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Lying and Misleading within the Philosophy of Language: A Relevance-Theoretic Perspective

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to examine the lying/misleading distinction from a relevance-theoretic perspective (cf. Sperber and Wilson [1986] 1995; 2004; Wilson and Sperber 2002; 2012). On standard accounts, the distinction is drawn parallel to the saying/implicating distinction. ‘What is said’, rooted in Grice (1975), has been subject to extensive discussion and numerous reanalyses under a variety of terms (see, for example, Recanati 1993; Bach 1994; Carston 2002), but no agreement has been reached as to the content of ‘what is said’ and the borderline between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’. Accordingly, within the philosophy of language the attempts to capture the lying/misleading distinction (Meibauer 2005; 2011; 2014ab; Saul 2012ab; Stokke 2013; 2016) rely on different notions of ‘what is said’. The paper is an attempt to take a stance in the debate on the distinction under discussion from the perspective of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson [1986] 1995; 2004; Wilson and Sperber 2012), which is a cognitive extension and modification of Gricean model of communication and has been seriously concerned with the elaborated concept of what is said, known as ‘explicature’. One of our goals is to see how the relevance-theoretic understanding of “what is said” (Carston 2002; 2009; 2010; Carston and Hall 2012) affects the lying/misleading distinction, and the other way round. In an attempt to provide ground for the relevance-theoretic account, a critical overview and comparison of the existing approaches to lying and misleading is also presented.

1. Introduction

Following the Oxford English Dictionary (OED 1989) definition of lying, to lie is to make a false statement with the intention to deceive. Within philosophy the most common definition of lying views it as saying something one believes to be false with the intent to deceive one’s listener, i.e. to get the listener to believe the statement to be true (cf. Augustine c395, ed. Deferrari 1952; Bok 1978; Kupfer 1982; Primoratz 1984; Davidson 1985; Williams 2002; Fallis 2009, Carson 2010). It has been noted, however, that lying is not the only way of deceiving. The speaker may deceive the hearer while avoiding outright lying, by merely misleading (Green
Recently, the lying/misleading distinction has been discussed within the philosophy of language (cf. Meibauer 2005; 2011; 2014ab; Saul 2012ab; Stokke 2013; 2016), where lying is classically equated with deceiving by saying/asserting what one believes to be false, while misleading with deceiving by saying/asserting what one believes to be true and conversationally implicating what one believes to be false.

Let us illustrate this distinction with the examples from Saul (2012a) and Stokke (2016). In (1) we are faced with President Bill Clinton’s famous present-tense denial of a past relationship with Monica Lewinsky that nearly led to his removal from office.

(1) Bill Clinton: There is no improper relationship. (Saul 2012a, 2)

The choice of the present-tense denial rather than There has never been a sexual relationship is an instance of a phrasing strategy aimed to avoid lying by merely misleading. Although Clinton did not lie in uttering (1) as his relationship with Monica was in the past, he initially misled the audience into thinking that he had never had an improper relationship with her. Had he said it explicitly, it would have counted as a lie and perjury.

Similarly, the classic contrast between lying and merely misleading can be illustrated by the contrast between the dialogues in (2) and (3).

Context: Dennis is going to Paul’s party tonight. He has a long day of work ahead of him before that, but he is very excited and can’t wait to get there. Dennis’s annoying friend, Rebecca, comes up to him and starts talking to him about the party. Dennis is fairly sure that Rebecca won’t go unless she thinks he’s going, too.

(2) Rebecca: Are you going to Paul’s party?
   Dennis: No, I’m not going to Paul’s party.
(3) Rebecca: Are you going to Paul’s party?
   Dennis: I have to work. (Stokke 2016, 85)

Whereas in both cases Dennis conveys the false information that he is not going to Paul’s party, only in (2) Dennis’s utterance is a case of lying; this is because only in (2) the false information is said/asserted. His utterance in (3) is a case of misleading since the false information that he is not going to Paul’s party is not said or asserted but is conversationally implicated on the basis of a truly asserted proposition that Dennis has to work.

Whereas traditional accounts of lying adopted Kant’s (1797) position that lying is never morally justified and, consequently, that lying is always morally worse than merely misleading, the recent research has led philosophers to a conclusion that there is no significant moral difference between lying and misleading. Although
sometimes there may be no moral difference between lying and misleading, obviously there is a linguistic difference. Since the paradigm cases of lying involve the speaker saying something false and the paradigm cases of misleading while not lying are cases where the speaker says something true in order to conversationally implicate something false, it seems indispensable to define the notion of ‘saying’ as opposed to ‘implicating’ in order to define the lying/misleading distinction. Philosophical and pragmatic literature abounds in the accounts of ‘what is said’, which has been discussed under a variety of terms, but naturally there is no agreement as to the content of ‘what is said’ and the borderline between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’). Consequently, the distinction between lying and misleading is understood differently depending on the notion of “what is said” adopted in the theoretical framework.

Our concern in the present paper will be with the understanding of ‘lying’ as opposed to ‘misleading’ within the philosophy of language and pragmatics, with the focus on the relevance-based understanding of the distinction. Since both classic and most recent accounts of the lying/misleading distinction have been rooted in Grice (1975), in section 2 we present selected aspects of Paul Grice’s inferential model of communication. In our attempt to provide ground for the relevance-theoretic account of the lying/misleading distinction (section 4), we also offer a critical overview and comparison of recent approaches to lying and misleading (section 3).

