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## **CONSTRUCTING MEANING, SHAPING SOCIETY: THE CALCULABILITY AND CANCELLABILITY OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES**

This paper investigates the features of calculability and cancellability of conversational implicatures, focusing on their societal importance. The analysis of the carnival effigy Škuribando Furešćić is used to illustrate how conversational implicatures can be employed to maintain the social status quo and perpetuate stereotypes. This is not to suggest that implicatures are more prominent than explicit communication in achieving these effects, but rather that their indirect nature is often exploited to avoid responsibility for the conveyed message. This paper challenges the notion that implicatures are easily cancellable and deniable, arguing that cancellation often leads to logical implausibility, thereby indicating faulty communication.

**Keywords:** conversational implicature; cancellability; calculability; indirect meaning; conceptual engineering; societal impact

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper examines the properties of conversational implicatures, particularly their cancellability and calculability, and explores the tension between these features. Cancellability allows implicatures to be negated, suggesting a great degree of flexibility in their usage. Calculability, however, implies that implicatures are stable and can be systematically reconstructed by listeners based on the context and conversational principles. The tension between cancellability and calculability becomes evident when

considering the communicative strength and reliability of implicatures. On one hand, the ability to calculate implicatures gives them a semblance of stability and objectivity, essential for effective communication. On the other hand, the possibility of cancellation introduces a level of uncertainty, allowing speakers to negate previously implicated meanings. This contradiction poses challenges for the consistency and coherence of communication.

Additionally, the discussion extends to the implications of these properties for conceptual engineering, highlighting the interplay between implicit communication and the shaping of social concepts and practices. The recent controversy over the carnival effigy in the Croatian municipality of Čavle, perceived as a xenophobic symbol, is used to show how implicit verbal signals can be used to communicate societally harmful messages. The effigy, Škuribando Furešić, was perceived as a discriminatory representation of foreign workers. The carnival group's efforts to disassociate themselves from this interpretation underscore the difficulties in cancelling implicatures, ultimately proving unsuccessful due to the robust rational and cultural foundations supporting the harmful interpretation of their message.

The aims of this paper can be summarized as follows: (a) to argue that the potential for implicatures to be reconstructed holds greater significance in everyday contexts than their cancellability; (b) to propose an analysis of conversational implicatures compatible with the framework of conceptual engineering; and (c) to illustrate how implicatures can perpetuate negative stereotypes and contribute to harmful societal values.

## **CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES: CANCELLABILITY AND CALCULABILITY**

The concept of “conversational implicature” is introduced by H. P. Grice in his article “Logic and Conversation” (1989), where the author distinguishes between two types of implicatures: conventional and conversational implicatures. Conversational implicatures, which will be discussed in this paper, are primarily derived from the fact that the speaker has uttered a sentence with a certain intention. Here's a simple example of conversational implicature:

Imagine two friends, Tom and Sara, are discussing their plans for the evening:

Tom: I don't have any plans for tonight.

Sara: There's a new movie playing at the theatre.

Even though Sara doesn't explicitly say it, her statement implies that she suggests

they go see the movie together. The implicature is that she's inviting Tom to join her at the movies, even though she didn't directly say, "Do you want to go see the movie with me?"

The term "conversational implicature" is a technical term that could be replaced by various expressions from everyday language. We can say that implicatures insinuate something to us, that the speaker wants to hint, suggest, or indicate something with them. Grice concludes the article by listing the properties that conversational implicatures must possess (1989: 38, 39). In the following sections of this paper, the focus will be on the properties of conversational implicatures related to their cancellability and calculability, i.e. their reconstruction, and the interplay between these characteristics, excluding other properties.

According to Grice, implicatures can be cancelled explicitly (verbally) or contextually (*ibid.*). Returning to the dialogue between Tom and Sara, Sara could add "I'm actually going to see the movie with some other friends" thereby cancelling the implicit invitation, or she could have started preparing the ingredients for dinner signaling in that way that she is not leaving the house any time soon.

Implicatures are not explicitly stated by the speaker but are inferred by listeners through a process of reasoning and interpretation. Therefore, reconstructing implicatures involves listeners analyzing the speaker's utterance in light of the context, the conversational principles at play, and any relevant background knowledge. By reconstructing implicatures, listeners can arrive at a fuller understanding of the speaker's intended meaning beyond the literal interpretation of their words.

