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The mechanisms of interpreting the implicative verb *manage*: a relevance-theoretic perspective

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Abstract

The implicative verb *manage* has long been discussed in semantic and pragmatic theory, particularly because it appears to involve potential semantic elements such as *effort*, *difficulty*, and *unexpectedness*. However, standard accounts overlook the structure of a core encoded meaning and the complex pragmatic mechanisms that determine how both core and potential elements are interpreted. This study investigates these issues by drawing on relevance theory and lexical pragmatics. A set of naturally occurring examples from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was examined to illustrate the insights developed here. These examples were qualitatively analyzed to identify the interpretative mechanisms that underlie the verb's meaning in context. The study demonstrates that *manage* has a two-layered conceptual structure: a core (obligatory) layer, and an outer (potential) layer. The core meaning encodes an (animate) subject reaching a positive outcome. Two additional figurative meanings, i.e. those involving non-volitional subjects and unintended negative outcomes, arise through pragmatic broadening and appear to have become conventionalized. The outer layer consists of three conceptual elements: [EFFORT], [DIFFICULTY], and [UNEXPECTEDNESS/UNLIKELIHOOD]. These elements are not encoded but are activated through free pragmatic enrichment, varying in type, degree, and communicative strength. Crucially, they contribute to the explicated proposition rather than forming separate implicated propositions. These findings suggest that the meaning of *manage* is more dynamic, fine-grained, and context-dependent than traditional accounts acknowledge. The study contributes to theories of lexical semantics and pragmatics by showing how encoded meaning interacts with graded contextual enrichment. The approach may also be applied to other implicative verbs. (примљено: 4. марта 2025; прихваћено: 27. маја 2025)

1. Introduction

1.1. The standard account of *manage*

Karttunen (1971) identified a semantically distinct class of verbs that take a sentential complement, such as *manage*, *forget*, *remember*, *prevent*, *hesitate*, and others. He refers to this class as implicative verbs and establishes the foundational principles for the standard semantic interpretation of sentences in which these verbs occur. In this paper, we focus on the verb *manage* as a representative of this class and use it to demonstrate how these standard interpretations apply and how they may need to be reconsidered.

- (1) Mark managed to pass the exam.
 - a. Mark passed the exam.
 - b. Mark tried to pass the exam.
 - c. The exam was difficult for Mark to pass.
 - d. It was unexpected/unlikely that Mark would pass the exam.

Karttunen says that it appears crucial to separate two elements in the semantic representation: explicated proposition and implicated propositions. The explicated proposition (a.) conveys the illocutionary force of the sentence, as it is the component that can be negated or questioned and includes the truth-conditional content. Since this proposition is meant to be new, in that the speaker informs the addressee with it, it is referred to as the main (foregrounded, at-issue) proposition. On the other hand, by using the implicative verb *manage* in the utterance, the speaker assumes additional propositions beyond the explicated – propositions that are not part of the truth-conditional content (a.–d.) (Karttunen, 1971: 351).

The standard literature (Baglini/Frances, 2015; Coleman, 1975; Karttunen, 1971; 2012; 2016; Karttunen/Peters, 1979; Luzón Marco, 1999; Potts, 2015) predominantly examines these implicated propositions, focusing on their categorization, their relation to the explicated proposition, their projection under entailment-canceling operators, the mechanisms by which they arise, and their contextual cancelability. In the following, we briefly discuss each aspect of the standard analysis.

First, the dependency between the explicated and implicated content is considered weak, as the falsity of an implicated proposition does not make the entire sentence meaningless. For instance, if the speaker is incorrect about the implicated content – such as in the cases where Mark passed the exam by luck rather than through effort, the exam is not difficult for Mark, or it is not unexpected or unlikely for Mark to pass the exam – the main proposition still holds true (Potts, 2015: 170). Therefore, the implicated propositions are generally considered logically independent of the explicated (truth-conditional) proposition, meaning that their falsity does not necessarily affect the truth value of the main proposition.

Second, implicated propositions are typically viewed as backgrounded assumptions that the speaker takes for granted and expects the addressee to share as part of the common ground. These backgrounded assumptions function as

supporting content that helps contextualize the foregrounded (main) propositional content (Potts, 2015: 190).