2. Grice (1975; 1978): saying and implicating

As the notions of ‘saying’ and ‘implicating’ are crucial for the lying/misleading distinction within the current philosophy of language, let us have a closer look at how they have been defined in the Gricean model of communication (1975; 1978), which was a kind of breakthrough due to its assumption that communication is inferential in nature and what speakers mean by their utterances usually goes far beyond a code. According to Grice, the total signification of an utterance may be divided into what is said and what is implicated. ‘What is said’ is the output of decoding of the conventional meaning of the words, disambiguation and reference assignment, which can be grasped by entailments (truth-conditions). ‘What is implicated’ is the other part of the total signification of an utterance, within which one can distinguish, for example, ‘what is conversationally implicated’: the speaker’s meaning, which goes beyond the conventional force of the utterance (i.e. linguistically encoded meaning) and may be described in terms of the Cooperative Principle (the CP) and its four maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation, Manner), cf. Grice ([1975] 1989, 26). This type of meaning may be grasped by generalized and particularized conversational implicatures, which are beliefs that the hearer attributes to the speaker in order to preserve the assumption that the speaker was obeying at least the CP in saying what he said.
The maxim which makes direct reference to the notions of truth, falsity and saying is the Maxim of Quality, which requires that the speaker should make his contribution one that is true, i.e. should not say what he believes to be false (maxim of truthfulness) or that for which he lacks adequate evidence. Consequently, on Grice’s account lies are interpreted as covert violations of the Maxim of Quality and the Co-operative Principle, where the hearer is meant to assume that the maxim of truthfulness is still in force and that the speaker believes what he has said. The Gricean norm of quality of communication – “Do not say what you believe to be false” (Grice [1975] 1989, 27) – has been adopted in one of the alternative definitions of lying by Fallis (2009), which reads as follows: to lie is to make a believed-false statement to another person while believing that the context is one in which the norm ‘Do not say what you believe to be false’ is in effect. Thus, we deal with a lie when the speaker makes the untruthful statement believing that she is in a context in which the Gricean maxim of truthfulness is in place, as illustrated by (4) below:

Context: John’s surname is Brown and B knows this.
(4) A: What’s John’s surname?
   B: Smith.

In the following section we offer an overview of selected approaches to the lying/misleading distinction, with the aim of developing a relevance-theoretic stance on the matter.

3. Lying and misleading distinction: a critical overview

3.1. Meibauer (2005; 2011; 2014ab)

One of the approaches deeply rooted in Grice’s account of communication and theory of implicature is Jörg Meibauer’s account, which views lying in the context of Searle’s speech act theory (1969) as a speech act of insincere assertion aiming at influencing the hearer’s belief (2011, 277, 280, 289). Meibauer (2014a, 106) derives sincerity from felicity conditions for speech acts or from the operation of the Gricean Co-operative Principle and the Maxim of Quality. He maintains that truth and sincerity constitute a pragmatic relation: “what the speaker truthfully utters”, as opposed to truth and truthfulness, which constitute an epistemic relation: “what the speaker believes and knows” (Meibauer 2014a, 71).

The crucial claim made by Meibauer is that “it is possible to lie while saying the truth” (2014a, 113) by intentionally using false implicatures as illustrated in (5) and (6). Accordingly, Meibauer obliterates the lying/misleading distinction drawn parallel to the saying/implicating distinction. On his account both deceiving
by assertion and deceiving by implicature count as cases of lying: “deliberately implicating what is false is a part of the complete act of lying” (2014b, 97).

Context: John is Mary’s boyfriend. Valentino is her ex-boyfriend. Valentino has been sick with mononucleosis for the past two weeks. Mary saw Valentino yesterday.

(5) John: Mary, have you seen Valentino lately?
   Mary: Valentino has been sick with mononucleosis for the past two weeks.
   (adapted from Meibauer 2014b, 98, after Coleman and Kay 1981)

Context: Ken knows for sure that the person to be met is X’s wife.

(6) Ken: X is meeting a woman this evening (Grice [1975] 1989, 37)
   Conversational implicature: The person to be met is someone other than X’s wife.

Meibauer postulates two levels of interpretation of Mary’s utterance in (5): (a) The asserted proposition that Valentino has been sick for two weeks is true, (b) The implicated proposition that Mary hasn’t seen Valentino lately is false, i.e. is an instance of lying. Similarly, he claims that if Ken utters \textit{X is meeting a woman this evening}, knowing that the person is X’s wife, then Ken is lying because he conversationally implicates that the person to be met was someone other than X’s wife. Although what Ken asserts is true (if it is true that he is meeting his wife, it must be true that he is meeting a woman), he is still lying, according to Meibauer, as he leads his addressee into the false belief that the person to be met was someone other than X’s wife via conversational implicature. As the interpretation of the examples shows, on Meibauer’s account “cases of ‘misleading’ are not separated from ‘proper’ lying, they are ‘part of the overall act of lying’ (Meibauer 2014a, 154), so the lying/misleading distinction made parallel to the saying/implicating distinction is not acknowledged. We get an extended understanding of lying that includes untruthful assertions as well as intentionally untruthful implicatures, which is reflected in Meibauer’s extended definition of lying (with S = Speaker, p = propositional content, q = conversational implicature):

\textit{Lying: extended definition}

A speaker S lies iff
a. s/he asserts that p while not believing that p, or
b. s/he conversationally implicates on the basis of her/his assertion that q while not believing that q (2014b, 98)

To sum up, according to Meibauer, first, lying requires an intention to deceive (2014b, 106). Second, the speaker is committed to the (false) assertion in the same way as to the (false) implicature (2014b, 107): “lies, be they realized
by untruthful assertion or by untruthful conversational implicature (...) can never be cancelled and never be clarified; all the speaker can do is deny that s/he lied or to confess that s/he lied” (2014b, 110). Finally, deliberately false implicatures are not a case of misleading. Accordingly, a question arises how Meibauer understands misleading. He seems to give an answer claiming that “misleading has to do with utterances that invite for misunderstandings. Untruthful implicatures are a different case, because they are intended” (2014b, 114). To illustrate this claim, Meibauer discusses the example in (7a) adopted from Saul (2012a, 33).

