The paradox of pragmatics:

How to deal with linguistic issues in a pragmatic contextual framework

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The issue

- Pragmatics in a classical sense deals with language in use in context.
  - «the term *pragmatics* covers both context-dependent aspects of language structure and principles of language usage and understanding that have nothing or little to do with linguistic structure» (Levinson 1983, 9).
- In the Gricean tradition, pragmatic meaning is triggered by reference to universal principles of rationality (cooperation principle, maxims of conversation).
- In neo- and post-Gricean tradition, principles apply to the stage of utterances interpretation:
  - Q-Principle and R/M or I-Principle (Horn, Levinson)
  - Principle of Relevance (Sperber & Wilson)

The questions

- How does linguistic information contribute to pragmatic meaning?
- Is a contextual framework compatible with a linguistic-driven one?
- How does linguistic meaning interact with contextual information?
- How does pragmatics interface with syntax and semantics?
- What role does cognition play in context construction and conceptual information?

Some basic assumptions

- These questions have a straightforward meaning only if some assumptions are stated as acceptable:

a. Grammar differs from usage.

b. Linguistic meaning is not akin to pragmatic meaning.

c. Words are encoding concepts, but concepts are not equivalent to meaning.

d. Verbal communication is the result of both a coding / decoding process and an inferential one.

a. Grammar is not usage

- First, some properties of grammar are structure dependent, some are not:
  - In French, there is a fixed order between quantifier and negation: negation cannot precede a quantifier in a subject position, unless in an ellipsis or in headers.

    1. Anne: *Est-ce que tes étudiants ont réussi?*
       Jacques: ***Pas tous***.

    2. *Déplacements de messages:* ***pas tous*** *les forums visibles*

- The NEG-Q order is in object position:

    3. *On n'a* ***pas tous*** *les jours vingt ans.*

Grammar is not usage (2)

- In a subject position, the NEG-Q is grammatically odd:
  1. ?? ***Pas tous*** *les étudiants ont réussi*
- The standard order is Q-NEG:
  2. *Tous les étudiants n'ont pas réussi*
- In this case, we have wide scope interpretation: it is contradictory to the universal quantifier (3), and gives rise to the negative particular interpretation (4):
  3. *Tous les étudiants ont réussi.*
  4. *Quelques étudiants n'ont pas réussi.*
- The Q-NEG interpretation is possible, but marked: it needs to be uttered with a specific intonation on the QP (5), meaning *none* (6):
  5. ***TOUS les*** *étudiants n'ont pas réussi.*
  6. *Aucun étudiant n'a réussi.*

b. Linguistic meaning vs. Pragmatic meaning

- Linguistic meaning is not pragmatic meaning:
  - Either pragmatic meaning is a specification (1) or a broadening (2) of linguistic meaning (Wilson & Carton),
  - or it is in a relation of disjunction (3) with linguistic meaning (particularised conversational implicatures):
    1. *Mary is happy: she finally met a bachelor.*
    2. *This steak is raw*.
    3. Jacques: *Axel, please go and brush your teeth.*
       Axel: *Dad, I'm not sleepy*.
- Narrowing and broadening are the result of pragmatic enrichments.
- Particularized implicatures are nonce implicatures, which are mostly context dependent: they are triggered through the construction of implicated premisses (one has to brush one's teeth before going to bed, when one goes to bed one is sleepy…)

c. Meaning is not only conceptual

- Meaning is the semantic value of an utterance.
- In order to get the semantic value, an utterance must be contextualized.
- The construction of a context implies the access to conceptual information.
- Some part of the information contributing to pragmatic meaning is conceptual, but some is not.
- The linguistically triggered information which is **not conceptual** is **procedural**.
  - Procedural information corresponds to a set logical rules guiding the interpretation of the utterance.
  - Procedural meaning is a set of instructions on how to manipulate conceptual information.

d. Verbal communication is a coding/ decoding and an inferential process

- Verbal communication is both a coding / decoding and an inferential process.
- Therefore, the contribution of linguistic meaning to pragmatic meaning is only partial.
- Linguistic information functions as a set of **indices** about the informative intention of the speaker.
- In inferential communication, the speaker entertains two intentions: informative and communicative.
- The **informative intention** is a set of assumptions that the speaker intends to make manifest or more manifest.
  - The requirement for accessing the informative intention is the recognition by the audience of the speaker's **communication intention**: to make his informative intention mutually manifest.
- Inferential communication is a another way of achieving non-natural meaning (Grice).

Do we face a paradox?

