Why communication isn't a joke : relevance and content

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＜要約＞

　英国サルフォード大学教授ダイアン・ブレイクモアを1998年10月13日，本校に迎えて上記のタイトルで講演会をもった。

　本稿は Sperber＆Wilson（1986, 1996）の提唱した，関連性理論（Relevance Theory）の名で知られるコミュニケーション理論のよって立つ基盤と，基本的概念を紹介するものである。言葉がコミュニケーションの道具として最たるものであるから，言葉の実際の使用を扱う語用論の理論である。相手に伝達しようとする意図を持った話し手が，そのとき，その場で発する文（発話）の解釈が何故そのようになされるのか，あるいは時として失敗するのか，これは心理的事象と見なされ，単一の認知的原理に支配されていると RT は訴える。

　聞き手の復元する発話解釈について，RT は二つのタイプを区別する。一つは統語論の出力としての理論形式を下敷きにして，これに肉付けをしていくことによって得られるもので，発意（explicature）と呼ばれる。たとえば，

She blew up the mattress.

においては，(a) she が誰を指すのか（指示付与），(b) blew up は inflated with air の意味なのか use explosive to destroy の意味なのか（一義化），(c)どの，何のために使うマットレスなのか（指示付与と富化）を復元しなければならない。言語形式の持つ意味を越えての肉付けは，さらに(d)どういう発話行為をしているのか，(e)命題に対する話し手の態度といったものの復元も含む。

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　第二のタイプは推意（implicature）と呼ばれるものである。次のダイアログにおいて，

　A：Does your mother know I am staying the night?

　B：She blew up the mattress.

まず B に対して，A の復元する発意は次のようなものである。

　ｉ．B's mother inflated the mattress used for overnight guests with air.

しかしこれが B 発話の解釈のすべてではもちろんない。聞き手が(ii)のような想定を引き出すことが説明されなければならない。

　ii．B's mother knows that A is staying the night.

これは聞き手が(iii)の様な想定と結びつけて，引き出す結論である。

　iii．If B's mother inflated the mattress with air, she knows that A is staying the night.

(ii)は(ｉ)とは対照的に，B の言語形式を肉付けして出てくるものではない。(ii)は暗示的に伝達される想定であり，推意（implicature）と呼ばれる。

　発意と推意の両方を復元して初めて意図された解釈をすることになるのであるが，いずれの復元の過程にも，話し手の意図した文脈想定を，聞き手が選択，同定出来なければならない。発話解釈を生み出す文脈想定を聞き手がどう選ぶのか。これは relevance という概念に支配されているとする。

　伝達意図を持った話し手は，自分の情報が聞き手にとって注目すべき価値があると思い，聞き手は，話し手の提供する情報が自分にとって価値があると信じているからこそコミュニケーションは成り立つのである。すなわちその情報が認知的効果を生み出す限りにおいて発話解釈は成り立つのである。認知上の効果を引き出すには，コストがかかる。発話解釈に当たって，人は出来るだけ多くの効果（effects）を，出来るだけ少ないコスト（efforts）で手に入れようともくろむ。Relevance を最大限にしようと努めるのである。聞き手の努力を最小限にすることは話し手にとっても関心事である。かくして双方の目指すことは，その発話を最適に関連性のある（optimally relevant）ものにすることである。これが RT の基本の想定であり，関連性の原理と呼ばれる。

　プラカードを持った女性の漫画を見てみよう。彼女はおそらく女性開

放運動家で，「女性を開放せよ」と訴えているという解釈がステレオタイプ的なものであろう。なぜなら，聞き手（この場合は受け手）であるわれわれにとって，即座に呼び出し可能な，したがってコストの小さい文脈想定だからである。「女性をただで与えます」という解釈も可能ではあるが，それには，そういう文脈想定を呼び出す（そういう状況を想像する）のに，相当のコストが必要とされるわけで，最適の関連性を目指す話し手（送り手）の意図するものではない。小男の問いが，この努力をさせ，よってユーモラスな効果を上げることになるのである。ノーマルな伝達では，話し手の意図する解釈は常に最適関連性を目指すものなのである。 （武内道子　記）