**BILLY AND THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING**

Context: Imagine that I watch Billy go to the top of the Empire State Building and jump up and down three times. Reporting on what I saw, I utter *Billy went to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped*, not realizing how my audience will interpret me. My audience interprets me as claiming that Billy jumped off the edge of the building.

(7a) Billy went to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped.
(7b) Billy went to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped [off the edge of the building]

Meibauer (2014b, 114) claims that either (7a) is a case of misunderstanding, that is, the hearer infers something which was not intended by the speaker or the speaker has the intention to lead the hearer into the false belief that Billy committed suicide. In this case, the speaker falsely implicates (7b). When it is a case of misunderstanding that could have been avoided by an alternative wording, for example *Billy went to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped up and down three times*, (7a) is regarded as an instance of misleading. When it, however, communicates an intended untruthful implicature, it counts as lying. There are at least two kinds of problems with Meibauer’s account, which will be discussed in detail in the Conclusions of the paper.

### 3.2. Saul (2012ab)

Another account of the lying/misleading distinction is put forward by Jennifer Saul (2012ab). The notion of *saying* plays a crucial role in this distinction. Whereas lying requires *saying*, understood in a certain way, misleading involves conveying information one believes to be false while avoiding *saying* it. Saul (2012a, 71) additionally gives two main characteristics of misleading, which differentiate it from lying. First, ‘misleading’, unlike ‘lying’, is a success term. For A to mislead B, B has to believe A, whereas A can lie to B even if B does not believe A. Second,
lying, unlike misleading, must be deliberate, i.e. A cannot accidentally lie to B, but A can accidentally mislead B.\textsuperscript{2}

According to Saul, without the notion of what is said, the lying/misleading distinction would be obliterated, with the result that every intentional deception would be regarded as a lie. Consequently, the definition of lying that Saul adopts crucially involves what is said and acts like a constraint on a satisfactory conception of saying for the lying/misleading distinction:

**Lying (Complete):**
If the speaker is not the victim of error/malapropism or using metaphor, hyperbole, or irony, then they lie iff (A) or (B) holds:
(A) (1) They say that P; (2) They believe P to be false; (3) They take themselves to be in a warranting context.
(B) (1) They say something indeterminate across a range of acceptable propositions in the range CP1...CPn; (2) for each complete proposition in the range CP1...CPn, they believe that proposition to be false; (3) They take themselves to be in a warranting context (Saul 2012: 65)\textsuperscript{3}.

The question arises which of the existing notions of what is said has been adopted by Saul in her definition of lying. Saul admits that none of the existing conceptions of what is said and related notions is adequate to the lying/misleading distinction: “Despite the vast literature on saying, we don’t yet have a notion suitable for doing the work needed by the lying/misleading distinction” (Saul 2012a, 3). She does not aim, however, to show that any theory of saying is the right theory (or the wrong theory) of saying. She merely wants to discover which is the right theory of saying for a particular purpose – drawing an intuitive distinction between lying and misleading. Eventually, Saul (2012a, 55) comes to the conclusion that the notion of saying that she needs for the lying-misleading distinction should allow for completion and disallow expansion (for the definition of these two processes, see Bach 1994)\textsuperscript{4}. In order to capture this sort of notion of saying, she adopts the broader concept of what is said and rules out cases of expansion by introducing a necessary condition for when a contextual contribution counts as a part of what is said, i.e. Needed for Truth Evaluability:

\textbf{(NTE)} A putative contextual contribution to what is said is a part of what is said only if without this contextually supplied material, S would not have a truth-evaluable semantic content in C. (Saul 2012a, 57)\textsuperscript{5}

The examples below illustrate Saul’s understanding of the lying/misleading distinction as determined by the conception of what is said that has been presented above and that she eventually adopted for her analysis.
 Context: Imagine a hospital room. Dave is lying in bed, and two nurses, Fred and Gertrude, are discussing the treatment he needs. Ed holds up a bottle of heart medicine, points at it, and utters (8a) Fred, who hates Dave, wants him to die, and plans to bring this about by denying him his much-needed heart medicine, replies with (8b):

(8a) Ed: Has Dave had enough?
(8b) Fred: Dave’s had enough.
(8c) Completion: Dave’s had enough heart medicine. (Saul 2012a, 62)

As Saul notes, Fred’s reply is intuitively a clear case of lying. And it is clear that, together with the claim that lying requires saying, (NTE) captures this. For Fred’s utterance to express a truth-evaluable proposition, the semantic content of (8b) requires completion (contextual supplementation). In this context the salient completion is the one illustrated in (8c), which is meant by the speaker and grasped by the audience. Therefore, according to (NTE), Fred counts as having said (8c), which explains why his utterance is a lie.

BILLY AND THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING (Saul 2012a, 33)
Context: Imagine that I watch Billy go to the top of the Empire State Building and jump up and down three times. Reporting on what I saw, I utter (7a), not realizing how my audience will interpret me. My audience interprets me as claiming (7b).

(7a) Billy went to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped.
(7b) Expansion: Billy went to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped [off the edge of the building].

