

The final rise conveys uncertain cooperativity

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[For the other side of this coin, attend my Student Session presentation!]

Responding to a question by answering with a *final rise* boundary tone in English, indicated here by ‘...’, can yield many different readings:¹

- (1) Which colours do you like?
I like blue... [high rise]

This has at least four salient readings, that I will name by the Kantian categories:

1. **Quality:** I’m not sure if I really like blue.
2. **Quantity:** I’m not sure how specific I should be. ‘Aquamarine’?
3. **Manner:** I’m not sure about my pronunciation of ‘blue’.
4. **Relation:** I’m not sure about the other colours.

Although a formal account exists of the Quality reading (Gunlogson, 2008), and the Relation reading is shared with the rise-fall-rise contour (ending in a *low rise*) (Constant, 2012), it is unclear how these connect, and how the other readings should be accounted for.

As a unifying solution, I propose that **the final rise conveys uncertain cooperativity**, in the Gricean sense. This uncertainty may pertain to any aspect of cooperativity, and the four readings correspond to uncertain compliance with the maxims of Quality, Quantity, Manner and Relation, respectively (hence the labels). For the first three readings, this is seen intuitively, and I will not give a formal account. It is harder to see that the fourth reading corresponds to uncertain compliance with the maxim of Relation. Therefore, in this presentation I will show formally how it is derived.

What uncertain compliance with the maxim of Relation amounts to, depends on one’s maxim of Relation. I combine a simple, existing maxim of Relation (Roberts’s (2012) *contextual entailment*), with a richer-than-usual semantics, namely *attentive semantics* (Roelofsen, 2011). Attentive semantics models not only the *information* that an utterance provides, but also the possibilities that it *draws attention to*. Intuitively, the question in (1) draws attention to all colours, while the response only draws attention to blue, leaving the other colours unattended. With attentive semantics, the maxim of Relation automatically becomes sensitive to the possibilities that a response leaves unattended: it requires for each

¹ Following (Gunlogson, 2008), one may take ‘H* H H%’, in Pierrehumbert’s (1980) notation, as a typical example of a (high) final rise, amidst many varieties between which I will not differentiate.

unattended possibility that it depends in some way on the information provided by the response. For example (1), the Relation reading comes about through the following inference:

1. The speaker believes she likes blue (Quality)
 2. For each non-blue colour, she lacks the belief that she likes it (Quantity)
 3. For each non-blue colour, she's unsure how her (uncertain relatedness) liking it depends on her liking blue.
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4. For each non-blue colour, she's unsure whether she likes it.

Here 1. and 2. are standard conversational implicatures, while 3. is a semantic contribution of the final rise.

I present a formalization of the semantic and pragmatic notions involved, and give a number of general, formal results. I relate the approach to existing work on the high rise, as well as on rise-fall-rise, suggesting that despite the phonological variation, a uniform semantic account of the final rise, as conveying uncertain cooperativity, is on the right track. With regard to rise-fall-rise, I argue that the focused constituent it contains, in addition to a final rise, makes those readings salient that pertain to the information structure, in particular the question under discussion: Quantity and Relation. I speculate that the higher the final rise, the larger the uncertainty conveyed.

The take-home message is twofold: (i) that pragmatic notions, such as relevance, are sensitive to attentive content, and (ii) that those same pragmatic notions may enter semantics. The first also enables a properly Gricean account of exhaustivity implicatures, as I show in this year's ESSLLI Student Session (the proceedings paper, (Westera, 2013), also contains a formalization of the final rise). The second may be of interest to the study of expressions such as 'on an unrelated note', 'maybe' and 'did I make myself clear?'

References

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