- Verbal communication and pragmatic meaning should give rise to a paradox if only one model of communication applies.
  - For instance, pragmatic meaning would be the result of a single coding / decoding process.
- Moreover, if pragmatic meaning were not the result of a pragmatic enrichment, the language-context interface would be difficult to model.
  - Pragmatic meaning would be the set of possible ordered pairs of semantic values and contexts:
    - $PM\ (U) = \{<sm_1, c_1>, <sm_2,c_2>, \text{etc…}\}$
  - This approach is only possible if the set of semantic values and the set of contexts are accessible and given.
  - The objection is that both pragmatic meaning and contexts are built.

The language-context interplay

- I would like to give three illustrations on how language and context interplay in the construction of pragmatic meaning.

1. The computation of temporal relations in discourse
2. The computation of causal discourse relations in discourse
3. The computation of the scope of negation in descriptive and metalinguistic uses.

1. Temporal order

- French is a very good example for the semantics-pragmatics interface on temporal reference.
- The tense system in French is rich enough to encode semantic contrast, but flexible enough to require contextual strengthening.
- Basically speaking, past French tenses are in opposition on the directional dimension of their meaning:
  - The *passé simple* (simple past) bears a forward weak directional feature (f).
  - The *imparfait* (simple past and progressive past) bears no directional feature, as the *passé composé* (present perfect).
  - The *plus-que-parfait* (pluperfect) bears a backward weak directional feature (b).

Tenses and connectives

- Temporal connectives can strengthen the direction of time:
  - *et* (*and*) bears a strong forward feature (F), which can cancel a weak backward feature;
  - *parce que* (*because*) bears a strong backward feature (B), which can cancel a weak forward feature.
- In other words, tenses and connectives can compose their directional features.
- In case of contradiction, contextual information has to accommodate for the relevant direction, either coming from strong linguistic features or from weak conceptual features.

Bearers of features Examples	concepts	tenses	connectives	context	interpre-tation
Marie poussa Jean. Il tomba	f	f + f		F	F
Jean tomba. Marie l'avais poussé	b	f + b		B	B
Marie poussa Jean et il tomba	f	f + f	F	F	F
Jean tomba parce que Marie l'avais poussé	b	f + b	B	B	B
Jean tomba. Marie le poussa	b	f + f		F	F
Marie poussa Jean. Il était tombé	f	f + b		B	B
Jean tomba et Marie le poussa	b	f + f	F	F	F
Marie poussa Jean parce qu'il était tombé	f	f + b	B	B	B
Marie poussa Jean, parce qu'il tomba	f	f + f	B	F	F
?? Marie poussa Jean et il était tombé	f	f + b	F	F	? F