Third, the content of the backgrounded implications tends to project when the sentence is embedded under entailment-canceling operators such as negation, modality, or conditionals. This means that, while these operators affect the truth-conditional content, they preserve the backgrounded content. Therefore, the backgrounded propositions (b.–d.) project under the negation operator in (2), whereas the main proposition (a.) is altered.

- (2) Mark did not manage to pass the exam.
 - a. Mark did not pass the exam.
 - e. Mark tried to pass the exam.
 - f. The exam was difficult for Mark to pass.
 - g. It was unexpected/unlikely that Mark would pass the exam.

Fourth, it is believed that these implicated propositions are conventional and arise from the lexical meaning of *manage*. This suggests that the semantic elements that trigger the implications – *trying*, *difficulty*, and *unlikelihood/unexpectedness* – are hardwired into the verb's semantics. However, it has been observed that these semantic elements can be cancelled in certain contexts. Examples:

- (3) The alarm clock managed to wake me up.
- (4) The tennis player managed to injure himself during the warm-up before the match.

In both examples, *manage* does not imply trying because the outcomes are not the result of deliberate effort. In (2) trying is not implied because the subject is inanimate (the clock). In (3) the injury is an unintended outcome, not caused by the player's effort to injure himself. Therefore, the semantic elements of *trying*, *difficulty*, and *unlikelihood/unexpectedness* are context-dependent and not always actualized in interpretation.

Fifth, in the standard literature, there is ongoing discussion about whether the implicated propositions should be understood as presuppositions, conventional implicatures, or something else. In the seminal paper on implicative verbs Karttunen (1971) referred to these implications as presupposition, but later (1979, 2016) he adopted Grice's term conventional implicature. In more recent literature, such as in Baglini and Frances (2015) and Potts (2015), uncertainty is expressed about their categorization. Baglini and Frances (2015) are closer to viewing the trying implication as a presupposition rather than a conventional implicature, though not definitively, while they classify implications of difficulty and unexpectedness as pragmatic implications.

1.2. Limitations of the standard account and the theoretical framework

In this paper, we focus primarily on the meaning (i.e., the semantic structure) of the verb *manage* and the mechanisms involved in its interpretation. We do not treat the meaning of *manage* as a fixed dictionary definition; rather, we approach it as a concept situated within the conceptual system of the mental lexicon. In this framework, a concept functions as a kind of memory address to which the lexeme *manage* is conventionally linked (Clark, 2013: 244).

We propose that the concept associated with *manage* can be divided into two layers: a core (obligatory) layer and an outer (potential) layer.

The standard approach often overlooks the obligatory (core) aspect of meaning. In this paper, we examine the semantic structure of this core meaning and seek to answer the following questions: Does a single conventional core meaning exist that can be contextually expanded or narrowed, or are there multiple conventionalized meanings, making the lexeme polysemous? What is the nature of the interpretive process associated with this semantic layer – does it involve decoding, inference, or a combination of these mechanisms? Finally, we aim to understand the central conceptual layer's role in interpreting the entire sentence.

The semantic elements of *trying*, *difficulty*, and *unlikelihood/unexpectedness* belong to the outer layer, as they are not always actualized in interpretation. These elements are best understood as potential rather than inherent; their realization depends crucially on pragmatic inference guided by contextual factors. Standard accounts typically assume a more straightforward view, according to which these elements are actualized by default unless blocked or cancelled by specific contextual cues (e.g., a non-volitional subject or an undesirable outcome). Moreover, traditional theories generally treat these elements as contributing to implicated propositions, rather than to the explicated meaning.

In contrast, our paper argues that the interpretive mechanism for this potential semantic layer is more nuanced than traditionally assumed. We examine a set of questions concerning the interpretation of potential semantic elements associated with the outer conceptual layer. Specifically, we ask: What kind of inferential mechanism is responsible for interpreting these elements? To what extent are these elements semantically flexible, and how does context determine their interpretation – for example, in distinguishing between physical and mental effort? Are these elements inherently gradable, and if so, how is their degree of intensity pragmatically adjusted to reflect the speaker's intended meaning? Do these elements differ in communicative strength – are some more salient in a given context than others? Finally, to what extent – and for what reasons – is the interpretation of these outer-layer elements constrained by the core conceptual content of the utterance? These questions challenge binary models of conceptual specification, i.e., models in which a conceptual element is either present or absent in interpretation, and instead support a more fine-grained account that allows for gradual, context-sensitive adjustment.

