is informationally stronger than the lexical item *war ‘armed conflict’*, in that it emphasises technocratic aspects, and thus leaves open the possibility that wars could be necessary and useful. However, in uttering the tautology *War is war*, the speaker wants to communicate the lexical definition of *war* only, i.e., her tautology is intended to be “deep”. To utter the lexical definition directly (*War is an armed conflict*) would not do, because it is presupposed that the speaker knows that meaning and to state that what the speaker already knows would violate the Q-Principle.12 Moreover, such a statement typically would be interpreted as an explanatory speech act. It is obvious that it would be possible to have other contrast scales, for example <adventure, war>. The same explanation holds for these alternative, informationally stronger elements. Thus, the analysis of Ward and Hirschberg (1991), according to which other alternates are excluded in the utterance of nominal equatives, is warranted.

Of the three types of contrast sets mentioned by Levinson (2000: 101), the scales relevant with tautologies are best seen as Type II. In Type II, “the use of an alternate from a contrast set suggests the inapplicability of another alternate”, e.g., *He lectures on Wednesdays* implicates ‘As far as the speaker knows, he does not lecture on Thursdays.’ One problem with these contrast sets is that their informational asymmetry is dubious. For example, in what sense should in the contrast set scale <white, blue> the element *white* be stronger than the element *blue*? Surely it can be argued (as one anonymous reviewer did) that *war* is more informative, because it is more precise than, e.g., *conflict management*. The question is, however, whether precision is necessary for informativity. Conversely, deliberate imprecision or vagueness can be viewed as inviting a number of possible inferences, and in this sense, a more imprecise term can be seen as more informative or “stronger”.

Interestingly enough, Levinson is oscillating between the view, “that to the extent that such inferences are based directly on the structure of the lexicon, rather than ancillary knowledge about the specific context, one might expect them to
have a generalized character” (Levinson 2000: 98), and the view that “the generalized character of these inferences is in general dubious” (Levinson 2000: 101). In the case of Type II implicatures, Levinson (2000: 102) reasons that “Type II inferences still fall under the rubric of the Q-principle […], because they are based on the absence of specified information that one would expect to be provided if applicable.” He highlights that Type II implicatures have a generalised status “in only a few cases, usually over sets of compatibles (i.e., sets of alternate, contrasting, terms that may be predicated of the same individual without inconsistency)” (Levinson 2000: 103). While color terms are seen as the prototypical cases, the given definition applies to a contrast set like <conflict management, war>, too.

Now Reboul (2004) argues on the basis of a questionnaire study dealing with comparative sentences involving narrow negation, that contrast set implicatures are likely to be globally (i.e., context-driven) computed. Admittedly, I find test sentences like Better no red wine than white wine quite artificial, but here I will point out that Levinson's approach is not an approach that is intended to reflect on-line processing (while it is certainly agreed on that theories compatible with results on on-line processing are preferable). Levinson's theory is a theory about the dependence and interaction of linguistic modules; it is a theory of interfaces.

Note that considerations of the role of truth conditions with regard to pragmatic components are not prominent in recent experimental pragmatics. But it is this question of the relation between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’ that is at the core of Levinson's theory. I would like to argue that with regard to Levinson's architecture, enrichment and restriction are processes that are of the GCI-character because they influence truth conditions. Note in addition that most experimental studies are comprehension studies, but from the point of view of production, it is reasonable to assume that a speaker overlooks the speech situation, so that before it comes to the level of truth conditions, aspects of the context may be calculated. The very task of selecting appropriate items for the discourse points into that direction. The basic hypothesis is thus that there may be lexical items that trigger GCIs, while they are nevertheless context sensitive.

Now consider the I-principle (Levinson 2000: 114–115):

(39)  I-Principle
Speaker's maxim: The maxim of Minimisation. “Say as little as necessary”; that is, produce the minimal linguistic information sufficient to achieve your communicational ends (bearing Q in mind).
Recipient's corollary: The Enrichment Rule. Amplify the informational content of the speaker’s utterance, by finding the most specific interpretation, up to what you judge to be the speaker’s m-intended [= meaning-intended] point, unless the speaker has broken the maxim of Minimisation by using a marked or prolix expression.
Specifically:

a. Assume the richest temporal, causal and referential connections between described situations or events, consistent with what is taken for granted.

b. Assume that stereotypical relations obtain between referents or events, unless this is inconsistent with (a).

c. Avoid interpretations that multiply entities referred to (assume referential parsimony); specifically, prefer coreferential readings of reduced NPs (pronouns and zeros).

d. Assume the existence or actuality of what a sentence is about (if that is consistent with what is taken for granted).