Implications

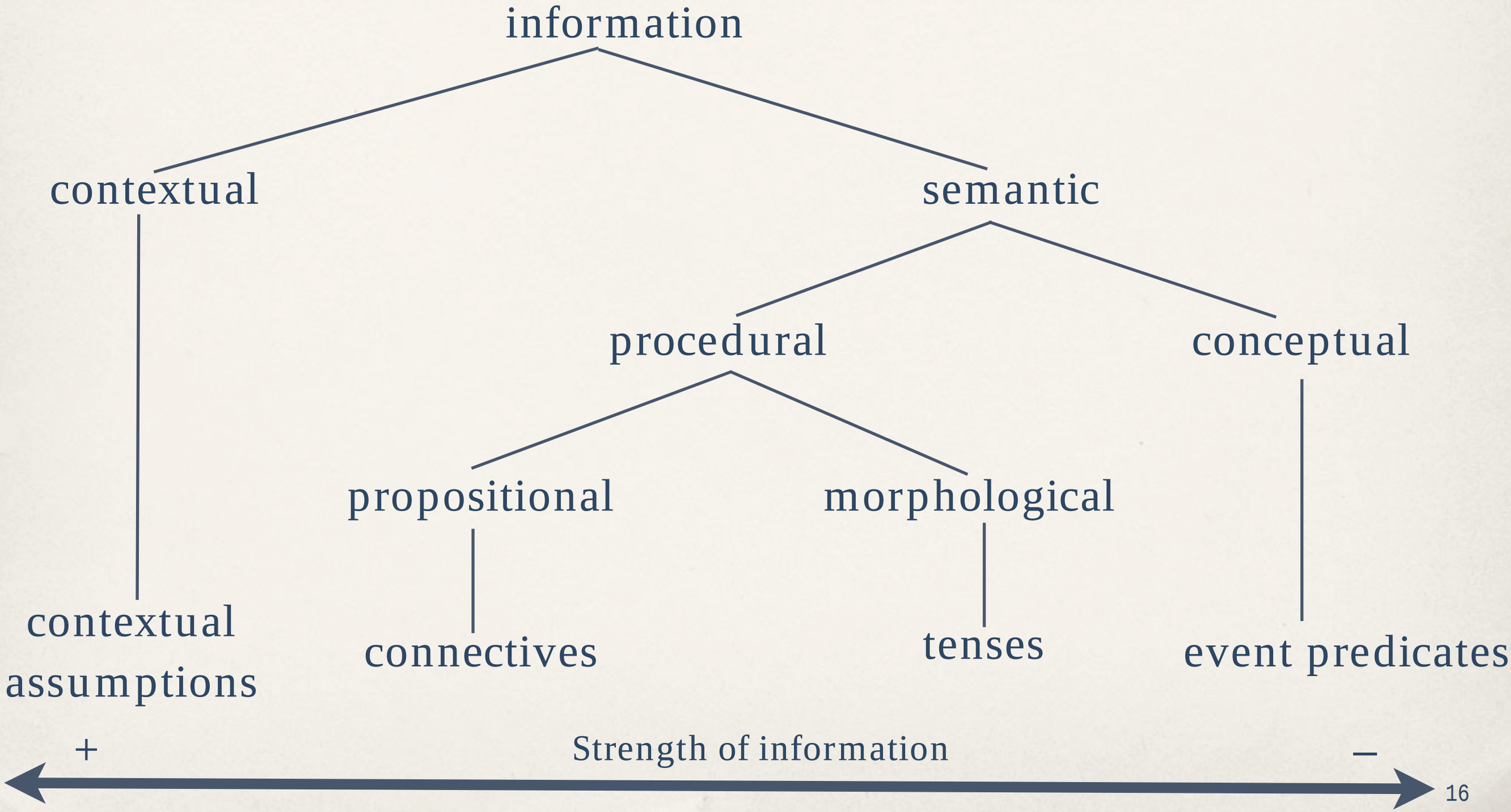
- The most important implication is that tenses show that semantic information is controlled by contextual information.
- It also shows that procedural information (tenses, connectives) is stronger than conceptual information.
- The syntactic scope of procedural information explains its strength: propositional information is stronger than morphological information.
- So directional inferences illustrate the following **hierarchy of information**:

A. contextual information > semantic information

B. procedural information > conceptual information

C. propositional information > morphological information

Hierarchy of information



2. Causal relations in discourse

- Causal relations can be marked or unmarked.
- Content causal relations without connectives can be forward or backward.
  - <Consequence. Cause>

    1. L'herbe est verte. Il a plu tout l'été.
  - <Cause. Consequence>

    2. Il a plu tout l'été. L'herbe est verte.
- But with connectives, only backward order is causal.
  - Consequence *parce que* Cause

    3. L'herbe est verte parce qu'il a plu tout l'été.
- When the order is forward [Cause *donc* Consequence], the discourse is not causal but inferential.

    4. Il a plu tout l'été, donc l'herbe est verte.

One possible explanation

- In French, there is a very systematic division of labour between temporal, inferential and causal connectives.
- Causal relationships between events and states cannot be verified with a single connective in the cause-consequence order:
  - *donc* (*therefore*) has a causal meaning only when the cause is a state.
  - When the cause is an event, *donc* allows inferring the consequence, not to state it.
  - The reverse is true with *et* (*and*): its causal meaning is constrained by an event cause; stative causes give rise to odd discourses.
- In contrast, *parce que* verifies the causal reading with any aspectual combinations.
- The cost of *parce que* is its non-iconic order: consequence-cause.

A general survey of French causal, inferential and temporal connectives

- The next table is based on the following parameters:
  - Four clausal combinations with events and states:
    - Event-event
    - Event-state
    - State-event
    - State-state
  - Three connectives: *parce que, donc, et*
  - Two orders: CONSEQUENCE-CAUSE and CAUSE-CONSEQUENCE, giving rise to two readings (causal and inferential)
  - Total: 24 possible combinations (4 x 2 x 2)

Results

types of readings	causal readings			inferential readings		
types of eventualities	***parce que*** (cons-cause)	***donc*** (cause-cons)	***et*** (cause-cons)	***parce que*** (cause-cons)	***donc*** (cons-cause)	***et*** (cons-cause)
event-event	+	–	+	+	+	–
event-state	+	–	+	+	+	–
state-state	+	+	–	+	+	–
state-event	+	+	?	+	+	–

Parce que is the only connective verifying a causal relationship whatever the aspectual combinations and the semantic order

What conclusion to draw?