In our example, the hearer (Tom) would reconstruct the implicature based on his knowledge of the English language, several contextual clues, and the cooperative principle of conversation<sup>1</sup>. Tom would also consider the relevance of Sara's response to his statement, i.e. the maxim of relation, which suggests that conversational contributions should be pertinent to the ongoing discussion (*ibid.* 27). Given that Tom said that he doesn't have any plans for the evening, Sara's mention of the new movie playing at the theatre is likely intended as a suggestion for a potential activity they could do together. Therefore, Tom would likely reconstruct the implicature as Sara subtly invited him to join her at the movies, even though she did not explicitly state it.

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1 Grice states the cooperative principle as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1989: 26). It states that participants in a conversation should cooperate with each other by making their contributions appropriate to the accepted purpose or direction of the exchange. Essentially, it means that speakers and listeners should work together to make the conversation logical and coherent.

As stated in the introduction of the paper, it is suggested that the two features – the potential for cancellation and reconstruction (calculation) – are incongruous, often leading to contradictions. The process of reconstructing implicatures relies on the hearer’s ability to infer implied meanings based on contextual cues and the cooperative principle. This expectation suggests that implicatures are meaningful and contribute to the overall message conveyed in the conversation. On the other hand, the possibility of cancelling implicatures implies that these inferred meanings can be overridden or negated by subsequent discourse. This creates a contradiction in expectations, as implicatures are initially treated as meaningful contributions to the conversation but can be dismissed or altered later. In the literature, there is no definitive answer regarding whether the characteristics of implicatures are in a hierarchical relationship. However, this paper proposes that calculation should be given priority in the analysis of implicatures, a perspective that will be elaborated upon in the subsequent sections.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that there is always a possibility of cancellation of implicit messages has epistemic and ethical implications because it introduces the possibility that, when it comes to pragmatic content, the listener does everything properly in reconstructing the meaning of the speaker yet fails to interpret the speaker’s message correctly. This can lead to miscommunication, a lack of trust and the inability to form beliefs based on communicative interactions. Indirect or implicit communication is not something that happens periodically, but a pervasive mode of thought exchange, thus it should be held to the same standards as direct communication. Errors are inevitable, and speakers can always revise their stance, however, for a speaker’s denial of the message inferred by a listener to be communicatively acceptable, it must be coherent and convincing, which is seldom the case.

It is argued that because people (should) aim to be responsible and accountable communicators<sup>3</sup>, the idea that conversational implicatures can be reconstructed and cancelled are in conflict. The possibility of their calculation gives them stability and objectivity that enables their use in the speech community<sup>4</sup> and is therefore contra-

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2 For two opposing views regarding the importance of cancellability see Blome-Tillman (2008) and Weiner (2006).

3 In order to defend this position, we can use Kantian principles and the concept of universalization. According to the Categorical Imperative, we should act according to maxims that we would will to become universal laws. If everyone communicated reliably and honestly, trust and effective communication would flourish, creating a rational and cooperative society. If we disregarded these principles, communication would become impossible, as a foundation of trust and mutual respect is essential for any meaningful exchange. Therefore, these behaviors are not merely personal preferences but moral duties that contribute to an ethical and cohesive society. See Kant (1998, esp. chapter 2).

dictory to the idea that the speaker can always successfully cancel the implicature that their expression of a certain content carries.

To summarize, the communicative strength of conversational implicatures lies in their ability to be reconstructed, which means that listeners can infer the implied meaning based on shared contextual knowledge and principles of communication, such as Grice's maxims. This reconstruction process ensures that implicatures are not arbitrary or easily dismissed, but rather grounded in rational interpretation that can be scrutinized and debated. By enabling interlocutors to reliably infer meaning, this process fosters mutual understanding and trust, which are essential for effective communication. Furthermore, it holds speakers accountable for the implications of their words, reinforcing the ethical responsibility to communicate clearly and honestly. In this way, the calculability and reconstructive potential of implicatures enhance their role in conveying nuanced meaning and maintaining communicative integrity within the speech community.

## THE RATIONALITY OF IMPLICATURES

It is important to note that we should not view the possibility of calculating implicatures as an actual psychological process that always occurs when we are faced with an indirect message, especially not one that is carried out on the conscious level. For example, Sbisà (2006) argues that the possibility of calculating implicatures is not important because it determines the way in which the implicature is actually conceived and understood, but because it guarantees the rationality of the implicature, testifying that attributing that implicature to the speaker who produced a certain utterance can be supported by an argument. The listener can provide an argument ex-