Furthermore, we reconsider the standard analysis and propose that these potential semantic elements may, in fact, contribute to the explicated rather than

the implicated proposition. That is, they may enter the contextually enriched explicated proposition and become part of the utterance's truth-conditional content.

To address these issues, we adopt the theoretical framework of relevance theory, drawing on insights from lexical pragmatics, which help illuminate the interpretative mechanisms involved in contextualizing lexical meaning (Bezuidenhout/Morris, 2004; Blakemore, 2002; Carston, 2012; 2019; 2020; Clark, 2013; Depraetere, 2014; Mazzarella/Domaneschi, 2018; Simons, 2005; Sperber/Wilson, 2016; Wilson/Carston, 2007), as well as on insights from our previous research (Knjižar, 2019; 2025). Our analysis is based on an intuitive theoretical exploration of the verb *manage*, guided by relevance-theoretic principles. To illustrate key points, we refer to a small set of representative examples drawn from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which includes naturally occurring data from blog posts, blog comments, and transcripts of TV and radio shows. These examples are used illustratively to support and exemplify the theoretical claims, rather than to provide broad quantitative evidence. The analysis is divided into two sections: Section 2 examines the core layer of meaning, while Section 3 focuses on the outer conceptual layer.

2. The core conceptual layer

2.1. Encoded meaning, pragmatic broadening and conventionalization

We suppose that the verb inherently encodes animacy, with the subject functioning as an agent possessing potential intentionality and volition, as well as the capacity to exert effort toward achieving a specified outcome. Additionally, it encodes a resultative component, indicating the completion of an action, and a positive value component, suggesting the attainment of a beneficial or favorable result. Therefore, we start from the hypothesis that the primary encoded concept could be structured as following:

(I) [(ANIMATE) TO REACH SOMETHING POSITIVE]

The following example clearly illustrates this meaning.

(5) [*blog post*] [...] I manage to work on my blog, my novel, my personal reading (all three books), job and grad school applications, and some other tasks aside (like cleaning those dishes).

Since these elements are encoded, communication participants can, in principle, directly associate the verb *manage* with this concept in a process known as decoding. This interpretative process is fundamentally semantic, as it does not require contextual elements to access this layer of meaning. This means that the addressees will interpret the meaning of the verb *manage* in example (5) by directly associating it with the central conceptual layer within the conceptual system of their mental lexicon. In this utterance, the subject (the blogger) is animate, as the verb's meaning requires.

However, the encoded concept, as hypothetically structured in (I), exhibits a degree of flexibility. It can be modified to accommodate specific or *ad hoc* contextual demands and speaker intentions. Such modifications are frequently observed in figurative uses of the verb *manage*, including instances of metaphor and sarcasm.

First, both the corpus and the theoretical literature demonstrate that the verb *manage* can be used with non-volitional subjects, as illustrated in the following corpus example:

- (6) [*blog post*] Rarely does a pizza with so many big, mallet-like flavors [*spicy pork sausage, aged mozzarella, eggs, etc.*] manage to work in concert, but on this pie everything mingled.

In this example, the subject (pizza) is an inanimate entity. Since pizza cannot act intentionally, this creates a conflict with the verb's encoded meaning in (I). To resolve this semantic conflict, the verb's encoded meaning is metaphorically broadened to include inanimate subjects — entities that can reach something without potential intention or exerting effort — thus generating a new concept:

- (II) [(INANIMATE) TO REACH SOMETHING POSITIVE]

In addition to metaphorical broadening, the encoded concept can also be broadened through irony. For example:

- (7) [*blog post; K-Mart is a chain of retail stores in the United States*] It seems I always manage to forget that K-Mart is about as bad an idea as you can come up with -- kind of like a big dollar store, except with worse value products than you'd find at smaller stores.

In this example, the encoded meaning of the verb *manage*, which requires the complement to have a positive value, conflicts with the following contextual assumptions: *forgetting is generally unintentional and undesirable, especially when it leads to repeated poor decisions (e.g., shopping at K-Mart); the speaker holds a negative view of K-Mart, implying that remembering to avoid it would be the desirable or rational action*. This conflict leads to a broadening of the encoded meaning to encompass unintended, negative situations, thereby generating another concept:

- (III) [(ANIMATE/INANIMATE¹) TO REACH SOMETHING NEGATIVE]

It is worth examining whether these two novel concepts (II) and (III) are occasion-specific, *ad hoc* or whether they have become conventionalized, either fully or partially.