What is particularly interesting here is the condition that stereotypical relations are to be assumed. For example, in (40) below, there is an inference to the stereotype that secretaries are usually female.

(40) Ken said “Hello” to the secretary and then he smiled. +> ‘Ken said “Hello” to the female secretary and then Ken smiled.’

Now it appears that inference to stereotype plays also a role in nominal equatives, as Autenrieth (1997) has convincingly shown. Let such a stereotypical assumption about wars be that war is stupid bloodshed (other stereotypical assumptions, for example that war kills people, including civilians, etc. are of course also possible). Then this meaning goes beyond the lexical definition of war, but is relevant for the derivation of an implicature, e.g., that the speaker is a pacifist, etc.\(^{13}\)

To sum up: In the case of nominal equatives, the Q-principle restricts the meaning of the NP to the lexical core meaning, while the I-Principle allows for stereotypical enrichment of the predicative NP. The interaction of these principles yields the result that in some contexts restriction is called for, and in other contexts enrichment is required. It is also consistent with the assumption of Ward and Hirschberg (1991) according to which in a tautological construction ‘NP\(_a\) is NP\(_a\)’, it is implicated that alternative utterances of the type ‘NP\(_a\) is NP\(_b\)’ are not relevant. Note in addition that the possibility of restriction vs. enrichment gives rise to certain negotiating acts, e.g., in the case of parents who argue (After all), homework is homework, while their children argue Homework is (just) homework!

One requirement for contrast sets is that its members are compatibles. If we have the contrast set <conflict management, war>, one could refer to the event in question with war and conflict management simultaneously. This leaves open, as one anonymous reviewer observed, that the processes of restriction and enrichment occur simultaneously: War is not peace or conflict management (Q-based restriction), but it is stupid bloodshed, kills people, including civilians, etc. (I-based enrichment). The possibility of invoking both principles may explain the function
of some tautological utterances to be presented as decisive arguments that leave no room for further discussion. Note that both principles, the Q- and the I-principle, refer to and thus mutually balance out each other. The prima facie uninformativity of tautologies may have to do with the fact that the second, predicative NP is the more or less neutral starting point for the operation of the Q- and/or I-principle.

Let us finally consider the M-Principle that requires in the Recipient’s Corollary that “what is said in an abnormal way indicates an abnormal situation, or marked messages indicate marked situations” (Levinson 2000:136–137), the contrasting normal/abnormal expressions having the same denotation (cf. Traugott 2004 for a recent critique of the M-Principle). But as far as I can see, there is no difference in markedness with regard to the reactions of Speaker B in (41), and, moreover, it is questionable whether the expressions disaster and war have the same denotations at all; all wars may be disasters, but not all disasters are wars.

(41) Speaker A: In this region, thousands of victims were killed in war.
Speaker B: War is a disaster. [vs. War is war]

I conclude, then, that the interaction of the Q- and I-Principle is sufficient to account for the phenomena of restriction and enrichment that are to be observed in the utterance of tautological constructions.

In the case of the tautology War is war, a Q-based Type II implicature is ‘not conflict management’. Note that this is not the implicature ‘there is nothing one can do about it’, etc., which arises only on PCI level. Up to now, what we have achieved is to model enrichment versus restriction of the predicate. If these processes are relevant for truth conditions, then these processes are presemantic in nature.

3.4 Semantic interpretation

If the restriction to the lexical core meaning of the predicative NP in nominal equatives comes about through the operation of the Q-principle, and the enrichment of this NP through the operation of the I-principle, then in both cases the tautological construction should be considered as informative, and hence be submitted to truth conditions. Thus, the operation of the principles influences the specific make-up of the truth conditions.

In the second case, we would have truth conditions along the following lines:

(42) Enrichment
    “War is war” is true iff war is stupid bloodshed.

In the first case, however, where the meaning of the second NP is restricted to the lexical meaning, it appears that we face the problem of the informationally void sentence that is true with respect to all possible situations:
(43) **Restriction**

“War is war” is true iff war is armed conflict.

Recall that we still assume that the second NP is predicative, and that the point of a “deep” tautology is to assert the propositional content and to draw attention to this assertion. It appears, then, that there is nothing wrong with (43). Of course, the assertive character of an utterance of *War is war* (= ‘armed conflict’) is to be accounted for on the level of illocutionary force, a type of meaning, that is usually not associated with the level of truth-conditional semantics.