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4 One reviewer pointed out that the fact that conversational implicatures are calculable does not entail that they are stable, in fact, it seems to imply that they are highly context-dependent. While it is true that the calculability of implicatures involves a high degree of context sensitivity, this does not necessarily undermine their stability or objectivity. Rather, it highlights the intricate interplay between context and inference in pragmatic communication. The stability of conversational implicatures is not an absolute quality but a relative one, contingent upon the shared contextual knowledge and interpretive frameworks employed by interlocutors. Calculability, in this sense, refers to the systematic process by which listeners infer intended meanings based on contextual cues and conversational principles. This process ensures that implicatures are not arbitrary, but rather anchored in rational interpretative strategies that are commonly understood within the speech community. Context-dependence indeed plays a crucial role in this inferential process, as it allows for the flexibility and adaptability necessary for effective communication across diverse situations. However, this does not negate the stability of implicatures; instead, it underscores the dynamic nature of meaning-making, where stability is achieved through the consistent application of interpretative principles and shared knowledge.

plaining how they came to believe in the existence of a certain implicature, and if such an argument is valid, we can say that the speaker is rational. More about the relationship between implicatures and arguments will be explicated later. For now, we will briefly introduce the theoretical notion of “intentional stance”, which will be used to strengthen the position put forward in this paper.

The question that can be raised here concerns how much the listener assumes about the speaker when interpreting implicatures and how these assumptions are justified. Grice argues that for the interpretation, as well as the analysis, of implicatures, the speaker’s intention and the listener’s recognition of that intention are crucial. This paper suggests that it is sufficient for the listener to assume such intentions reasonably. When interpreting the speaker’s statement, the listener must consider the speaker’s beliefs, intentions, and other mental states. According to Dennett (1971), when we explain someone’s behaviour, we assume their rationality. We do not expect our acquaintances to behave irrationally, and when that expectation is betrayed, we try to justify them, for example, by claiming that we misunderstood them. Dennett calls this attribution of rationality the “intentional stance.” Therefore, people behave towards each other as if they were rational because that way, we can explain and predict the behaviour of other people. If we did not consider them rational, we could not do that. The same goes for communication.

In the context of conversational implicatures and their interpretation, the intentional stance can be applied to understand how hearers infer implicated meanings based on the assumed intentions of the speaker. In the example provided earlier, when Sara responds to Tom’s statement by mentioning the new movie playing at the theatre, the hearer (Tom) will assume that the speaker (Sara) is rational in interpreting her implicated invitation. Rather than taking Sara’s words at face value, Tom may infer that Sara intends to suggest they go see the movie together, even though she did not explicitly express this desire because it will be a better explanation of her utterance than stopping the interpretation of her words on the level of what is said – why mention the movie if nothing is to be inferred from it?

This allows Tom to attribute a mental state of intentionality to Sara and assume that she wants to spend time together, subtly conveying this through her choice of words. By adopting this stance, Tom can make sense of Sara’s utterance in a way that goes beyond its literal meaning, considering the implicit communicative intentions behind it. By attributing intentions to the speaker, hearers can reconstruct implied meanings and make inferences about the speaker’s communicative goals, even when these goals are not explicitly stated. Thus, attributing rationality to the people we

communicate with is necessary for the cooperative principle and other communicative norms to be at play, or at least for a justified presumption of their presence.

We should be careful here and not emphasise the speaker's intention too much, as is often done when discussing implicatures. Sbisà (2001) has proposed that it is more important for the listener to attribute such intention, and Haugh (2008) advocates for the joint creation of implicatures through interaction between the listener and the speaker. In regular circumstances, if the hearer takes into consideration all the relevant factors, such as spoken or unspoken norms, context, previous interactions with the speaker, etc., they will be justified in presupposing a communicative intention (as part of a presupposition of rationality and intentionality) on the part of the speaker, even if occasionally the speaker lacks this intention. In the latter case, we can talk about misunderstanding.

To show that the use and interpretation of implicatures is a rational process and that their cancellation is not as straightforward as Grice proposes, it is claimed that implicatures can be seen as reason-giving arguments in which the speaker provides reasons for a conclusion without expecting them to be refuted by the interlocutor. In such argumentation, the argument arises spontaneously through the interaction between the speaker and the hearer, and its formal reconstruction is only a subsequent step that can be taken to evaluate the interaction, not a process carried out explicitly during the communicative interaction. The argument consists of some stated premises ("what is said", for example "There's a new movie playing at the theatre"), some implicit premises based on shared knowledge regarding language and culture (the topic of discussion, knowledge about in which circumstances people go to see a movie, knowledge about indirect speech acts carried out due to factors such as politeness, familiarity, economy and so on), and the conclusion of this argument, which also remains unstated, is the implicature ("We could see the movie if you are up for it").<sup>5</sup>

Arguments that can be said to express implicatures or that can be reconstructed based on them will always contain a degree of uncertainty. That is, they will not have the deductive strength that allows no exceptions. However, such a situation is quite common in everyday reasoning, as noted by Mercier and Sperber (2017).