1 We have not found any cases in the excerpted corpus examples where an inanimate subject reaches something negative, but we believe it is possible. For example: *The storm managed to destroy all the flowers I had planted*.

We believe that these new concepts were not originally part of linguistic convention but are instead constructed *ad hoc* by the speaker to meet their specific needs. Since these concepts were not encoded, they were not interpreted through decoding but rather through what relevance theory terms free contextual adjustment of the encoded concept. Through this process of pragmatic adjustment – specifically, the broadening of the encoded concept – *ad hoc* concepts (II) and (III) emerge.

Such lexical pragmatic processes have the potential to drive semantic change – what initially functions as an *ad hoc* concept may eventually become an encoded concept. The key question, therefore, is whether these two newly formed concepts have become conventionalized as stable figurative meanings in their current synchronic state. Based on our linguistic intuition, we argue that they have, suggesting that the verb *manage* encodes one non-figurative, primary concept (I), alongside two figurative concepts (II) and (III). If this is true, all three senses would be incorporated into the verb's lexical entry, and the addressee would retrieve the intended meaning through disambiguation during interpretation (for discussions on meaning stabilization, see Carston, 2020; Wilson/Carston, 2007).

2.2. The role of the core conceptual layer in utterance interpretation

The next step is to determine the role of the core conceptual layer in the interpretation of the entire utterance. This conceptual structure contributes to the explicated proposition (i.e., the truth-conditional content). Thus, the explicated propositions, represented here as conceptual structures, cannot be derived without considering the central conceptual layer:

[THE BLOGGER REACHES A DESIRED POINT WHERE THEY ACTIVELY WORK ON THEIR BLOG, NOVEL, ETC.]

[A PIZZA WITH SO MANY BIG, MALLET-LIKE FLAVORS RARELY REACHES A DESIRABLE STATE WHERE IT HAS A BALANCED TASTE]

[THE BLOGGER REACHED AN UNDESIRED STATE WHERE HE FORGOT THAT K-MART IS ABOUT AS BAD AN IDEA AS ONE CAN COME UP WITH]

It seems that the core layer contributes minimally to the overall meaning of the utterance. When a speaker uses the verb *manage* merely to convey that the subject has achieved something, its contribution may be redundant, adding little beyond what is already conveyed. For example, the speaker in (5) could simply say: *I work on my blog, my novel, my personal reading (all three books), job and grad school applications, and some other tasks aside (like cleaning those dishes)* without using the verb *manage*. This raises the question: What motivates the use of the verb *manage* in such contexts? How is its use justified? The answer lies in enriching the conceptual core with additional semantic content. We will discuss this additional semantic content in the next section.

3. The outer conceptual layer

3.1. The outer conceptual elements

Based on corpus examples, as well as the literature discussed in the introductory section, the semantic core is enriched with three additional general conceptual components:

[EFFORT], [DIFFICULTY], [UNLIKELYHOOD/UNEXPECTEDNESS].

The first conceptual element states that reaching something requires some form of effort; the second, that it is difficult; and the third, that it is unlikely or unexpected.

Although these conceptual elements are commonly linked with the verb *manage*, they are merely potential. Their realization depends on ongoing contextual assumptions, so not every conceptual element is needed in every context. Since their realization is only potential, we have placed these conceptual elements in the outer, contextually dependent layer of meaning. Therefore, the implicative verb *manage* carries a semantic template in which encoded conceptual elements occupy the core, obligatory slot, while context-dependent conceptual elements fill outer slots that may be activated contextually (cf. Depraetere's 2014 analysis of modality).

the core slot: [(ANIMATE/INANIMATE) TO REACH A POSITIVE/NEGATIVE RESULT]

the outer slots: [EFFORT], [DIFFICULTY], [UNLIKELYHOOD/UNEXPECTEDNESS].

Filling the outer layer slots with these values does not occur through decoding (a semantic process) but through pragmatic inference. This process is known in relevance theory as the free pragmatic enrichment of the core (obligatory) layer of the concept. It is called *free* because no conceptual element is obligatory, and *pragmatic* because context is necessary for this process.

In the next section, we will examine the mechanism of free pragmatic enrichment, clarifying how the conceptual core is enriched across different contexts to enable the addressee to understand the intended conceptual content.