- This example shows a different trade-off between linguistically encoded information and contextual information.

1. **Linguistic meaning** encodes basic directional properties that combine with aspectual ones to allow the maximal flexibility in expressing causal relationships.
2. **Context** does not interplay as a default, but intervenes to convey iconic causal order in the inferential use of *parce que*.
3. **Prediction**: the iconic causal order is not only triggered because of conceptual constraints (POUSSER-TOMBER order), but because of processing and time pressures, and information structure.

3. Two types of negation?

- The last example of the semantic-pragmatic interplay is linked to **negation**.
- Negation (*pas*) in French has a very precise behavior:

a. Syntactically, it follows the inflected predicate.

b. The negative clitic *ne* is mostly omitted in speech, and carries no semantic weight in written texts.

c. Negation is unmarked regarding wide and narrow scope.

d. **In other words, no syntactic cues distinguish ordinary descriptive negation (narrow scope, internal negation) from metalinguistic negation (wide scope, external negation)**.

How to interpret negative utterances?

- Different contexst trigger different scopes of negation:

1. a. **Descriptive use** of negation can occur without any preceding contradictory positive utterance.
   b. **Metalinguistic negation** cannot occur out of the blue: it must be a reaction to a preceding utterance.
2. a. **Descriptive negation** need not be completed by a corrective clause.
   b. **Metalinguistic negation** is triggered because of a corrective clause.

   - The corrective clause cancels a presupposition, an implicature or a semantic implication.

Examples

1. A: *Combien d'enfants a Anne?*
   B: *Elle n'a pas trois enfants.*
2. A: *Paul dit qu'Anne a trois enfants.*
   B: *Non, Anne n'a pas trois enfants, elle en a quatre.*
3. *Anne n'a pas trois enfants,*
   a. *elle en a deux*
   b. *elle en a quatre*
4. *Abi ne regrette pas d'avoir échoué*
   a. *puisqu'elle ne s'intéresse pas à son avenir*
   b. *puisqu'elle a réussi.*
5. *Abi n'est pas belle*
   a. *elle est quelconque*
   b. *elle est sublime.*

What is the semantic meaning for negation

- Negation has mainly two meanings:
  - In its **descriptive** use, negation preserves the presupposition, does not affect the implicature, and when applied to a scalar predicate, it means «less than».
  - In its **metalinguistic** use, negation cancels the presupposition as the implicature, and means «more than» when it scopes over a scalar predicate.

	assertion	implication	presupposition	implicature
DescriptiveNeg	not-P	Q	Q	
MetaLingNeg1	not-P	not-Q	not-Q	
MetaLingNeg2	~~not-P~~	P and Q		~~not-Q~~

Which meaning is the basic one?

- In the **classical** analysis, internal negation (descriptive use) is the default meaning of negation.
  - Descriptive use does not require a specific context.
  - A bare negative utterance has narrow scope, and scope is widened only if linguistic completion requires it.
- In the **Gricean** analysis (Carston), default meaning is wide scope.
  - Metalinguistic negation is not always the result of a second processing of the sentence.
  - Narrowing is a typical way of enriching a semantic meaning (logical connectives, quantifiers).
  - Narrowing occurs when wide scope is not informative and relevant enough in the context of utterance.

An illustration

1. The default reading is wide scope:
    1. *Anne n'a pas trois enfants*
    2. [NOT [**ANNE HAS 3 CHILDREN**]]
2. Wide scope reading is either confirmed or cancelled:
    a. It is confirmed by an explicative clause:
        3. *Anne n'a pas trois enfants,* ***elle en a quatre***
        4. [NOT [**ANNE HAS 3 CHILDREN**]] & [ANNE HAS 4 CHILDREN]
    - Negation scopes over the implicature, not the proposition
        5. [NOT [**ANNE HAS EXACTLY 3 CHILDREN**] & [ANNE HAS 4 CHILDREN]
    b. Wide scope reading is cancelled if no information is given or new information requires it:
        6. *Anne n'a pas trois enfants (****elle en a deux)***
3. Negation is attracted for reason of relevance by a local domain, that is, a predicate:
    7. *Anne n'a pas trois enfants*
    8. [ANNE NOT [**HAS 3 CHILDREN**]]