What is the significance of the idea that conversational implicatures can be seen as arguments for their cancellability? Here, attention should be directed towards the ideas put forth by Jaszczolt (2005, 2010, 2016). According to the author, cancellation does not depend on whether the content is semantic or pragmatic, direct or indirect, literal,

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5 For a more detailed argumentative approach to the reconstruction of conversational implicatures see Blečić (2019a, 2019b, 2021).

or non-literal; what is important for the possibility of cancellation is whether the content is primary or secondary. If implicatures are part of the primary meaning, they cannot be cancelled. On the other hand, if a possible implicature is not part of the primary but the secondary meaning, then it can be canceled. The primary meaning is the one communicatively highlighted, resulting from a situationally given interpretation. In the case of implicatures we can, at least in theory, take into account only the message conveyed on the direct, semantic level. Our example featuring Sara and Tom would be the utterance, “There’s a new movie playing at the theatre”. But if we did so, we would not adhere to the cooperative principle or its maxims, and we could be described as uncooperative – why bring up the movie if it is irrelevant for the current conversation? This is why, in this example, the implicated message (“Let’s see the new movie”, “We could see the movie if you are up for it”, or something similar) is the primary meaning of the utterance, which is hard to cancel a meaningful way. Recognising implicatures as part of primary meaning strengthens their position as reason-giving arguments that are integral to successful and coherent communication because it makes the exploration of unstated premises and the implicated conclusion a mandatory part of communication, which cannot be explained by a formal analysis of only what is explicitly stated, treating all pragmatic meaning as an optional possibility or just an additional layer.

Here, a distinction between two types of cancellability must be introduced: theoretical and practical (see Walton 1989; Åkerman 2015; Sullivan 2017; Macagno 2023). Theoretical cancellability rests on the absence of logical contradiction between what is said and the negation of the implicature that can be inferred from it. Practical cancellability depends on whether the cancellation of the implicature can be reasonably justified against possible criticisms in a real communicational context. Mazzarella et al. (2018), following Pinker and Lee (2010), write that cancellation (theoretical cancellability) opens the door to denial (practical cancellability). According to them, the content can be denied if the speaker can deny (when openly challenged) ever having intended to communicate it. Let’s consider the example they provide. Mary suspects her husband is having an affair and asks her friend Suzy what she thinks about it. Suzy responds: “I saw your husband with a woman at the cinema the other day.” Mary interprets the statement as confirmation that her husband is having an affair. However, it turns out that her husband was at the cinema, but he was with his sister, whom Suzy knows well. When Mary asks her for an explanation, Suzy defends herself by saying: “I didn’t mean to say he’s having an affair. The woman he was with is his sister” (ibid. 16). According to Mazzarella et al., in this case, Suzy can cancel the implicature, but she will find it difficult to deny it.



A further step is to suggest that if conversational implicatures are seen as conclusions of implicit arguments, then an unsuccessful cancellation of implicatures constitutes a logical contradiction. Namely, if we view conversational implicatures as arguments that the listener reconstructs based on the input provided by the speaker, then adding a contradictory premise can be seen as a logical fallacy that leads to an inconsistent set of beliefs. Let's consider a different example this time. Ana comes to pick up Ben to go out to dinner together, but he is not ready to leave yet.

Ana: How much longer do you need?

Ben: Have a drink.

The conversational implicature is that Ben needs some more time to get ready and that Ana has enough time to have a drink before they leave. Ben can cancel the implicature by adding "but I'm ready in a minute." However, although such cancellation is possible, it creates an inconsistent set of beliefs. The statement "Have a drink" opens the space for the implicature "I need more time to get ready," and the cancellation adds the content "but I'm ready in a minute." The combination of the implied message and explicit cancellation creates an inconsistent set of beliefs, and in reconstructing the argument, an inconsistent set of premises: "I need more time to get ready + but I'm ready in a minute." Therefore, we can say that practical cancellability or denial is unconvincing in this case even though formal cancellation – in the form of the sentence "Have a drink" followed by "But I'm ready in a minute" – is possible.