1.　Introduction

As you all know, communication does not always succeed. I should know : I have failed to communicate many times since I have been in Japan. Of course, this was because of my inability to speak Japanese or because I very arrogantly assumed that my audience spoke English as fluently as I did. However, communication failure cannot always be attributed to the fact that speaker and hearer do not speak each other's language. Knowing each other's language does not guarantee communicative success. There are all sorts of other reasons why communication might fail. For example, communication may fail because the hearer does not recognize that the speaker is communicating with her and hence does not bother paying attention to the speaker's utterance. If you intend to communicate with someone, then you must intend that they recognize that this is your intention. And then even if the hearer does recognize that the speaker is communicating with her, she may fail to recognize what it is the speaker is communicating. There are always different ways to interpret an utterance, and as you know, hearers do not always interpret an utterance in the way that the speaker intended. For example, the sentence the speaker utters may have more than one meaning, only one of which is intended by the speaker, and the hearer may for some

reason construe it in a way that is not intended. This is, what is going on in this cartoon.

Now, this lecture is not going to be about why we find cartoons or utterances funny: not all cartoons and utterances achieve their humorous effects in the way that this does; and even if they did, I don't think I would be able to begin to explain what it is about our so-called sense of humour that makes us laugh or smile at Calman's depiction of communicative failure. In any case, what is going on in this cartoon is not always funny. Moreover, I'm sure we have come across people who <u>think</u> it is funny to behave as if they have recovered an interpretation of your utterance which is manifestly not the one

intended, but who only succeed in being exasperating. For example, when I wish to put sugar in my coffee and ask my daughter for a spoon by producing the utterance in (1), I am not amused when she simply says 'Yes, I can', and does nothing more.

(1) Can you pass me a spoon?

And I doubt if I would be amused if someone who I had asked to blow up some balloons for a birthday party asked where I kept the dynamite. The point is that whether or not I smile at my daughter I know that she knows that I do not expect her to interpret (1) simply as a question about her ability to pass a spoon. Similarly, whether or not we smile at the Calman cartoon, we know that Calman knows that we would not expect anyone to interpret the slogan in (2) as an advertisement that the speaker was giving away women for free.

(2) Free women

But this raises the question of why the speaker of (1) or (2) is justified in assuming that it will be interpreted in the way that it is intended. After all, from a linguistic point of view, my daughter's silly interpretation of my request is a possible interpretation of (1) – indeed, you may even be able to think of situations in which it was the one intended. And equally, from a linguistic point of view, there is nothing to stop anyone from entertaining the silly interpretation of (2) as a possibility.

Notice that I say 'from a linguistic point of view'. What I am going to show in the first part of this lecture is that if utterances only had linguistic properties, then there would be no constraint on the way that people interpret utterances. That would mean that every time you produced an utterance you could expect it to be understood in any of a number of different ways. And it would mean that there is nothing funny or unusual about what is going on in Calman's cartoon.

But surely, you might say, the interpretation of an utterance must be constrained to some extent by its linguistic properties. Consider my utterance in (1). Surely, even my silly daughter would not inter-

pret it as a question about whether she could pass me a table or rhinocerous. And surely, the slogan in (2) could only be interpreted either as an advertisement that the speaker was giving away women for nothing or as a recommendation that women should be liberated. It could not, for example, be interpreted as an advertisement for free cars or as a recommendation that linguistics should be abolished. This is true. The grammar does determine a range of possible interpretations. But it is only a range. And the hearer has to somehow work out which of these is the one intended.

2. Why we need pragmatics : explicit content

Let me begin, then, by making a catalogue of the ways in which the grammatically determined meaning of an utterance falls short of being a complete interpretation. This is not intended to be a complete list, but is intended simply to give you an idea of the extent of the problem. In the first place, hearers are expected to be able to identify the proposition that the speaker is expressing or, in other words, its truth conditional content. But of course, it does not take long to see that knowing just the meanings of the words uttered is not enough for being able to identify what state of affairs the speaker is intending to represent by his utterance. Consider the examples in (3-6) :

(3)   She blew up the mattress.

(4)   Everyone was there.

(5)   He wondered if they were free.

(6)   She ran too fast.

In (3) we know that some female person blew up a particular mattress. But we do not know the identity of either the person or the mattress. Nor do we know whether she blew the mattress up with an explosive and destroyed it or whether she just blew it up with air and inflated it. In (4) we know that everyone in some domain was somewhere. But where? And does the speaker mean everyone in the world? Or just everyone in the family or everyone who the speaker thinks is

important. In (5) we have the problem of identifying the referents of he and them. But we also have problem of identifying which sense of free is intended – free from tyranny, free to have lunch or available for no cost? And in (6) apart from the problem of assigning reference of she we also have the problem of identifying what she ran too fast for – too fast to be safe, too fast to catch, or too fast to see.