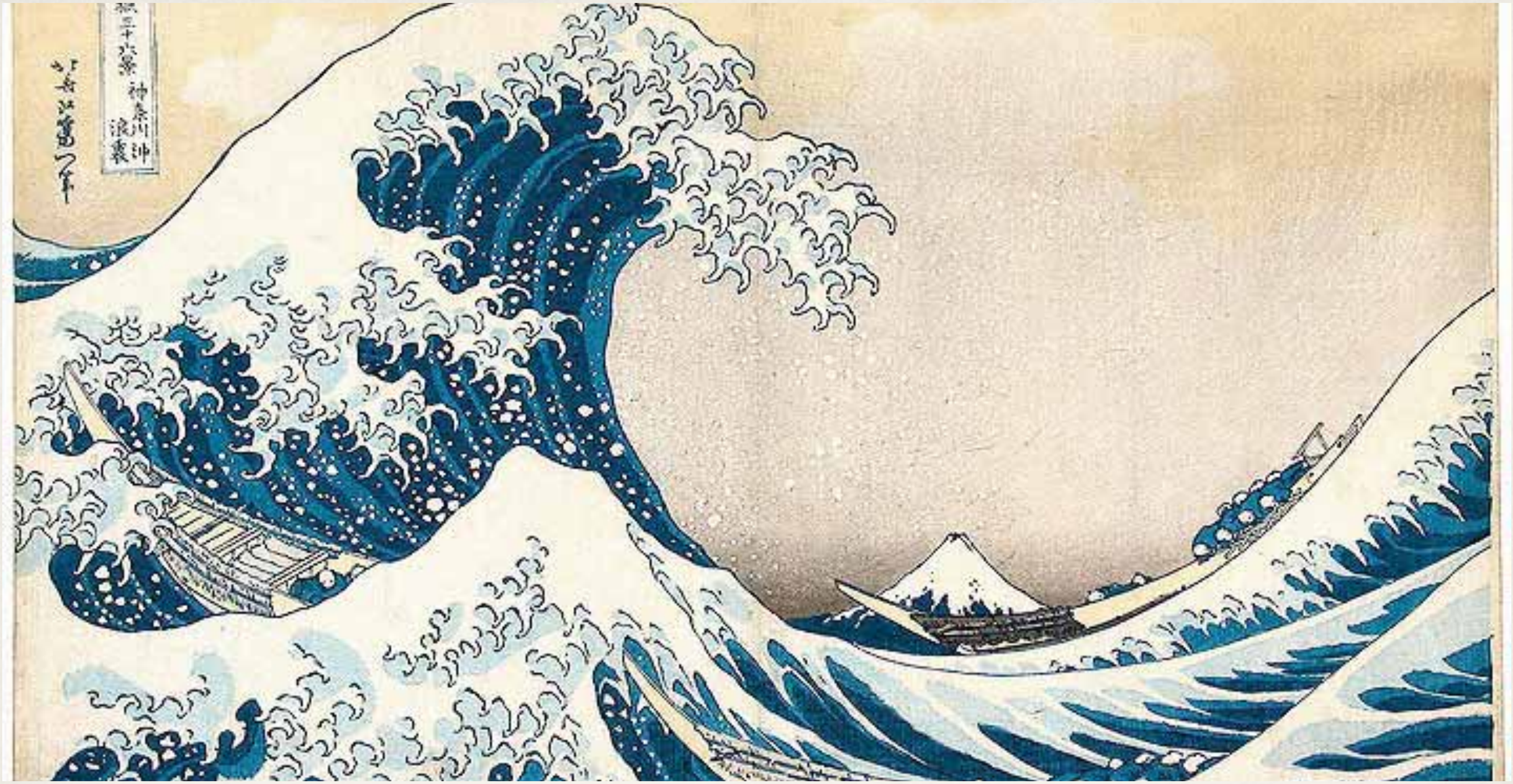
To make a long story short

- What is the consequence of the negation case?
  1. The semantics of logical words is their logical meaning.
  2. The default meaning is NOT what unmarked uses allow to conclude for.
  3. Pragmatic meaning is not a marked one: pragmatic enrichment and inferences occur for any type of meaning, descriptive and metalinguistic.
  4. The semantics of natural languages is not common sense: pragmatic meaning is.

General conclusions

1. Pragmatic meaning is the result of complex interplays between linguistic information and contextual information.
2. The semantics of linguistic expressions is not common sense:
   a. Tenses have directional orientations.
   b. Causal connectives trigger directional features.
   c. The semantics of negation is wide scope.
3. There is no paradox in combining linguistic information and contextual information, because contextual information is stronger.

- The revenge of linguistic information is
  - **incoherence** or **oddity** (when linguistic information does not fit contextual information)…
  - … or wreck.



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