The proposal is that deniability operates effectively only under specific conditions, such as cultural differences among conversation participants or when there are mismatches in communicational expectations. It is argued that indirect communication is governed by rational, communicative, and social principles, establishing it as a structured and effective communicative strategy. These principles discourage easy dissociation from pragmatically conveyed messages and suggest that such messages can be considered primary communication content, even if not explicitly encoded semantically, provided they are justified through reasoning and argumentation. Given that beliefs and norms are often transmitted and adopted through reliance on these indirect messages, they play a crucial role in shaping and perpetuating societal beliefs, as well as in adopting and reinforcing associated concepts and values. Subsequently, a necessary connection between pragmatics and conceptual engineering will be proposed.

## CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES AND CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

Conceptual engineering is a branch of philosophy or philosophical methodology that deals with the process of evaluating and improving our concepts. This process is motivated by the fact that sometimes our conceptual schemes need to be enhanced to achieve certain beneficial effects, which can be social, theoretical, political, or otherwise. This can be accomplished by introducing a new concept, modifying, or abolishing an existing one (see Bohlman 2023, Koslow 2022 and Burges, Cappelen and Plunket 2020). The story of the concept of sexual harassment is a good illustration. The concept of sexual harassment emerged within the context of legal and academic discussions on gender discrimination and women's rights. Before the term was coined, behaviours that are now recognised as sexual harassment were often dismissed or ignored (see Campbell 2017).

As for modifying an existing one, the definition of "marriage" can provide a good illustration. Traditionally, the term has been used for the union between man and wife, and it excluded homosexual couples, but many countries expanded its meaning to include same-sex marriage (see Winter, Forest, and Sénac 2018). There are also other terms, such as "civil union", for this kind of romantic partnership; however, unlike "marriage" this term lacks the inherent authority, cultural connotations, and certain legal aspects (see Opačić, Grđan, and Jurčić 2012).

Perhaps the most discussed example is Haslanger's project of amelioration of the term "woman". Haslanger suggests a way to improve the concept of "woman" by incorporating the notion of subordination into its definition. The underlying concept is that by altering the definition, more focus will be placed on the systematic subordination experienced by women, thus helping to combat it. Haslanger (2000) emphasizes the feminist goal of eventually eliminating the category of women altogether, while recognizing the importance of not erasing females as a biological category.

Finally, there are terms that do not add anything positive to society, and the possibilities of a change in their content are limited. Think of slurs, words that are used to denigrate members of a specific group based on their sexual identity, ethnicity, race, or another immutable factor.

So, conceptual engineers' basic idea is that concepts should be analyzed, evaluated, and modified to produce a change that will benefit society.

Even before conceptual engineers proposed this new way of doing philosophy, the importance of language in shaping society was well known. One of the most fa-

mous incarnations of this idea is linguistic determinism (or relativism), known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis proposes that a language's structure and vocabulary shape or influence how its speakers perceive and think about the world. This hypothesis suggests that language doesn't just reflect our thoughts but can also determine or limit the range of thoughts that we can have. In other words, different languages may lead their speakers to view the world differently, affecting cognition, perception, and behaviour. As expressed by Worf (1956: 212) “[w]e dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages”. Some simple examples of this theory in practice are the often-recalled various terms that Inuit people have for “snow”<sup>6</sup>, or the large repository of terms Arab people have for “camel” (see Kharusi 2014). A concise overview of how conversational implicatures integrate into this framework will be provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

As we have seen, conversational implicatures, as introduced by H. P. Grice, play a crucial role in the subtlety and complexity of everyday communication. They allow speakers to convey nuanced messages that go beyond the literal meaning of their words, fostering deeper understanding and richer interactions. The ability to infer these indirect meanings is essential for navigating social roles, building trust, and strengthening community bonds. The interplay between the calculability and cancellability of implicatures reflects the dynamic nature of communication, where stability and flexibility coexist. This dynamic ensures that communication remains a collaborative process, where meaning is co-constructed and continuously refined, enhancing the rationality and coherence of our interactions. Understanding and effectively using conversational implicatures thus enhances our capability to engage in meaningful and contextually appropriate exchanges, reinforcing the foundations of social cohesion and trust.