Now, it is generally agreed that people don't just recover the propositional content from an utterance. After all, you can say that all of the examples in (7) have the same propositional content, namely one which is true in a state of affairs in which Anna is leaving. But clearly they will not be interpreted in the same way.

(7) (a)   Anna is leaving.

     (b)   Is Anna leaving?

     (c)   Anna, leave.

As you may know, it is sometimes said that the differences between these utterances lie in the differences between the speech acts which they are used to perform. Thus (7a) communicates the information in (8a), (7b) communicates the information in (8b) and (7c) communicates the information in (8c).

(8) (a)   The speaker is saying that Anna is leaving.

     (b)   The speaker is asking whether Anna is leaving.

     (c)   The speaker is telling Anna to leave.

There is a lot more that I could (and should) say about this account of the interpretation of these utterances. But then I would never get to my main point, which is that information about the speech act the speaker intended to perform is not necessarily determined by the grammatical properties of the utterance.

But if it isn't how did I know that, for example, (7b) is used to communicate the information in (7c)? Surely, I knew that the speaker was asking whether Anna is leaving (rather than saying that she is or telling her to leave) because of its syntactic properties : it is an interrogative (with changed word order) rather than an indicative or

an imperative). It is true that so-called mood can play a role. But in many cases the linguistic mood of an utterance is only a clue. It is possible, for example, that in certain situations a speaker could utter (7a) (that is, the indicative sentence) in order to ask whether Anna is leaving or to tell Anna to leave. And I can also imagine a situation in which a speaker might utter (7b) in order to tell Anna to leave.

Moreover, linguistic mood does not help us when we are trying to identify the speaker's <u>attitude</u> towards the proposition that she has expressed. For example, is the speaker of (7a) communicating that she is certain that Anna is leaving or is she just communicating that she believes that it is possible that Anna is leaving. Is the speaker of (7c) communicating that she wants Anna to leave or that it is advisable from Anna's point of view that she should leave? These are all possible interpretations of these utterances, but there is nothing in their linguistic form which helps the hearer decide which one is intended.

However, although the linguistic form of an utterance like (7a) may not <u>encode</u> the information in (9), it at least provides a sort of blueprint for recovering it.

(9)   The speaker believes that it is possible that Anna is leaving.

That is, we build the proposition in (9) up out of the linguistic meaning and the context and the result of this building process is inevitably much richer than the linguistic meaning. I am going to call propositions that are recovered by builing up or developing the linguistic meaning of utterances <u>explicatures</u> or the <u>explicit content</u> of utterances.

So going back to our example in (3), we can say that the proposition that the speaker intended to express is a development of the linguistically determined form or blueprint in (10):

(3)   She blew up the mattress.

(10)   Either (i) some female person inflated some mattress with air

      or   (ii) some female person used an explosive to destroy

some mattress

We obtain the explicature or explicit content by filling in the values for the variable expressions (like some female) and choosing between the two alternative forms.

But how? If the explicature is richer than the linguistic meaning, then clearly we must need something else in the building up process – we must go beyond the linguistic meaning. As you will have realized by now, our building up process involves what is generally called the context – that is, our assumptions about the world. It is fairly easy to imagine how two different hearers with different sets of assumptions might interpret (3). For example, given the assumption that the speaker's daughter, Anna, was preparing her room for an overnight visit by her friend, a hearer will go for option (10i) and give she the value Anna and the mattress the value the mattress which Anna's friends sleep on. However, given the assumption that the speaker believes that the hearer wishes to know how the female villain in the detective novel the speaker is reading managed to destroy the evidence which had been hidden in the mattress, the hearer will go for the other option and give the variable expressions other values.

I have been assuming that the explicatures of an utterance are the assumptions which the hearer takes the speaker to have intended to communicate. Since the explicatures that the hearer recovers depend on the contextual assumptions that are used in filling out the linguistically determined meaning of the utterance, this must mean that the hearer can somehow identify which contextual assumptions the speaker intended her to use. Surely the possibilities are enormous : lets just take the problem of assigning reference to she (or filling in the value of some female person). How many female people do you know? How is it that the speaker can intend the hearer to use his contextual assumptions about the world to determine which female person she intends to refer to when these assumptions include assumptions about any number of female persons. The point is that

I made it look too easy when I narrowed it down to a choice between two scenarios. I didn't explain why a hearer would go for either of these assumptions given the range of the contextual assumptions that he might (in principle) have used. So the question is : how does the hearer select the context in the recovery of explicit content?