3.2. Mechanisms of free pragmatic enrichment

Free pragmatic enrichment of the encoded meaning involves filling the empty slots in the outer layer based on ongoing contextual assumptions. However, corpus examples have confirmed our assumption that this process is more nuanced than a simple filled-versus-unfilled slot distinction, with meaning enrichment being more fine-grained.

First, the conceptual elements ([EFFORT], [DIFFICULTY], [UNLIKELYHOOD/UNEXPECTEDNESS]) from the outer layer can be specified in various ways depending on the context. Initially, contextual specification involves identifying the types of these conceptual elements. This includes distinguishing between different types of effort, such as mental or physical, or more precisely specifying what the subject

did to reach something, as well as categorizing difficulty into physical, cognitive, or emotional types. It also involves determining whether the third conceptual element is characterized by unexpectedness, rarity, or unlikelihood, though other interpretations may be possible. Moreover, the outer conceptual elements are gradable, meaning their intensity can be adjusted according to the context. This adjustment helps determine factors such as the amount of effort required, the difficulty of a task, and the unlikelihood or unexpectedness of achieving a particular result.

Second, the corpus shows that the outer-layer conceptual elements exhibit varying degrees of strength. Some elements can be strongly communicated and highly salient, while others may be weakly communicated. The scale of strength ranges from conceptual elements that are strongly communicated, where the relevance of the utterance heavily depends on them, to those that are weakly communicated, where the relevance of the utterance is less reliant on these elements. Consequently, there is typically no simple dichotomy of whether the slot is filled or not; rather, the strength of communication of these elements is gradable.

Finally, this process of enrichment can also be constrained by the core conceptual layer.

In the following subsections, we will elaborate on the process of pragmatic enrichment using examples from the corpus.

3.2.1. Prominence of effort and difficulty

In the first type of discourse situations, communicators emphasize the effort and difficulty involved in reaching the intended result. As mentioned, both conceptual elements are gradable and specified in different ways, as illustrated in the following examples:

(8) [*spoken; NBC News: Today*]

MK: Scientology, whether it really is a religion has been an ongoing debate in our country, whether this should be a tax-free organization given all we've heard about it. You did manage to get out. Your dad left and then you did.

BT: Mm-Hm.

(9) [*blog post*]

I have ADHD. When I was younger, I couldn't keep my mind on anything for an extended period of time. Now that I'm "grown up" I am much better at this, [...] I keep a dayplanner, lists, and I prioritize like a madwoman. [...] I follow this process and I manage to work on my blog, my novel, my personal reading (all three books), job and grad school applications, and some other tasks aside (like cleaning those dishes).

(10) [spoken; CNN: CNN Newsroom]

V: The election monitors were allowed in for the first time in, I think 16 years. [...] You know, there was some problems like long lines in some polling stations and some stations were closed for no apparent reason. What was your experience like? Was it pretty smooth?

M: Extremely smooth – no mess, no fuss. Every so often the lines would get a little bit slow but most of the people who turned up did manage to vote.

In (8), general knowledge tells us that escaping from Scientology is highly difficult, meaning that it requires significant emotional and mental effort. Here, *did* highlights the accomplishment despite this challenge. Similarly, in (9), *manage* emphasizes that successfully doing multiple tasks demands considerable effort, given the high level of difficulty caused by the speaker's ongoing ADHD – something we also infer from general knowledge. However, unlike (8), where the effort remains unspecified, (9) explicitly details the concrete actions involved (*keeping a planner, making lists, prioritizing*). In contrast, in (10), the difficulty is much lower and is explicitly stated in the preceding discourse. The effort needed for voting is minimal, requiring only a small amount of patience to cope with the slow lines.

When effort is a more prominent semantic element, as demonstrated in the previous examples, speakers often highlight additional factors that aid the subject in achieving their goal. These factors can take various forms: they may be inherent human qualities, such as *the grace of God, blessing*, and *ingenuity*, as seen in example (11), or they may be facilitating circumstances – special situations that ease the process, as illustrated in example (12), where success is achieved by dealing with far fewer variables. In both cases, these elements contribute to the accomplishment, emphasizing that success often depends on more than just effort alone.