An utterance of (7a), repeated here for the sake of convenience, is a clear case of misleading on Saul’s interpretation. A typical utterance of (7a) is taken to mean what would be typically said by an utterance of (7b). According to Saul, the contextual enrichment about a sort of jumping is not, however, necessary for the utterance to express a truth-evaluable proposition; it is a matter of expansion and as such it does not contribute to what is said. Consequently, although the claim in (7b) is false, the speaker of (7a) did not lie: he did not deliberately or accidentally say anything false, he merely implicated something false. Intuitively, his utterance is true but misleading because what is said does not include anything about what sort of jumping took place.

The lying/misleading distinction is nicely illustrated in (9) and (10) below, which are also designed to prove that lying is not always morally worse than misleading.

Context: George makes dinner for Frieda. He knows that Frieda has a peanut allergy and even a small amount of peanut oil could kill her. He wants to kill
Frieda, so he has cooked with peanut oil. Frieda, being rightly cautious, asks whether George has put any peanuts in the meal. George utters the true but misleading (9) rather than the false (10).

(9) George: No, I didn’t put any peanuts in the meal.
(10) George: No, it’s perfectly safe for you to eat. (Saul 2012a, 73)

Saul claims that it is doubtful that this choice of George’s makes his act even slightly better due to his avoidance of lying. “In this case, misleading is in no way morally preferable to lying” (Saul 2012a, 72).

3.3. Stokke (2013; 2016)

Still another person who has examined the linguistic distinction between lying and misleading from the perspective of the philosophy of language is Andreas Stokke (2013; 2016), who acknowledges that “lying requires assertion and assertion requires saying something, as opposed to conveying information in indirect ways, e.g., by conversational implicature” (2016, 85). Although he admits that the central part of an account of the distinction should be the notion of what is said, he claims that “it is likely that the notion of saying that is required for a proper analysis of the lying-misleading distinction is not a notion of truth-conditional content, but rather a notion that tracks information that speakers count as committed to (…), given the context and the prior discourse” (Stokke 2013, 354). To paraphrase, Stokke (2016) argues that the distinction between lying and misleading while not lying is sensitive to discourse structure and, in order to capture it, we need discourse-sensitive notions of saying and asserting. Namely, what is said by an utterance in a particular context depends directly on the question under discussion (QUD) that is addressed in that context and, more precisely, is the answer an utterance provides to the QUD it is addressing. Although Stokke agrees with Saul (2012a) that what is said may go beyond linguistically encoded meaning, he maintains that it should be strictly constrained by a minimal kind of compositional meaning. Accordingly, in his view, what is said by a sentence in a context is determined systematically by the linguistic meaning of the sentence and the configuration of QUDs in the context, and can be defined as “the weakest answer to a QUD that entails a minimal proposition expressed by the utterance in question, given the context” (Stokke 2016, 108).

The adopted definition of what is said has a direct influence on the drawing of the lying/misleading distinction within Stokke’s framework. Since lying requires saying something as opposed to implicating, the distinction is sensitive to the information structure of the discourse. Whether an utterance is a lie or is merely misleading depends on the topic of conversation, represented by questions under discussion. Deception is like “disrupt(ing) the pursuit of the goal of inquiry”
(Stokke 2016, 104), i.e. the pursuit of truth. Whether this disruption is judged to be a case of lying or merely misleading is determined by how one’s utterance relates to the QUD one is addressing.

Let us consider the examples in (11) and (12) to substantiate the claim above.

Context: At an office Christmas party, William’s ex-wife, Doris, insulted her boss, Sean. Nevertheless, Sean took the incident lightly, and their friendly relationship continued. More recently, Doris lost her job in a round of general cut backs, but, despite this, Doris and Sean have remained friends. Sometime later, William is talking to Elizabeth, who is interested in hiring Doris. However, William does not want Elizabeth to give her a job.

(11) Elizabeth: Why did Doris lose her job?
    William: She insulted Sean at a party.
(12) Elizabeth: How is Doris’s relationship with Sean?
    William: She insulted him at a party. (Stokke 2016, 90)

Stokke claims that Williams’s utterance, in each case, is deceptive and expresses the minimal proposition that Doris insulted Sean at a party, but the same utterance in (11) is a lie, while in (12) it is merely misleading. The difference between the dialogues in (11) and (12) and, respectively, between lying and misleading can be attributed to previous discourse structure, i.e. a question being addressed. Whereas in the case of lying the answer is provided directly, or explicitly, in the case of misleading the answer is supplied indirectly, or implicitly. The content that is taken to be communicated by William’s utterance in (11) – the disbelieved proposition that Doris lost her job because she insulted Sean at a party – entails the minimal proposition expressed by the utterance, and therefore, this proposition is said, and asserted, by William’s utterance. This explains why William is claimed to be lying in (11). By contrast, the content that is taken to be communicated by William’s utterance in (12) – disbelieved information that the relationship is not good – does not entail this minimal proposition, and therefore, it is not asserted but implicated by the utterance, which explains why William is merely misleading in (12). According to Stokke, this difference cannot be explained by discourse-insensitive accounts like Saul’s (2012a).

Stokke (2016, 91) makes an interesting observation that the use of the contrast between assertion and conversational implicature to exemplify the difference between lying and merely misleading follows from the fact that it represents a contrast between a committing and a less committing way of communicating. Whereas lying involves commitment to the misleading information one conveys, utterances that are misleading but not lies avoid this type of commitment, as exemplified below:

(11’) Elizabeth: Why did Doris lose her job?
    William: She insulted Sean at a party.
Elizabeth: Oh, so he fired her because of that?
William: #No, that wasn’t the reason.
(12’) Elizabeth: How is Doris’s relationship with Sean?
William: She insulted him at a party.
Elizabeth: Oh, so they’re not on good terms?
William: No, they’re still friends.