What is implicated, profoundly influences how we construct concepts by enriching our understanding and adding layers of meaning beyond explicit statements. Implicatures often fill in gaps left by what is not explicitly stated. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of concepts without requiring exhaustive detail in every conversation. The creation of implicatures relies on shared knowledge and cultural norms, which shape how concepts are understood within a community. We can say that conversational implicature add to the mutual cognitive environment of a community (see Sperber & Wilson, 1986). As implicatures are interpreted and reinterpreted in different contexts, they contribute to the evolution of concepts and behaviours over time. Re-

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6 Appendix A of *Siku: Knowing Our Ice* (Krupnik, Aporta, Gearheard, Laidler, & Holm 2010) includes 93 different words for different kinds of snow.

peatedly using certain implicatures can shift the understanding of a concept since they allow meanings, values, and attitudes to be present but unspoken. In essence, what is implicated shapes our conceptual framework by providing additional, layers of meaning and reinforcing or changing the attitudes associated with someone or something. For instance, consider the concept of politeness (see Brown & Levinson 1987). In many cultures, politeness is not just about using polite words but also the implications behind words. When someone says, “Isn’t it hot in here?” the implicature is that the speaker wants the window opened or some form of ventilation used. This polite request relies on shared cultural norms about how requests should be framed to be considered courteous. Over time, the repeated use of such polite implicatures can shape the community’s understanding of politeness, reinforcing the notion that politeness encompasses both indirect communication and consideration for others’ feelings.

This process enriches communication, enhances mutual understanding, and allows for the development of more complex and context-sensitive concepts, but also carries some risks.

## ŠKURIBANDO FUREŠTIĆ: A CASE STUDY

In the remainder of this paper, a recent societal and communication example will be presented to illustrate how implicatures can reinforce existing stereotypes and social roles. In this example, implicatures are used so that the true communicative intent can be deemed uncertain, leaving such communication in the realm of hints, suggestions, and the implicit. However, building upon the earlier discussion that implicatures can always theoretically be cancelled, but practical cancellation can only occur in specific situations, this paper aims to demonstrate how speakers in the presented case cannot distance themselves from their conveyed messages effectively and that their attempts at cancellation are unconvincing. In the following section, a brief overview of events in the Municipality of Čavle this year, related to the tradition of the Rijeka Carnival (see Dmitrovic 1995), will be presented. This overview will serve as the basis for analysing the cancellation and reconstruction of indirect messages.

In Čavle near the Croatian city of Rijeka, this year’s carnival effigy (the main carnival culprit in the form of an anthropomorphic figure) was named Škuribando Fureštić. The name of the effigy suggested it symbolised a dark-skinned foreigner scapegoated for all misfortunes, a message underscored by its turban, working gloves, beard, and dark complexion.<sup>7</sup>

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7 The mainstream interpretation of this act can be summarized by newspaper titles such as “Scandalous move

To distance themselves from this discriminatory and xenophobic message the group Čavjanske maškare, responsible for displaying the effigy, released statements like the following: “We have created an effigy named Škuribando Fureštić. Now, it is very important to understand his name. He is not Škuribando because of the color of his skin, but because he is found in what we call ‘škuribande’, the dark areas of our municipality. Fureštić is his surname. Fureštić is a person who is not from Grobnik. When a person from Grobnik goes to Rijeka, he is a ‘furešt.’ When someone from Zagorje goes to Split, they call him ‘Vlaj.’ This may seem offensive to someone, but the fact is that you are a foreigner. Anyone who comes to Grobnik from another area is a ‘furešt,’ just as we are ‘furešti’ when we go to another area. That is a fact” (Ožanić 2024).

This can be interpreted as an effort to disassociate from the morally objectionable message conveyed pragmatically. The difference between this and the examples we have considered so far is that we previously encountered implicatures that arise from the expression of a specific statement or proposition. In contrast, here the message arises from the name (Škuribando Fureštić) and the act of hanging a dark-skinned effigy that has work gloves, a thick beard, and a turban. However, the interpretation process is the same. It takes into account extralinguistic knowledge (what an effigy is, what its meaning is, what the carnival is, etc.), the relationships among the participants in the communication, and the formal elements of the conveyed message (verbal, such as the effigy’s name, or visual, i.e. his appearance). The reconstruction of the message must consider all these elements, rationally assume the intention of the person sending the message, and lead to the most probable conclusion. Can the speaker (in this case, the carnival group) distance themselves from the racist and xenophobic interpretation of their message? Here is the rationale for why such distancing from the message and its denial may not be convincing.