(11) [blog post] Procrastinators are a unique group. I've read something to the tune of us being perfectionists. We wait until the last minute because we know we won't get it just the way we want it. [...] This for sure happens at work where I have a project that has 7568 parts to it or more and I'm like ohhh, lemme just wait one week until it's due and I have to stay up all night, all week, in order to get it done. Who does that? I do. I also believe many procrastinators are at damn near genius level. Like how else, besides for the grace of God do we manage to pull things off? That's a blessing. That's ingenuity.

(12) [blog post] Surely the Masters of the Universe, dealing with far fewer variables, can manage to equal the value added by a teacher?

3.2.2. Prominence of difficulty and unlikelihood/unexpectedness

There are discourse situations where effort is less prominent, and instead, the most prominent conceptual element is *difficulty* or *unlikelihood/unexpectedness*. Examples:

- (13) [*comment on a blog post*] [...] they have never formally taken courses in the area in which they claim expertise. I have heard the same idiot – who also claims expertise in arts and letters – mispronounce the names of well-known artists and writers. It is, needless to say, quite hilarious. Unfortunately his fans don't know the difference. The fact that semi-literate idiots manage to find an audience seemingly hungry for information – although they're looking in the wrong places – is encouraging to me. I think that his audience is trying to learn general information in science and arts in small, palatable doses.
- (14) [*blog post*] I have tried myself to comment on games, but its hard, being talkative about what you are doing and why, and not being a cliché machine is hard. Yogcast, TotalBiscuit... These people manage to do that and be interesting and likeable.

In (13), the subject's effort and difficulty are less prominent, as they are not central to this discourse situation. The most prominent conceptual element is the unexpectedness of the subject achieving the intended result – specifically, that a semi-literate person, with no formal education in the relevant fields, could find an audience. Therefore, the focus is on how unexpected it is for such an individual to succeed, rather than on the effort or difficulty involved.

On the other hand, in (14), both effort and unexpectedness/unlikelihood are less prominent, with the most prominent conceptual element being difficulty. The speaker emphasizes how challenging it is to comment on games without sounding like a *cliché machine*. The mention of Yogcast and TotalBiscuit illustrates that, despite the difficulty, these individuals do this successfully, with the effort involved or the improbability of success being irrelevant in this context.

3.2.3. Effort slot unfilled contextually

The corpus shows that the effort slot can remain unfilled in contexts involving animate subjects. In these cases, the conceptual element of *unlikelihood/unexpectedness* becomes the most prominent. For example:

- (14) [*NPR: Morning Edition*]
 CM: A five-year-old girl has been reunited with her family after a traumatic ordeal here in New York City in the subway. Police say the girl's distraught father held her in his arms, then jumped in front of an oncoming train Monday. That father was struck and killed. His daughter did manage to survive, but was trapped under the train.
- (15) [*NPR show; Bandits on the Run filmed the song "Love in the Underground" in a NYC subway station*]
 SM: How did you manage to find an empty train station in New York?
 RS: Well, it was late at night [...]

In (14), *manage* cannot be enriched with the conceptual element of *effort* because the daughter's survival was due to luck, not intentional effort. The conceptual element of *unlikelihood* is the most prominent, as surviving such an event, where her father jumped in front of an oncoming train with her in his arms, was highly unlikely.

In (15), the *effort* slot is left empty, allowing the addressee to potentially fill it, but it is not a necessity. The speaker asks how the addressee managed to find the empty train station, without knowing whether it was due to a significant effort or simply luck. The addressee will reveal this. However, what is most prominent is the conceptual element of *unlikelihood*, as finding an empty train station in New York is highly unlikely. The response suggests that the outcome can be attributed to factors like timing rather than deliberate effort.

3.2.4. Effort slot blocked by inanimacy and negative outcome

When inanimate subjects are involved and the complement content is unintended and negative, the *effort* slot remains unfilled. In these cases, the conceptual element of *unlikelihood/unexpectedness* becomes the most prominent and strongly communicated. This is evident in the following examples, which we already presented in Section 2 when discussing the core conceptual layer.

(16) [blog post; *K-Mart is a chain of retail stores in the United States*] It seems I always manage to forget that K-Mart is about as bad an idea as you can come up with – kind of like a big dollar store, except with worse value products than you'd find at smaller stores.

(17) [blog post] Rarely does a pizza with so many big, mallet-like flavors [spicy pork sausage, aged mozzarella, eggs, etc.] manage to work in concert, but on this pie everything mingled.