Three further aspects of a truth-conditional semantics for nominal equatives shall be mentioned here. First, there is some variation with regard to the definiteness/indefiniteness of the NPs to be found.

(44) a. “Es gibt bestimmt viele schöne Rennen, aber die Tour ist die Tour. Da kommt nichts drüber.” (Frankfurter Rundschau, 27.06.05)

‘Surely there are many beautiful races, but the Tour is the Tour. There is nothing equal to it.’

b. “Gut, eine Einführung ist eine Einführung, man fühlt sich nach der Lektüre mit einem Basiswissen versorgt und zum eigenständigen Weitermachen ermutigt … recht so!” (Amazon Review, 07.08.05)

‘Well, an introduction is an introduction, one feels after reading supplied with a basic knowledge and encouraged to carry on on one’s own … right so!’

c. “Stattdessen ist Musik Musik.” (ZEIT, 18.08.05)

‘Instead, music is music.’

Second, as already mentioned, there is some variation in tense. While in tautological constructions the typical case is the use of present tense, focusing on the actuality and genericity of the respective state of affairs, other tenses are not excluded (note that in German, typically, present tense is used for reference to the future):


‘There I was so much I’

b. “Gestern war gestern, soll die Botschaft von Brüssel sein.” (ZEIT 19.05.2005)

‘Yesterday was yesterday, this shall be the message of Brussels.’

Third, focus particles and modal particles may be inserted.

(46) a. “Ein Ding ist nur Ding.” (ZEIT, 02.12.04)

‘A thing is only a thing.’

b. “Volkswagen bleibt nun mal Volkswagen, auch wenn Phaeton draufsteht.” (Wiesbadener Kurier, 06.01.05)

‘After all, Volkswagen still remains Volkswagen, even it is called Phaeton.’
In (46a), the restrictive focus particle nur is used. Unlike other focus particles, nur influences truth conditions, and, in this case, supports Bulhof and Gimbel’s approach to “deep” tautologies. Modal particles, as in (46b), do not contribute to truth conditions, and thus have to be analysed on other levels. Sometimes they contribute to the “fatalistic” touch of some tautologies (cf. Autenrieth 1997: 29). For example, the German modal particle halt generally signals the insight of the speaker into the irreversibility of a fact (Helbig 1990: 158), thus fitting perfectly to a fatalistic tautology such as Krieg ist halt Krieg (‘War is MP war’).

3.5 Gricean pragmatics 2

According to Levinson (2000), Gricean pragmatics 2 has the following jobs: (a) It should account for “indirection, tropes, etc.”, and (b), it should deal with particularised conversational implicatures (PCIs). Both types of meaning are largely context-dependent and are therefore distinguished from GCIs.

From the first point it follows that, at least in this component, the assignment of illocutionary force is operative, because in indirect speech acts the notion of illocution is crucial. From the second point it follows that several layers of context (core context vs. wide context, etc.) must be distinguished. Recall that Levinson insists that the pragmatic processes involved in Gricean pragmatics 1 vs. Gricean pragmatics 2 are one and the same. From this it would follow that Levinson’s principles work in Gricean pragmatics 2, too. To what extent, however, is left unclear. Do they have here any role at all? What became of the Gricean maxims of Quality and Relevance? Are there additional principles or maxims at work? Let us point out some relevant aspects of tautological constructions with regard to a possible Gricean pragmatics 2.

In the remainder of the paper, I will discuss two examples that show the context-dependency of tautological utterances, and, according to Levinson (2000), should be considered as related to Gricean pragmatics 2. In order to derive the appropriate implicature and illocution of a tautological utterance, its specific context must be known. For example, if asked what Water is water means we would likely answer something like ‘Water is an indispensable raw material that should not be wasted.’ However, in the following context of an interview with the owner of a Turkish beer garden in Berlin, the intended meaning is different:


‘ZEIT: Your beer garden is called Castle at the Lake. No castle as far as the
eye could see, neither a lake.
Polat: In Turkey, beer gardens are often called so. At least the outer wall is shaped like castle walls. And, after all, the Landwehrkanal flows past here. Water is water.’