The name Škuribando Fureštić can be explained by an etymological inquiry of its Italian roots. “Škur” derives from the Italian term “scuro,” meaning dark or obscure. “Furešt” comes from “forestiero,” which translates to “foreigner” in English, denoting someone originating from another country, region, or place within the same country perceived as distant and different. Thus, Škuribando Fureštić likely conveys a sense of foreignness or outsider status, compounded by a darker or obscure connotation. This analysis contrasts with the explanation of the name provided by the carnival group. The group’s explanation relied on the softened or secondary meanings of the

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by the Čavlian carnival troupe: They hung an effigy in the „likeness of a foreign worker” (Skandalozni potez maškara u općini Čavle. Objesili pusta u liku stranog radnika, Pavlica 2004).

terms forming the name in question. Interpreting the name's meaning in line with a heavier, xenophobic interpretation is justified by an etymological analysis linked to the original meanings of the words mentioned, as well as their general usage.<sup>8</sup>

Another issue is the meaning that the "pust" (effigy) has in the carnival. In this cultural tradition, the effigy is to blame for all the troubles and problems that have befallen the community in the past year. In an act of catharsis, a list of misdeeds he has committed is read to him, he is beaten and dragged around, and in the end, he is burned. The effigy was linked by the group Čavjanske maškare to an alleged incident from several months earlier, involving individuals of Indian nationality accused of attempting to kidnap a local child. The police determined that no elements of any criminal offence, misdemeanour, or any other form of unlawful behaviour were established (see Gašpert 2024).

The question we can ask here is the following: if the name of the effigy is associated with a specific event, does not the meaning get lost? In this case he is not guilty of all the troubles, not even of a large part of them. He is just wrongfully accused of only one crime. If the goal of the "pust" is to capture a broader social picture, then, in the spirit of tradition and understanding of customs, it makes more sense to interpret him as universal symbol of foreign workers, who in the minds of many represents a cultural and economic threat, rather than as an individual foreigner who has or has not committed some wrongdoing.

Typically, the role of the carnival effigy is to signify crucial societal events that have impacted the community. For instance, many carnival groups associate their effigies with the introduction of the euro in Croatia (e.g., Kunko Centić and Eurić Lipić), and when an individual is chosen as the effigy, it's usually someone socially or politically influential, often a politician, but sometimes it can also be other influential figure, like an unscrupulous tycoon. Such individuals wield the power to influence community life, and through effigies bearing names similar to theirs and physically resembling them, society sends a message.

Why is it not the same to choose a powerful politician or a foreign worker as the effigy? The distinction often arises from power dynamics and historical context. Politicians and people in power are typically public figures who have chosen to enter

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<sup>8</sup> As one reviewer pointed out, in everyday contexts, we seldom invoke the etymology of words to understand specific meanings. In this case, the etymology of the name Škuribando Furešćić is presented because the group Čavjanske maškare referred to it in their response to criticisms, while also highlighting deficiencies in the etymological portrayal they presented. It is also important to note that many people in the broader area of the city of Rijeka are well acquainted with the Italian language and its dialects, enabling them to independently arrive at a valid interpretation.

the public sphere and are accountable for their actions and decisions. Satirising or criticising them is considered fair game because it's part of the scrutiny and accountability that comes with their role. On the other hand, minorities and foreign workers often belong to marginalised or vulnerable groups who have historically faced discrimination, oppression, and stereotyping. Mocking or ridiculing them can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, reinforce power imbalances, and contribute to discrimination, prejudice, and in the case of Škuribando Fureštić also potentially violence. It's essential to consider the power dynamics at play and the potential impact of speech on different groups. While freedom of speech is important, it's also important to exercise that freedom responsibly and sensitively, particularly when it comes to marginalised or vulnerable communities (see Horisk 2024).

Therefore, we can say that the racist and xenophobic interpretation of the effigy is a product of etymological analysis and analysis of the social significance of the effigy. It represents a culprit for deeds affecting the community, symbolising an important event or a powerful individual. The individual (or individuals) blamed for the incident unconfirmed by the police are neither. Furthermore, by choosing such an effigy, the negative perception of foreigners is deepened among a significant portion of the population who already perceive them as a threat, as untrustworthy, as someone who doesn't fit into mainstream society. The selection of the effigy's name and appearance relies precisely on these societal prejudices. The creators knew how the majority of the population would interpret the effigy. Critics of such behaviour presumed the existence of such communicative intent within the carnival group, and their interpretation aligns with that of the majority of the population. However, considering their negative stance on this issue, efforts have been made to negate the message. Such attempts are unconvincing due to factors such as the meanings of the terms used and the traditional significance and role of the effigy in the carnival context.

Earlier in the text, it was suggested that reconstructing the implicature through argumentation could enhance this communicative strategy, and that an unconvincing denial results in a contradictory set of beliefs or premises. In this case, from the name and appearance of the effigy, we derive the implicature "foreign workers are undesirable." The first step in the reconstruction of this meaning is to identify the literal elements at play. In this case, it is the name Škuribando Fureštić and the appearance of the effigy – a turban, dark skin, a beard and work gloves. We then combine these literal elements with the knowledge that the effigy symbolises the bad things that happened last year and that we want to get rid of in the new year, and we derive the implicature "foreign workers are undesirable."