In (11’), where Williams deceives by lying, he is committed to the untrue information and there is no possibility for him to claim that he did not intend to convey the false proposition that Doris lost her job because she insulted Sean at a party. In (12’), on the contrary, William is merely misleading without lying, so he is not committed to the false information and can subsequently retreat from the misleading implicature he conveys.

Another difference between lying and misleading pointed out by Stokke (2016) is that a lie can be explicitly denied, while a merely misleading utterance does not permit such denials, but typically requires questioning the speaker’s intentions. This is illustrated by (11’’) and (12’’):

(11’’) Elizabeth: Why did Doris lose her job?
William: She insulted Sean at a party.
Garry: No, that wasn’t the reason!
(12’’) Elizabeth: How is Doris’s relationship with Sean?
William: She insulted him at a party.
Garry: #No, their relationship is fine!/Wait, are you trying to make her believe they’re not on good terms?

Stokke’s view deserves a thorough critical evaluation and empirical verification, which is, however, beyond the scope of this paper. His approach is valuable to us as far as it provides arguments in favour of the relevance-theoretic distinction between lying and misleading, which will be shown in section 4 of the paper.

4. Lying and misleading: a relevance-theoretic perspective

Although the saying/implicating distinction has been widely discussed within literature, it has been scarcely examined with reference to the notion of lying, with the exception of a few cases selectively described in the paper. A theory which is rooted in Grice and is seriously concerned with redefining his notion of what is said as opposed to what is implicated is Relevance Theory, a highly influential cognitive theory of human communication developed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (cf. Sperber and Wilson [1986] 1995; Wilson and Sperber 2002; 2012). Surprisingly, despite the vast theoretical and empirical research within
the theory, there is no decent account of the lying/misleading distinction. Our goal is, therefore, to make an attempt at defining and examining the distinction from a relevance-theoretic perspective. Hopefully, the relevance-based approach will shed new light on the nature of lying and misleading and contribute to the discussion on the relevance-theoretic conception of what is said understood as the truth-evaluable content of an utterance.

If we follow the assumption that the lying/misleading distinction is determined by the saying/implicating distinction, where ‘what is said’ must be truth-evaluable, within Relevance Theory it can be accounted for in terms of the distinction between explicit and implicit communication (Carston 2002; 2009; 2010; Wilson and Sperber 2012; Kisielewska-Krysiuk 2016). This is because it is the explicit content of an utterance that is taken to be that content which ordinary speaker-hearer intuitions would identify as having been said or asserted by the speaker, i.e. the content on which the truth or falsity of an utterance would be judged (Carston and Hall 2012). The explicit content of an utterance corresponds to the notion of explicature, defined as a communicated assumption which is “a development of (a) a linguistically encoded logical form of the utterance, or of (b) a sentential subpart of a logical form” (Carston 2002, 124, elaboration on Sperber and Wilson [1986] 1995, 182). Any other communicated proposition is an implicature, a contextual assumption or implication which is wholly inferred, i.e. is not a development of a logical form of an utterance. Whereas implicatures are derived by global inference from fully propositional premises, explicatures are developed by a local process which applies to subpropositional constituents and modifies subparts of the linguistic logical form (Carston and Hall 2012). The schematic logical form, an output of the decoding process, is a non-propositional and non-truth-evaluable semantic representation of the sentence employed in the utterance, which is merely the starting point for the derivation of the explicit content of an utterance and needs to be pragmatically enriched in order to become a truth-evaluable explicature (Carston 2002).

The development of a logical form, i.e. the recovery of explicature, a unique truth-evaluable propositional form, involves:

(a) disambiguation (‘I can’t see you now. I’ve got to go to the bank now’);
(b) saturation /including reference assignment/, which involves finding the intended content (or value) for a linguistically indicated variable or slot; triggered by an element of linguistic form, such as an indexical (‘He is too young [for what?]’);
(c) free enrichment
i. supplying unarticulated constituents in the absence of any indication (overt or covert) within the linguistic form that this is necessary, entirely pragmatically motivated (‘Something [bad] has happened [today]’);
ii. ad hoc concept construction, i.e. pragmatic adjustment or ‘modulation’ of linguistically encoded conceptual constituents, so that the concept
understood as communicated by the use of a word differs from the concept encoded (‘Holland is *flat*, ‘Boris is a *man*’). (Carston 2009)

What may be surprising in the context of discussing the lying/misleading distinction is that Relevance Theory rejects the Maxim of Quality. Wilson and Sperber (2002, 583) argue “that language use is not governed by any convention or maxim of truthfulness in what is said”. Instead, it is relevance that governs language use, and therefore, “expectations of truthfulness – to the extent that they exist – are a by-product of expectations of relevance” (Wilson and Sperber 2002, 584). This standpoint may tie up with Sperber’s (2001) observation that the epistemic norms implicit in the process of communication (a norm of truthfulness in testimony and of rationality in argumentation, cf. Goldman 1999) are to some extent at odds with the very function of communication: “(…) part of the function of communication (…) is optimally fulfilled by the production of messages likely to have certain effects on the audience, irrespective of their truth” (Sperber 2001, 405). Although Relevance Theory does not acknowledge the maxim of truthfulness, it, of course, does not deny that people are untruthful. It is lies, among other phenomena, that constitute, according to Wilson and Sperber (2002), evidence against the claim that speakers try to tell the truth. The risk of deception is explicitly mentioned by Wilson (2011) as one of the problems raised by communication: a speaker may be mistaken about the facts or deliberately deceptive, but there is little point in understanding an utterance if you cannot believe what it conveys. Similarly, Sperber (et al. 2010; 2013) points out that communication carries a major risk for the audience of being accidentally or intentionally misinformed and it is because of the risk of deception that we need epistemic vigilance, that is, an ability aimed at filtering out misinformation from communicated contents. Alongside the pragmatic mechanisms that help us understand utterances, there may be a set of ‘epistemic vigilance’ mechanisms that help us decide whether to believe them.