In (16), as we have already noted, the use of *manage* is sarcastic. It is not enriched with the conceptual element of *effort* because the outcome is unintended and negative. Instead, *manage* is enriched with the conceptual element of *surprisingness*. The speaker emphasizes how surprising it is that he forgot that K-Mart is about as bad an idea as you can come up with.

In (17), *manage* is not enriched with the conceptual element of *effort* due to the inanimate subject, nor with *difficulty*, but rather with *unlikelihood*. However, what makes this case notable is that the inferential conceptual element of *unlikelihood* is explicitly communicated (*rarely*) rather than merely inferred.

3.3. The role of the outer conceptual layer in utterance interpretation

After this brief consideration of the mechanisms behind the interpretation of the outer conceptual layer of the implicative verb *manage*, the next step is to reconsider the role the outer layer conceptual elements play in utterance interpretation. There

are two current approaches. For the sake of simplicity, we will illustrate these two current approaches using the constructed example provided in Section 2.

(19) A: Mark passed the exam.

The first is the traditional (Karttunen's) approach, which we discussed in the introductory part of the paper. According to this approach, these conceptual elements contribute to what is implicated. In this standard approach, when speaker A uses *manage* in (19), they convey additional, implicated propositions that go beyond the proposition being explicated (see (1)).

Kent Bach's (1999) approach challenges the traditional model by suggesting that the outer conceptual content contributes to what is explicated rather than what is implicated. He argues that "[...] *manage* (to) seems to modify the verb in its infinitival complement, entailing that the action in question requires effort or involves difficulty" (Bach, 1999: 334). According to Bach, the use of *manage* introduces an additional clause that repeats part of the original sentence, resulting in more propositional content. As a result, there is no single explicated proposition when *manage* is used; instead, what is explicated consists of multiple propositions (*Mark tried to pass the exam; Mark passed the exam; The exam is difficult.*). However, Bach did not develop this approach further beyond a few sentences, and it remains a relatively isolated perspective in linguistic theory.

We will move away from the traditional (Karttunen's) approach and explore Kent Bach's suggestion. However, contrary to Bach, we believe that the outer semantic content conceptually contributes to the explicated proposition by enriching it, rather than introducing additional propositions that repeat material from the sentence. This approach, which probably requires less cognitive effort, is more aligned with relevance theory. The explicated proposition is developed both by the core semantic layer of the verb *manage* and through the contextual enrichment of its outer semantic layer. In this view, the verb *manage* indicates slots in the explicated proposition (invisible propositional elements) that are optionally filled in context, with filling at least one of these gaps being typical: *Mark passed the exam through effort, despite the difficulty and unexpectedness.*

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we challenge the standard interpretation, which suggests that the semantic elements of *try*, *difficulty*, and *unexpectedness* in the verb *manage* trigger implications, unless contextual elements cancel them. We also address the obligatory aspect of meaning, which the standard approach overlooks. We have examined these issues using examples from the corpus and through the lens of relevance theory, leading us to the following conclusions:

First, the meaning of the implicative verb *manage* has two conceptual layers: the core, obligatory layer, and the outer, potential semantic layer.

Second, we argue that the verb *manage* encodes the core meaning of an animate subject reaching something positive, interpreted through decoding. However, two

figurative meanings – representing non-volitional subjects or unintended negative outcomes – emerge through pragmatic adjustment, initially created by the speaker to address specific contextual needs. Initially, these meanings were not encoded but arise through a process of free contextual adjustment. We argue that these meanings have become stabilized and conventionalized, which has led to *manage* having three encoded conceptual structures. Therefore, in context, the intended concept is accessed by the addressee through disambiguation.

Third, based on the corpus examples and the literature discussed in the introductory section, we have identified three additional conceptual components that enrich the semantic core of the verb *manage*: [EFFORT], [DIFFICULTY], [UNLIKELYHOOD/UNEXPECTEDNESS]. These outer elements are not realized through decoding but through free pragmatic enrichment. Free pragmatic enrichment involves filling the outer conceptual slots based on contextual assumptions, but this process is more nuanced than simply filling or not filling these slots. The conceptual elements can be specified in various ways depending on the context, including salience, gradability and type. Moreover, this process of enrichment can also be constrained by the core conceptual layer.