3. Why we need pragmatics : implicit content

This is the main question that I want to talk about in this lecture. But before I do, I just want to show that the question of how we use contextual assumptions in the recovery of explicatures is not the only question we need to answer for a theory of how we interpret utterances : the recovery of explicatures is only one aspect of utterance interpretation. In particular, hearers are also expected to recover assumptions which cannot be derived from enriching the linguistic meaning of utterances. Let me give you an example. Suppose that a speaker produces (3) in the dialogue in (11) :

(11) A : Does your mother know that I am staying the night?

B : She blew up the mattress. (=(3)

As we have seen, the hearer of (11B) needs to flesh out the propositional form of (10) in order to recover the intended explicit content of the utterance. Intuitively, it seems clear that the result of this enrichment process in this situation will be the explicature in (12) :

(12) B's mother inflated the mattress used for overnight quests with air.

However, this is surely not the end of the interpretation process. We also need to be able to explain how the hearer is also able to derive the assumption in (13) :

(13) B's mother knows that A is staying the night.

This assumption, in contrast with the one in (12) is not derived by developing or building on the linguistic meaning of (11B). It is completely unrelated to the linguistic meaning of (11B). In a different

situation - for example, the dialogue in (14) - the hearer might derive
a completely different assumption, namely (15):

(14)   A: Did she get rid of all the photographs.

      B: She blew up the mattress.

(15)   She got rid of all the photographs.

I will call the assumptions in (13) and (15) implicitly communicated
assumptions or implicatures. As I have said, they contrast with
explicatures in that they are not derived by using contextual assump-
tions to develop or enrich linguistically determined meanings. Rather
they are derived by combining contextual assumptions explicit con-
tent in inferences. For example, if the hearer recovers the explicature
in (12) and if he combines this with the assumption in (16), then he will
derive the implicated conclusion in (13):

(12)   B's mother inflated the mattress used for overnight guests with
      air (explicit content of (11B)

(16)   If B's mother inflated the mattress with air, she knows that A
      is staying the night (contextual assumption)

(13)   B's mother knows that A is staying the night (implicature)

The use of different contextual assumptions will of course yield a
different conclusion. This means that the hearer's problem in work-
ing out what the intended implicit content is is just the same as his
problem in working out the intended explicit content: what are the
contextual assumptions that will yield the intended interpretation. In
fact, if I had more time, I would show you that the answer is exactly
the same too. The hearer's choice of contextual assumptions in the
interpretation of an utterance is governed by relevance. However, as
I have said, this lecture is about the recovery of explicit content and
so this is what I shall focus on.

4.   Relevance

Why are you paying attention to me at the moment - I assume that
you are paying attention? I suppose that you might say that you are

paying attention because I am a visiting lecturer and it's only polite to pay attention. But then you sould just pretend to be paying attention. My question, then, is only for those of you who are <u>really</u> paying attention. One answer might be that you have been told that I might say something that is worth listening to or that as a visiting lecturer I can be expected to say something that is worth listening to. Now, it is probably true that lecturers who have been asked to speak at another university do try to make sure that they say something worth listening to – after all, they do not want to acquire a reputation for being boring or incomprehensible. This means that you can probably assume that I have put quite a lot of effort into making sure I will be worth listening to. I may be failing miserably, but you are justified in thinking that I have tried to make sure I am worth listening to.

But am I really that different from anyone else who has gone to the trouble of communicating with you – a friend who rings you up or sees you on the street, the shopkeeper who chats to you when you buy your newspaper each day? Well, obviously someone who engages in spontaneous conversation with you has not gone to much or indeed any trouble in preparing their utterances. But when you think about it, there is a fundamental sense in which all communicators are the same. If someone has attempted to communicate with you and, moreover, is making it obvious to you that they are intending to communicate with you, and that they intend you to recognize that they are intending to communicate with you, then it would be very odd if they believed that it would not be worth it for you to pay attention to them. They are surely requesting your attention because they believe that it will be worth your while to pay attention. It is true that people like lecturers may have more to lose if they fail to attract the attention of their audiences, but every communicator who requests your attention must believe that you will find it worth paying attention.