Having presented the relevance-based approach to the notion of truthfulness and the saying/implicating distinction, which is crucial for differentiating lying from misleading, we want to reanalyse some of the examples discussed in this paper from a relevance-theoretic perspective. Let us repeat that the relevance-theoretic perspective (Kisielewska-Krysiuk 2016) is that lying takes place at the level of explicit communication, whereas misleading takes place at the level of implicit communication.

I will start with the example that should be interpreted along the same lines in all of the presented accounts:

(5) John: Mary, have you seen Valentino lately?
   Mary: Valentino has been sick with mononucleosis for the past two weeks.
   (adapted from Meibauer 2014b, 98, after Coleman and Kay 1981)
Irrespective of the adopted conception of what is said, the truth-evaluable proposition in (5) is that Valentino has been sick for two weeks. It has already been judged to be true by Meibauer (2014b) and would definitely be judged to be true by Saul, Stokke and relevance theorists. All of them would also agree that deceiving in (5) takes place at the level of what is implicated, i.e. what is false is the implicated proposition that Mary hasn’t seen Valentino lately. The only difference will be in categorizing this kind of deception. Only on Meibauer’s interpretation will deceiving by falsely implicating while saying the truth be classified as a case of lying rather than misleading due to the definition of lying that he endorsed. His proposal, however, is not convincing enough. If Mary responds to John with Valentino has been sick with mononucleosis for the past two weeks, the fact that she saw Valentino yesterday does not make her utterance false. The proposition that Mary hasn’t seen Valentino lately wasn’t part of what is said and should not influence the truth value of Mary’s utterance. On the RT (Relevance-theoretic) interpretation, Mary’s utterance is undoubtedly an instance of misleading: the explicitly communicated truth-evaluable proposition is believed to be true by both the speaker and the hearer and thus the utterance is not a lie. The explicature does not satisfy the H’s expectations of relevance on its own; therefore, it achieves relevance only as a premise in the inference process leading to the false implicated conclusion that Mary hasn’t seen Valentino lately. The false conclusion, not being a development of a decoded logical form, is an implicature of the utterance in (5), which serves as a tool of misleading. Although the indirect answer involves more processing effort on the part of the hearer, it is designed to give more credibility to the speaker by providing an explanation why it was impossible for Mary to meet Valentino.

Another example already examined in the paper is (6) below:

Context: Ken knows for sure that the person to be met is X’s wife.
(6) Ken: X is meeting a woman this evening (Grice [1975] 1989, 37)

On Meibauer’s interpretation, the utterance conversationally implicates that a woman to be met is not X’s wife, which is false, but deliberately false implicatures are a case of lying rather than misleading according to his definition. On RT interpretation, by contrast, the utterance is pragmatically enriched to the explicitly communicated meaning: (6a) X IS MEETING A WOMAN OTHER THAN X’S WIFE, which is obviously false in the context. Falsity at the level of explicit content is a case of lying within the relevance-theoretic framework.

Still another example worth reconsidering is (7a):

(7a) Billy went to the top of the Empire State Building and jumped.
To repeat, according to Meibauer’s interpretation, the communicated meaning “jumped off the edge of the building”, if intended by the speaker, is an untruthful implicature and thus a case of lying (bear in mind that Meibauer extended his definition of lying so that intentionally untruthful implicatures are part of the act of lying). If not intended by the speaker, the communicated meaning is an instance of misunderstanding and thus a case of misleading. On Saul’s interpretation (2012a, 34), “the utterance is true but misleading: the speaker neither lied nor accidentally said something false”, because what is said does not include anything about what sort of jumping took place. The contextual enrichment about a sort of jumping is a matter of expansion and as such it contributes to what is implicated rather than to what is said. Comparing the two approaches, both Meibauer and Saul believe that the false information about jumping off the Empire State Building is implicated, but whereas Saul equates falsely implicating with misleading, Meibauer treats falsely implicating as a case of lying. Let us turn to the RT interpretation for a further comparison. The conventional meaning of the utterance in (7a) is subpropositional as the encoded meaning of ‘jumped’ is underspecified and has to be pragmatically enriched in order for the communicated proposition to be truth-evaluable. “Jumped” can be enriched to [JUMPED UP AND DOWN THREE TIMES] or [JUMPED OFF THE EDGE OF THE BUILDING]. Establishing the truth-conditions and, consequently, the truth-value of an utterance becomes possible only when one particular explicature, among the many, is understood as carrying the greatest relevance (Carston 2002, 124). Given the Principle of Relevance, the hearer is more likely to arrive at the latter interpretation as the scenario about jumping off the high building to commit suicide is more accessible, and retrieving it from memory requires less processing effort. Surprisingly, the most relevant enrichment leads to a false explicature. In my opinion, it is either because the speaker is not competent, which leads to an accidental lie, or the speaker is not benevolent, which results in an intentional lie. To conclude, as on the relevance-theoretic approach the enrichment of ‘jumped’ is necessary for the utterance to express a truth-evaluable proposition and becomes part of the explicit content, the utterance of (7a) will be treated as a case of lying. Interestingly, the RT view differs here from Saul’s standpoint in that Saul excludes cases of Bach’s expansion like the one above from contributing to what is said and treats them as instances of misleading.