Fourth, we move away from the traditional approach, proposing that the outer semantic content enriches the explicated proposition, rather than introducing additional propositions, neither implicated nor explicated. The verb *manage* creates slots in the proposition, which are filled through contextual enrichment.

While this research offers some insights into the semantics and pragmatics of the verb *manage*, it is still preliminary and will benefit from further refinement through corpus and experimental research. Additional corpus examples and experiments might challenge these findings. Moreover, these insights could potentially be applied to other implicative verbs as well.

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Sažetak

MEHANIZMI INTERPRETACIJE IMPLIKATIVNOG GLAGOLA *MANAGE* IZ PERSPEKTIVE TEORIJE RELEVANTNOSTI

Ovo istraživanje ispituje semantičke i pragmatičke mehanizme koji stoje u osnovi interpretacije implikativnog glagola *manage*, fokusirajući se kako na njegovo kodirano značenje, tako i na kontekstualne procese koji ga obogaćuju. Rad je motivisan ograničenjima standardnog pristupa, koji obično naglašava implikacije *napora*, *teškoće* i *neočekivanosti*, ali zanemaruje strukturu suštinskog, centralnog kodiranog značenja i kompleksne pragmatičke mehanizme koji određuju kako se tumače i jezgro i potencijalni elementi. Centralna tvrdnja rada jeste da glagol *manage* ima dvoslojnu konceptualnu strukturu koja se sastoji od centralnog, obaveznog sloja i spoljašnjeg, potencijalnog sloja. Centralno kodirano značenje odgovara konceptu animatnog subjekta koji doseže pozitivan rezultat, do kojeg se dolazi procesom dekodiranja. Međutim, analiza pokazuje da *manage* poseduje i dva figurativna, konvencionalizovana značenja: jedno koje uključuje neanimatne subjekte i drugo koje podrazumeva neneravne negativne ishode. Ona su u početku upotrebljavana *ad hoc*, radi specifičnih kontekstualnih potreba, ali su, usled ponavljanja, postala dovoljno stabilna da se mogu smatrati delom kodirane konceptualne strukture ovog glagola. Tako *manage* sada ima tri kodirana centralna konceptualna sloja, a nameravano značenje identifikuje se kroz pragmatički proces razrešavanja dvosmislenosti. Izvan centralnog sloja, studija identifikuje tri dodatna konceptualna elementa, [NAPOR], [TEŠKOĆA] i [NEVEROVATNOST/NEOČEKIVANOST], koja mogu da obogate semantičko jezgro glagola. Ovi spoljašnji elementi ne ostvaruju se dekodiranjem, već kroz slobodno pragmatičko obogaćivanje, proces u okviru teorije relevantnosti u kome slušalac popunjava spoljašnja konceptualna mesta na osnovu kontekstualnih pretpostavki. Ovo obogaćivanje je suptilnije uređeno nego što to postojeći opisi sugerišu: spoljašnji elementi se međusobno razlikuju po tipu (npr. mentalni naspram fizičkog napora), stepenu (intenzitet napora, teškoće ili neočekivanosti) i komunikativnoj snazi (komunikativno više i manje prominentno). Važno je istaći da ovaj proces obogaćivanja spoljašnjeg sloja može biti ograničen osnovnim konceptualnim slojem. Rad takođe dovodi u pitanje tradicionalni stav da ovi elementi doprinose impliciranim propozicijama. Umesto toga, u radu se zaključuje, uz modifikaciju i preciziranje predloga Kenta Baha, da spoljašnji elementi obogaćuju ekspliciranu propoziciju, postajući deo sadržaja u smislu uslova istinitosti, bez uvođenja dodatnih, zasebno artikuliranih propozicija. Prema ovom gledištu, *manage* stvara prazna mesta unutar eksplicirane propozicije, koja se mogu popuniti kroz kontekstualno obogaćivanje. Nalazi ove studije unapređuju uvide iz teorije relevantnosti u oblasti leksičkog značenja i ističu dinamičku interakciju između kodiranih sadržaja i pragmatičkog obogaćivanja. Iako je analiza preliminarne, ona otvara puteve za dalja korpusna i eksperimentalna istraživanja i može biti primenjena i na druge implikativne glagole.

Ključne reči:

teorija relevantnosti, implikativni glagol *manage*, konceptualna struktura, mehanizmi interpretacije, dekodiranje, slobodno pragmatičko obogaćivanje