For a proper understanding of this tautology, it is essential that the hearer or reader relates the NP *Wasser* anaphorically to the NPs *Landwehrkanal* and *See* (typically, a canal and a lake contain water). Thus, the tautology is textually embedded. In addition, it has an argumentative function, because it provides an argument that legitimates the name of the beer garden. Because of the contrast of an idyllic lake with a rather common canal, the use of this tautology has a funny or even (self-) ironic flair.

Note that the stereotypical meaning of *water* (clear, tasteless, colourless, thirst-quenching, etc.) is not particularly relevant here. However, it could count as a deep tautology, because, as a matter of fact, besides romantic issues, lakes and canals contain H₂O. What is meant here is something like this: The name of the beer garden may be exaggerated, but it is not totally untrue with respect to the fact that it is situated in the near of the Landwehrkanal which shares with a lake at least the property of containing water. The witty effect stems from the fact to ignore all the differences between romantic lakes and common canals.

Tautological utterances also may be used indirectly. Consider the following example:

(48) “Es gab für Journalisten zum Beispiel nicht den geringsten Grund, der Parole der beiden [= Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer], Rot-Grün habe weiterhin eine Chance, auch noch einen Resonanzboden zu geben. Ein Bluff ist ein Bluff.” (ZEIT, 22.09.05)
For example, for journalists there did not exist the smallest reason to give the slogan of both [= Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer] — that Red-Green continued to have a chance — a sounding board. A bluff is a bluff.’

The background is that the German chancellor Gerhard Schröder had accused the German journalists of a one-sided coverage before the elections. Here, the author asserts that a bluff is a bluff while returning Schröder’s reproach. Thus, an indirect speech act is conveyed, with the reproach as the primary illocution and the assertion as the secondary illocution.

To sum up: Ironical and indirect use of tautologies is context-dependent to a high degree. At least in the cases discussed it does not seem necessary to invoke (i) a further operation of the Q- or I-principle beyond that on the level of Gricean pragmatics 1, or (ii) to assume a special, tautology-related operation of a principle of Quality or Relevance, or (iii) to assume another special maxim; in other words, all that is needed are the principles that account for irony and indirectness anyhow.
(I do not want to exclude that these may have to do with Quality or Relevance, see Meibauer 2005; 2006.) Whether one believes in Relevance or not: If the context is important in determining the meaning and implicatures of an utterance, then of course the context is to be checked for those properties that are relevant with regard to the production of that utterance.14

As a matter of fact, Levinson’s approach has not much to say on the exact derivation of implicatures of the type ‘There is nothing one can do about it’ in the case of utterances like Business is business or War is war. But it is plausible that these and similar evaluations are dependent on the processes of enrichment or restriction we have sketched above. Together with mutually available context knowledge, these evaluations determine the respective illocutions associated with the tautological utterances, illocutionary assignment being presupposed as being active at least in Gricean pragmatics 2.

A detailed account of the functions of tautologies in context is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the choice between a Q-based restriction of the predicative NP and the I-based enrichment of the predicative NP should correlate to a certain extent with the respective implicature in the context.

(49) Speaker A: Thousands of people were killed in those regions.
   a. Speaker B: War is war (‘armed conflict’). +> ‘This is the kind of thing one would assume to happen in wars.’ (definitional)
   b. Speaker C: War is war (‘stupid bloodshed’). +> ‘There is nothing one can do about it.’ (fatalistic)

The calculation of conversational implicatures in context is open ended, as Grice emphasised, but may partly be influenced by the operation of principles being active in Gricean pragmatics 1.

Two final remarks on irony and rhetorical questions are in order, because both have been dealt with from the point of view of implicature theory. First, tautologies may be used ironically, e.g., in (50):

(50) Speaker A: My ex lover Kevin took all my money.
    Speaker B: A friend is a friend.

And, while tautologies belong to the illocutionary class of assertives, rhetorical questions (these being best analysed as indirect assertions) are in order:

(51) a. Is business business? (not possible as an information question)
    b. Be honest. Isn’t business for you just business? +> ‘For you, business is just business.’ (You don’t care about ethical aspects, etc.)