The second step is the cancellation of the implicature. As we have noted several times, formal cancellation is always possible. In this case, we combine the literal elements (name and appearance) with the cancellation: “The effigy is named Škuribando Fureštić, has a turban, dark skin, and gloves, but we do not want to say that foreign workers are undesirable”. There is no logical contradiction here.

In practical cancellability, we consider the implied message and what led to it and judge how successful the distancing from the message is. “The effigy is named Škuribando Fureštić, has a turban, dark skin, and gloves; the effigy symbolises something negative we want to get rid of and do not want in the new year; thus, foreign workers are undesirable, but we do not mean to say that foreign workers are bad.” This reconstruction has several contradictory elements and is thus faulty. This is a clear indicator that the implied message cannot be denied. There is no misunderstanding present, no cultural or linguistic difference; rather, it is simply an attempt to distance oneself from a straightforward message whose implicit elements can be reconstructed by all competent members of the linguistic community.

Different interpretations can arise in indirect pragmatic communication, where much is left unsaid and some premises in the argument are implicit. However, some interpretations will be stronger and sounder than others, depending on the context of the utterance. In this case, considering the etymological and cultural analysis of the situation, along with the presupposition of the rationality and competence of the meaning’s creator, the subsequent attempt to distance from the conveyed message appears unconvincing.

## CONCLUSION

Conversational implicatures play an important role in human communication, allowing for nuanced and context-sensitive interactions. However, the tension between their cancellability and calculability introduces challenges for consistent and coherent communication. Understanding these properties enhances our ability to engage in meaningful exchanges and informs conceptual engineering. By examining a recent societal example, this paper illustrates how implicatures influence social concepts and values.

Indirect messages, communicative cues, and signals of various kinds – both verbal and nonverbal – often go unnoticed due to the tendency to prioritise direct and semantically encoded messages as primary forms of communication. However, it is precisely these indirect messages that require us to infer their meaning, at least ret-



respectively, that can be even more effective in subtly shaping communicative exchanges and the social climate precisely because they are perceived as fleeting and unstable.

If implicatures are co-created by both the speaker and the listener, it follows that the listener bears significant responsibility for the beliefs they form based on implicatures, potentially more so than the speaker who did not explicitly dictate their interpretation – rather, it arises from their independent inference. To avoid this conclusion and emphasise the speaker's responsibility, it is crucial to comprehend communication patterns, signals, and strategies for avoiding accountability, ensuring that individuals and groups are held responsible for the messages they convey and the meanings they perpetuate. These meanings, even if not semantically encoded, are not arbitrary but become the primary content of an utterance for any competent member of the language community.

To conclude, it is important to emphasise that this paper presents only one example to demonstrate how an attempt to cancel implicatures might look in practice. This leaves ample room for analysing other instances of using pragmatic communication tools in public discourse, of which there is no shortage. A more comprehensive analysis, which is yet to be undertaken, will better establish and examine the relationship between the method of conceptual engineering and conversational implicatures, and more concretely formulate how the mechanism of conversational implicatures can influence the creation and development of concepts that are consciously or unconsciously perpetuated and maintained in society. This paper aimed to provide an initial impetus for such research and show how a pragmatic approach in the philosophy of language can be used to analyze real linguistic and social situations and their repercussions.<sup>9</sup>

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## KONSTRUIRANJE ZNAČENJA, OBLIKOVANJE DRUŠTVA: IZRAČUNLJIVOST I PONIŠTIVOST KONVERZACIJSKIH IMPLIKATURA

### Sažetak:

Ovaj rad istražuje značajke izračunljivosti i poništivosti konverzacijskih implikatura, usredotočujući se na njihovu društvenu važnost. Analiza karnevalskog lika Škuribando Furešić koristi se za ilustraciju kako se razgovornim implikaturama mogu održati društveni status quo i produbiti stereotipi. Ovo ne znači da su implikature istaknutije od eksplicitne komunikacije u postizanju tih učinaka, već da se njihova neizravna priroda često iskorištava kako bi se izbjegla odgovornost za prenesenu poruku. Ovaj rad dovodi u pitanje ideju da se implikature lako mogu poništiti i poreći, tvrdeći da poništavanje često dovodi do logičke nevjerovatnosti, ukazujući time na pogrešnu komunikaciju.

**Ključne riječi:** razgovorna implikatura; poništivost; izračunljivost; neizravno značenje; konceptualni inženjering; društveni utjecaj

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