What makes it worth paying attention to a communicator? According to Sperber & Wilson, it is worth paying attention to information to the extent that it yields <u>cognitive effects</u>. Cognitive effects are simply the various ways in which a new item of information can interact with your assumptions about the world to yield an improved representation of the world. Here are some examples :

(i) You have planned to play football. You believe that if it is raining, the football match will be cancelled. You look out the window and see that it is raining. Now you can derive the <u>contextual implication</u> that the football match will be cancelled. This is information which is derivable neither from you existing assumptions alone nor from the new information that it is raining alone.

(ii) You lie in bed wondering what the weather is like. You hear what you take to be rain on the window and tentatively conclude that it is raining. When you get up and open the curtains, you see that it is indeed raining. In this case the new information <u>strengthens</u> an existing belief.

(iii) You lie in bed and hear what you take to be rain on the window. You get up and see that it is not raining and that the noise was caused by a tree rustling in the wind. In this case, the new information <u>contradicts</u> an existing assumption and causes you to eliminatate it.

Notice that none of these were examples of communication. They were effects derived from somebody's decision to pay attention to something that happens, a phenomenon. However, the claim is that in each case you choose to pay attention to a phenomenon because you are hoping to derive cognitive effects. However, cognitive effects are not free : they cost effort - mental effort. Suppose someone you see pictures on television of a terrible rain storms in England. I am sure that you <u>can</u> think up a context in which this information does have cognitive effects, but clearly this involves some effort of imagination.

In contrast, the effort that I need to derive cognitive effects from this information will be considerably less since I have much more readily accessible contextual assumptions which I can use for their derivation (the information will trigger highly accessible assumptions about my leaking roof or my daughter's plans to play outdoors).

The most basic assumption in relevance theory is that in processing information people aim to derive as many cognitive effects as possible for the least amount of processing effort or that in information processing people aim to <u>miximize relevance</u>.

This is a claim about information processing in general. However, linguists are not so much interested in human information processing as in communication, that is, in cases where someone not only intends to communicate information but also actively helps the hearer recognize that this is his intention. Now as we have just seen, it is in the interest of anyone processing information to obtain the most cognitive effects for the least amount of effort - that is, to <u>maximize relevance</u>. However, clearly, a hearer would not be justified in expecting <u>maximal relevance</u> from a communicator. In the first place, it may not be possible for a communicator to give the most relevant information : this may be because he simply does not have it or it may be because there are reasons (having to do with tact or ethics, company law or privacy) for the communicator not feeling able to give the most relevant information. I am sure, for example, that my students would find it extremely relevant to know what is in their examination paper before they sit it, but of course I am not able to tell them. On the effort side, a hearer is not always justified in expecting maximal relevance either. It may not always be within a communicator's capabilities to produce an utterance which requires less processing effort than any other that he might have made. Formulating utterances in the most hearer - friendly way requires effort and indeed skill, and a communicator may be too tired, too drunk, too harrassed or too engrossed with a desire to show off his

extensive knowledge of technical vocabulary to produce elegant, easy to process utterances.

On the other hand, as I have suggested, paying attention to an utterance and processing it involves some effort from the hearer, and it is clearly not in the speaker's interest to demand this effort from the hearer if it does not yield any rewards - i.e. cognitive effects. This means the hearer is enitled to expect that the utterance is <u>at least</u> relevant enough to be worth processing. At the same time, however, it is in the speaker's interest (and of course the hearer's interest) to achieve a greater degree of relevance if this is possible. Communicators do, after all, want to hold their audience's attention, and they have a much better chance of doing this if they are not boring or unintelligible - or in other words, if the utterances they produce are the most relevant ones possible given their abilities and interests.

What all this adds up to is something that Sperber and Wilson call <u>optimal relevance</u> :

Definition : an utterance is <u>optimally relevant</u> if and only if :
(a) the utterance is relevant enough for it to be worth the hearer's effort to process it ; and
(b) the utterance is the most relevant compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences.