An example which even better illustrates the difference between Saul’s account of the lying/misleading distinction and the relevance-theoretic approach is (9):

Frieda: Did you put any peanuts in the meal?
(9) George: No, I didn’t put any peanuts in the meal. (Saul 2012a, 33)

To repeat, according to Saul, George’s utterance is a true but misleading one on the assumption that George says that he did not put any peanuts in the meal he
prepared for Frieda and conversationally implicates that the meal is safe for Frieda. The analysis of the same data, however, would lead to different conclusions on the relevance-theoretic account. Relevance theorists take the view that “some degree of modulation of word meaning in context occurs across virtually all utterances and is essential in deriving the intended truth-conditional content (i.e. the explicit content of an utterance)” (Carston 2009). This is the case with peanuts in (9). Although ‘peanuts’ could be taken literally, on the optimally relevant interpretation the word will be understood as a loose use of the concept, given the context that both George and Frieda know that even a small amount of peanut oil could be fatal to Frieda, who has a peanut allergy. The interpretation that satisfies Frieda’s expectations of relevance, i.e. serves as an implicated premise in the inference leading to an implicated conclusion that the meal is safe for her, is the explicature which contains the interpretation of peanuts in the loose sense of ‘peanuts or anything else made from or containing peanuts’. In cases like this, the pragmatic enrichment involves broadening of the encoded concept ‘peanuts’, i.e. the denotation of the concept communicated is broader than (and includes) the denotation of the encoded concept. Since Relevance Theory views ad hoc concept construction as the pragmatic process contributing to the level of explicature, the proposition that is assessed for truth or falsity in (9) contains the broadened concept of peanuts. The explicitly communicated meaning corresponds to “George didn’t put peanuts or anything else made from or containing peanuts to the meal he prepared for Frieda” and is judged to be false because the peanut oil has been added to the meal. Accordingly, George’s utterance is a case of lying in the first place, but also a case of misleading Frieda into believing that the meal is safe for her. This interpretation may not agree with intuitions that many people have about the truth of the utterance in (9) and may turn out to be troublesome for the relevance-theoretic notion of what is said, but the testing of this hypothesis would require a study of its own.

Last but not least, I would like to show how Stokke’s observations about the lying/misleading distinction in relation to a denial can support the type of distinction within Relevance Theory.

(11") Elizabeth: Why did Doris lose her job?  
William: She insulted Sean at a party.  
Garry: No, that wasn’t the reason!

(12”) Elizabeth: How is Doris’s relationship with Sean?  
William: She insulted him at a party.  
Garry: #No, their relationship is fine!/Wait, are you trying to make her believe they’re not on good terms?

On Stokke’s interpretation, the cases of merely misleading, as exemplified above, do not allow explicit denials, while lies can be explicitly denied. On the RT
interpretation (Carston and Hall 2012), it does seem to be pragmatically infelicitous to immediately and directly contradict the implicature of someone’s utterance. Whereas a direct denial of implicatures seems odd (not fully coherent), this is not at all the case with explications. A comparison of the two approaches undoubtedly points to the correlation between lying and the explicit content, on the one hand, and between misleading and the implicit content, on the other hand.

5. Conclusions

The main goal of this paper has been to explore the lying/misleading distinction within the philosophy of language from a relevance-theoretic perspective. Relevance Theory seems to be well-suited to conduct such an analysis as one of its main interests is the notion of what is said, which has been claimed to be crucial for the distinction under discussion. An overview and comparison of the existing approaches to the lying/misleading distinction and an attempt to contribute to the present state of research with the relevance-theoretic account has led to the following observations and conclusions.

It has been shown that each of the accounts discussed in the paper views ‘what is said’ differently, which naturally influences their perception of the lying/misleading distinction. Saul (2012ab) claims that no existing account of what is said adequately captures lying as opposed to merely misleading. Since “no views of saying (or related notions) in the current philosophy of language literature can do the work that we need done for the lying-misleading distinction” (Saul 2012a, 51), she wants to discover the concept of saying that is proper just for her particular purpose of the analysis. A good candidate for such a concept seems to be the output of Bach’s completion, but not expansion, of a semantically incomplete propositional radical. Stokke (2016), for a change, maintains that ‘what is said’, and hence the distinction between lying and misleading, is sensitive to discourse structure, i.e. whether an utterance is a lie or is merely misleading sometimes depends on the topic of conversation, represented by so-called questions under discussion. Meibauer (2014ab), in turn, sticks to the Gricean distinction between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’, but postulates that it is not crucial for the lying/misleading distinction because both types of meaning, even deliberately false implicatures, are a part of an act of lying. Finally, the relevance-theoretic account sketched in the paper acknowledges the notion of ‘explicature’ as corresponding to what is said, and therefore, defines lying as deception that takes place at the level of what is explicated, as opposed to misleading, which takes place at the level of what is implicated. The explicitly communicated content may go well beyond Grice’s what is said, e.g. it can include constituents which are not articulated in the linguistic form of the utterance content (Carston and Hall 2012), which has its consequences for reanalysing the lying/misleading distinction.
When we compare the relevance-theoretic account with Saul’s account of the distinction, it turns out that the relevance-theoretic notion of explicature is broader than Saul’s conception of saying chosen for the sake of defining lying. Relevance Theory reinterprets cases of expansion, ruled out by Saul from the definition of lying, as free pragmatic enrichment contributing to explicature. Consequently, contrary to Saul’s prediction, it classifies them as ‘lying’. Although Saul does not say it explicitly, it follows from her analysis of the data that she would not include the meaning of unarticulated constituents and ad hoc concepts in the truth-evaluable content of an utterance. On the contrary, their meaning would be implicated and their falsity would result in misleading. If her intuitions are right, the notion of explicature needs rethinking, especially when faced with the cases of lying by contextually broadened concepts. Obviously, such a strong claim needs to be substantiated with empirical evidence and requires further research beyond the scope of this paper.