That is, tautologies may appear in other sentence types than declaratives, but what ultimately matters is their illocutionary force.
4. Conclusions

Starting from observations of Ward and Hirschberg (1991) on the exclusion of alternatives, the claim of Autenrieth (1997) that the second NP in nominal equatives is predicative, and the recent insights of Bulhof and Gimbel (2004) on deep tautology, an attempt at integrating these findings in the framework of Levinson's three-level-pragmatics was made. It was argued that the Q-Principle restricts the meaning of the predicative NP and leads thus to the exclusion of alternatives, while the I-Principle enriches the meaning of the predicative NP stereotypically. These are processes on the level of Gricean pragmatics 1 where “pragmatic intrusion” takes place. The analysis of one classical example, War is war, drew on contrast sets. A crucial question was, whether contrast sets operate on the level of Gricean pragmatics 1 or 2. It was argued that the processes of restriction and enrichment operate on word meaning and enter into the truth conditions, and thus are presemantical, while they are connected with implicatures and illocutions postsemantically. The other pragmatic components, i.e., Indexical pragmatics and Gricean pragmatics 2, were shown to be also involved (albeit the exact role of the latter remains unclear in Levinson's framework). To look more closely on the functioning of PCIs, to analyse their interaction with illocutionary forces and to study the syntactic make-up, as well as argumentative role in text and discourse, still remains a task for the future. It is clear that the success of the analysis hinges not only on the predicative analysis, the status of contrast sets, and the GCI/PCI distinction in general, but on its applicability to tautologies beyond the nominal equative type.

Notes

* I am grateful to all the reviewers, especially to one of them, who provided detailed as well as lucid comments. Review is review!

1. A more general scepticism against theories working with Gricean principles such as “Say as little as necessary!” is raised by an anonymous reviewer. This may be consistent, so the argument goes, with the Anglo ideal of “conciseness” but cannot be viewed as an universal principle of human interaction in all societies. I agree in that conversational principles may be culturally parameterised, but would like to add that the dialectics of saying not too much on the one hand and not too less on the other hand is a good candidate for an universal pragmatic principle, even in societies where, e.g., verbosity is esteemed.

2. From the point of view of recent debates on the proper semantics/pragmatics distinction (e.g., Bianchi 2004; Szabó 2005) the “radical” attitude put forward by Wierzbicka looks tied to a particular time when radical positions were en vogue. Wierzbicka (1987: 95) not only attacks
“the whole vision” that goes with a Gricean approach, she also sees “one’s entire idea of linguistics, its boundaries, its capacities, and its responsibilities” at stake. To be sure, radical positions still are available on today’s market, but the opinion at large is that of a division of labour between semantics and pragmatics.

3. While Davis (1998: 46) states that “convention seems to be the only answer as to why specific tautologies have the implicatures they do”, it remains unclear to me, why — if convention is all that matters — tautologies should be connected with implicatures at all. Like Wierzbicka, Davis is not aware of the possibility that syntactic and lexical aspects of tautologies may not be sufficient to determine their overall meaning in context. And it is exactly here where the need for an approach in the Gricean spirit arises.

4. Or are “evocated”, to use the terminology of Miki (1996).

5. I owe this argument and the examples to an anonymous reviewer.

6. In addition to these arguments, Autenrieth observes that tautologies do not allow for reflexivisation, because there is a lack of reference in the second NP, e.g., Duty is duty vs. *Duty is itself (it/it itself).

7. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for proposing an argument along these lines.

8. I owe this phrasing to an anonymous reviewer.

9. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this objection.

10. Note that the sharp opposition between the Default and the Context-Driven view appears to be too simplistic, at least when seen from the perspective of research on sentence-processing. Breheny et al. (2006: 458) shortly discuss another approach, the Interactionist view, that “would allocate a circumscribed role for structural factors in addition to contextual factors”.

11. The definition excludes that armed conflicts between, e.g., bank robbers and policemen, are called wars.

12. Note that reactions such as War is an armed conflict, after all, or, in German, Krieg ist halt [= modal particle] ein bewaffneter Konflikt, appear to be more acceptable (Daniel Gutzmann, p.c.). However, the modal element indicates that the speaker is willing to discuss the lexical content of war. The same holds for the utterance of Bachelors are unmarried men, after all in comparison with the (deep) tautology Bachelors are bachelors.

13. This pattern of explanation extends to proper nouns, too. There are typical properties of the referents which give rise to stereotypical assumptions, and there are alternatives in the context that may be denied.

14. In Levinson’s Principles, there is a distinction between Speaker’s maxim and Recipient’s corollary, this reflecting the perspectives of producing and receiving an utterance. However, his alternative model of the semantics/pragmatics interface is linear in that there is a clear ordering of “input to” and “output from”, running from the grammar to the context. In the production perspective, this ordering is far from clear, because here the context of the utterance must be observed from the start.
References


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