And what I was saying about communication was what Sperber & Wilson call their communicative principle of relevance :

<u>The communicative principle of relevance</u> : every act of overt communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

Now clearly, this cannot mean that every utterance is in fact optimally relevant. A speaker may be mistaken about what is rele-

vant to a hearer. For example, you might gesture towards an empty seat in a lecture theatre not realizing that I have seen it already. In this case, my expectation that the utterance actually achieves optimal relevance will be a false expectation. However, this is not to say that I am not able to see how you thought your gesture was relevant or that I do not have an expectation about the attempted relevance of the gesture. And clearly, it is not difficult to see that at this level – the level of attempted relevance – your gesture is consistent with the principle of relevance.

5.   Comprehension strategy for recovering explicit content

Sperber & Wilson have claimed that this principle – the principle of relevance – is enough on its own to account for all aspects of utterance interpretation. That is, it is the basis of a theory of pragmatics. Thus a complete relevance theoretic pragmatics would show how this principle can be used to explain how propositional content is recovered, how it can be used in the explanation of implicit content, how it can be used to explain so-called discourse coherence, how so-called stylistic effects can be derived from the notion of optimal relevance, and how the identification of the speaker's attitude towards the proposition expressed delpends on the principle of relevance. I cannot do all of this here. I am going to focus on just two examples which illustrate 2 of the processes involved in the recovery of the proposition expressed – first the assignment of reference, and second, the disambiguation of ambiquous expressions. I am not going to talk about either of these processes in detail – just enough to show you how the principle of relevance suggests a strategy for comprehension.

First, then let us look at an example discussed some years ago by Jerry Katz in 1972 (when the president of the USA was George Bush). He asks us to think about the case of someone who walks up and down outside the White House with a sign reading :

(17)   GEORGE BUSH IS A CROOK

When he is prosecuted for libel his lawyer argues that his client was not intending to refer to the President but to a local businessman who had cheated him. The question is why this defense is bound to fail. Katz's answer is intuitively plausible - if he had intended to refer to George Bush the businessman then he would have made it clear by say using some qualifying expression (George Bush of Sandy Lane/ George Bush the grocer). His answer can also be given a relevance theoretic foundation. The point is that, uttered/produced outside the White House, (17) has a highly accessible interpretation which does yield contextual effects. Since it is highly accessible, it can be assumed to be the interpretation which a speaker who is trying to optimize relevance by ensuring adequate effects for minimal cost would have intended. If the speaker <u>had</u> intended the interpretation in which <u>George Bush</u> referred to the local businessman then he would have put any hearer to the effort of first recovering the accessible interpretation, and then looking for an alternative interpretation and then somehow deciding between the two. And as we have seen, this is not in the interests of a communicator who wants to produce the most relevant interpretation possible. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that it would have been within the speaker's capatilities to have somehow reformulated his utterance in such a way that would have spared the hearer this effort.

Now let us go back to the example which we began with.

(2) Free women

I assume that the joke hinges on the fact that the interpretation that has apparently been recovered by the cartoonist's character is not the interpretation that is manifestly intended. But why is it the interpretation that is manifestly intended? Calman is assuming, quite justifiably, that his readers are familiar with the kind of placards carried by supporters of feminism or the kind of sentiments expressed by supporters of feminisim, eg that women are the victims of male tyranny, that they should be liberated from their condition. In other

words, he is assuming that the utterance in (2) triggers a stereotypical and hence highly accessible context in which it yields cognitive effects – given this context, for example, we recognize the person carying the placard as a supporter of the women's movement. It is of course possible that (2) might be interpreted as an advertisement that women are being given away free (just like a product in a super-market), but of course this requires considerably more effort of imagination and would not have been intended by a speaker who is aiming for optimal relevance. Of course, it is the fact that the little man's question forces us to make this effort of imagination that enables Calman to achieve the humorous effect that he intended. The point is that in achieving this effect Calman is cashing in on the assumption that the character carrying the cartoon like any normal communicator is aiming for optimal relevance and therefore can be assumed to have intended the interpretation derived from the most accessible (and least costly) context.

In otheer words, Calman is cashing in on the fact that we use a strategy for utterance comprehension in which once we recover enough contextual effects to satisfy our expectation of relevance we simply stop processing and choose this as the intended interpretation. Or – he is cashing in on the fact that communication is not as he is depicting it. In fact, if communication was not like this, not governed by the principle of relevance, then he would not have succeeded in making anyone smile. Communication is not a joke – although, of course (thank goodness), we can communicate in order to make jokes.