Last but not least, I would like to draw your attention to the flaws in Meibauer’s account of lying, which treats both deceiving by assertion and deceiving by implicature as cases of lying. The first counterargument to Meibauer’s obliteration of the lying/misleading distinction comes from legal practices concerning perjury, which confirm that there is a fundamental difference between lying and merely misleading. Namely, perjury law is often formulated in terms of a willful statement of a falsehood, which can be rephrased as ‘saying something false’ (cf. Mahon 2008; Saul 2012a).

Second, Meibauer’s rejection of the distinction under discussion boils down to the claim that there is no difference between false assertions and false implicatures as far as they are both tools of lying. This claim, in turn, relies on the intuitive, ‘layman’, understanding of lying. An average person surveyed is not sensitive to the source of false information and the mechanism of obtaining it, so his/her truth-evaluability judgements will be simplified in the sense that they will probably overuse the notion of lying to label a variety of cases whose categorization will be a challenge from the point of view of a linguist. If you want to find out whether a particular utterance is an instance of lying, either you have to impose the definition of lying on respondents in a survey before carrying it out or you risk the term being overused in the case of every utterance that departs from the truth, irrespective of whether this departure takes place at the level of what is said or what is implicated. This is because these two levels of meaning may be equally available to respondents who may not be able to differentiate between them, contrary to what the Availability Principle predicts: “In deciding whether a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning is part of what is said, that is, in making a decision concerning what is said, we should always try to preserve our pre-theoretic intuitions on the matter” (Recanati [1989] 1991, 106). The Availability Principle leaves too much responsibility to our intuitions, which often lead the participants in a conversation to contradictory conclusions about
whether a given portion of meaning is part of what is said or what is implicated. Since intuitions about what is said/lying differ from speaker to speaker, often due to our different intuitive understanding of the phrase “what is said” and the word “say”/“lie”, they are neither reliable nor conclusive.

Finally, the fact that Meibauer incorporates cases of deceiving by conversational implicature into his definition of lying and thus reinterprets what others consider to be ‘misleading’ as ‘lying’ may suggest that the Gricean notion of ‘what is said’ that he adopted for his analysis is too narrow. Meibauer’s intuition that the speaker lies rather than misleads by a conversational implicature may be an argument for a supposition that what he calls “implicature” is not an implicature at all but part of explicit content, which is predicted by the relevance-theoretic framework. There is no need to adapt the definition of ‘lying’. It is sufficient to view “what is said” differently.

Notes

1  The Co-operative Principle
Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Grice [1975] 1989, 26).
Apart from being observed and covertly violated, the maxim of Quality can also be overtly violated, i.e. exploited/flouted with the result that it is obvious to the hearer at the time of the utterance that the speaker has deliberately and quite openly failed to observe the maxim and, therefore, the hearer attributes beliefs/implicatures to the speaker in order to preserve the assumption that the S was obeying at least the Cooperative Principle in saying what he said. This is the case with non-literal meaning, such as metaphor, irony, hyperbole or metonymy.

2  These claims, obviously, need empirical verifying, but this falls outside the scope of this paper.

3  A warranting context is a context in which one warrants the truth of what one says. The exception will be, for example, the context of joke-telling, where the warranty is suspended. Saul admits that her definition of lying resembles Fallis’s (2009) definition, with a difference that a warranting context replaces a context in which Grice’s Maxim of Quality is in effect. Clause B in Saul’s definition of lying is designed to deal with cases when what is said is indeterminate across a range of possible completions (the Indeterminate Completion view).

4  The enrichment of what is said results in implicature, which corresponds to the relevance-theoretic explicature and “(...) can be a matter of either filling in or fleshing out what is said. Completion is the filling in of a propositional radical, and expansion is the fleshing out of the minimal proposition expressible
by an utterance” (Bach 1994, 144). In other words, a process of completion is involved in deriving a complete truth-evaluable proposition from a non-complete proposition which may already include the result of disambiguation and reference fixing, cf. *Jack and Jill are ready [to get married]* or *Kurt finished [drawing] the painting*. Expansion, by contrast, is a process which takes a complete proposition, the result of completion, and yields the proposition communicated by the speaker, which is the enriched or elaborated version of the one explicitly expressed by the utterance itself, cf. *Jill got married and [then] became pregnant, I haven’t taken a bath [today] or Nobody [important] goes there anymore because it is too crowded* (Bach 1994, 125–126).

5 The principle has been discussed by Recanati (1993, 242) under the name of the Minimal Truth-Evaluability Principle.

6 Although Stokke claims that Saul’s discourse-insensitive account cannot explain the difference between his examples in (11) and (12), we believe that Relevance Theory will nicely deal with cases like these. Since the search for the intended proposition is relevance-guided, utterances in (11) and (12) will achieve relevance only as answers to the preceding questions. Accordingly, in (11) an utterance achieves relevance as a direct/explicit answer to the question. Therefore, an incomplete proposition expressed by an utterance has to be enriched with the meaning contained in the question. In (12), by contrast, an utterance achieves relevance as an indirect/implicit answer to the question, so the proposition it expresses is not linguistically related to the question and does not call for enrichment at the level of explicitly communicated meaning. In order for the hearer’s expectations of relevance to be satisfied in (12), he has to make inferences which will not be developments of the linguistically encoded meaning and will take the hearer from the proposition expressed to the level of implicated meaning, thus providing an answer to the question.

7 **Presumption of optimal relevance**

An ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to an audience iff:

a. It is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s processing effort;

b. It is the most relevant one compatible with communicator’s abilities and preferences. (Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995, 270]; Sperber and Wilson 2004, 612)

**References**


