

LSA.311: Lecture 5

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Where We Are

- Two properties of presupposition
 - "Taken for granted"
 - Generally inherited by complex containing structures
- Stalnaker's Proposal
 - Presuppositions as requirements on the common ground
 - Inheritance happens because of the way that the common ground evolves in complex discourses

What We'll Do Today

- A Closer Look at Stalnaker's Project
- Integrating Stalnaker's proposal within a compositional semantics

The Two Properties

- When a sentence with a presuppositional component is asserted, the presupposition is not thereby put forward as potentially new and worthy of discussion; instead, normally the presuppositional component is taken to be something that the speaker is taking for granted, assuming that it is already agreed upon.
- When a sentence with a presuppositional component is embedded in a larger structure, more often than not the larger structure inherits that presuppositional component.

Stalnaker's Proposal

- Property 1: A sentence ϕ presupposes that p iff the use of ϕ would for some reason normally be inappropriate unless it is common ground that p .
- Property 2: In complex sentences, the common ground evolves according to natural principles. These explain the inheritance patterns of presuppositions.

Hey, wait a minute!

- A: It was Sam who broke the typewriter.
- B: Hey, wait a minute! I had no idea that the typewriter was broken.
- B': #Hey, wait a minute! I had no idea that Sam did that.[12pt]
- A: John is going to drop out of school again.
- B: Hey, wait a minute! I had no idea that he dropped out of school before.
- B': #Hey, wait a minute! I had no idea that he was going to do that.

Accommodation

- Kai: *I am sorry that I am late. I had to take my daughter to the doctor.*
- Appropriate even though it is clearly *not* common ground that I have a daughter.
- OK, because
 - not a controversial issue
 - not an outlandish piece of information
 - you trust me on this
- Stalnaker: this is precisely expected to be possible
- See von Stechow (2000), Stalnaker (2002), Simons (2003)

The Problem of Presupposition Projection

- Why “Projection”?
- Really: the problem of how presuppositional components of meaning behave compositionally in complex constructions
- So: the Compositionality Problem for Presuppositions
- In fact, the term *projection* was the one used to refer to composition of meaning early on in the history of generative grammar (Katz & Fodor, Katz & Postal)

Negation

- Examples
 - The mathematician who proved Goldbach’s conjecture wasn’t a woman.
 - John did not invite every foreign graduate student to his party.
 - John isn’t going to drop out of school again.
 - It wasn’t Sam who broke the typewriter.
- If ϕ presupposes that p , then *not* ϕ will also presuppose that p

The Cumulative Hypothesis

- If ϕ presupposes that p , then any sentence embedding ϕ will also presuppose that p .
- Often attributed to (blamed on) Langendoen & Savin (not quite accurate)

Conjunction

- Examples
 - Thanksgiving will be great. The turkey is organic and Harry's wife is a great cook.[3pt]presupposes that Harry has a wife.
 - Harry is married and Harry's wife is a great cook.[3pt]does not presuppose that Harry has a wife.
 - If the turkey is organic and Harry's wife is a great cook, Thanksgiving will be great, otherwise
 - If Harry is married and Harry's wife is a great cook, Thanksgiving will be great, otherwise
- If ϕ presupposes that p , then ψ and ϕ will also presuppose that p , unless ψ entails (together with assumptions "in the common ground") ϕ

Conjunction, the other way

- Examples
 - Harry's wife is a great cook and the turkey is organic.
 - # Harry's wife is a great cook and Harry is married.
- If ϕ presupposes that p , then ϕ and ψ will also presuppose that p

Conditionals

- Examples
 - If this dish wasn't catered, then Harry's wife is a great cook.
 - If Harry is married, then Harry's wife is a great cook.
 - If Harry's wife is a great cook, then Thanksgiving will be a success.
- If ϕ presupposes that p , then *if ϕ , then ψ* will also presuppose that p .
- If ϕ presupposes that p , then *if ψ , then ϕ* will also presuppose that p , unless ψ entails (together with assumptions "in the common ground") ϕ .

Stalnaker's Explanation

- Once a proposition has been asserted in a conversation, then (unless or until it is challenged) the speaker can reasonably take it for granted for the rest of the conversation.
- In particular, when a speaker says something of the form *A and B*, he may take it for granted that *A* (or at least that his audience recognizes that *he* accepts that *A*) after he has said it.
- The proposition that *A* will be added to the background of common assumptions before the speaker asserts that *B*.

Stalnaker's Explanation (cont'd)

- Now suppose that *B* expresses a proposition that would, for some reason, be inappropriate to assert except in a context where *A*, or something entailed by *A*, is presupposed.
- Even if *A* is *not* presupposed initially, one may still assert *A and B* since by the time one gets to saying that *B*, the context has shifted, and it is by then presupposed that *A*.
- Class: Why is the projection behavior of conjunction asymmetric?

Notation (from Heim)

- $c + (\phi \text{ and } \psi) = (c + \phi) + \psi$
- Asserting a conjunction in a context *c* is the same as first asserting the first conjunct and then asserting the second conjunct in the context resulting from asserting the first conjunct.

Presuppositions in Conditionals

- If this dish wasn't catered, then Harry's wife is a great cook.
- If Harry is married, then Harry's wife is a great cook.
- Stalnaker: "Here we need first the assumption that what is explicitly *supposed* becomes (temporarily) a part of the background of common assumptions in subsequent conversation, and second that an *if* clause is an explicit supposition."

What's Left to Do After Stalnaker 1974

- Find and explain the various sources of presuppositional requirements on the common ground.
- Establish how independent the truth-conditional content is from the presuppositional pragmatics. Can the truth-conditional content of complex constructions work in ignorance of presuppositional ingredients especially if the latter are conventional/semantic?
- Extend projection analysis to other constructions: negation, disjunction, quantification, attitudes.

Some Possible Sources of Presupposition

- Semantic presupposition
 - partiality
 - three-valued semantics
- Brute force presupposition
 - two-dimensional semantics
- Conversational implicature

Partiality as a source

- *The King of France is bald.*
- $\llbracket \text{the KoF is bald} \rrbracket = \lambda w : \text{there is exactly one } x \text{ s.t. } x \text{ is KoF in } w. \text{ the unique } x \text{ s.t. } x \text{ is KoF in } w \text{ is bald in } w$
- The sentence expresses a partial presupposition that is
 - true of worlds in which the unique KoF is bald
 - false of worlds in which the unique KoF is not bald
 - not defined for worlds in which there isn't a unique KoF
- Possible Alternative: three-valued semantics

Stalnaker's Bridge

- "Since the whole point of expressing a proposition is to divide the relevant set of alternative possible situations – [the context set] – into two parts, to distinguish those in which the proposition is true from those in which the proposition is false, it would obviously be inappropriate to use a sentence which failed to do this. Thus, that a proposition is presupposed by a sentence in the technical semantic sense provides a reason for requiring that it be presupposed in the pragmatic sense whenever the sentence is used.

Shortcutting

- I believe that semantic presupposition is the primary source for presupposition.
- In particular, I am highly skeptical of the implicature-based approaches.
- For reasons of time, I will simply assume that I am right.
- We will therefore work under the assumption that somehow presuppositional properties are encoded in the lexical semantics of (many) presupposition triggers.
- \Rightarrow But see next Monday's class for some possible discussion.

Another Look at Conjunction

- $c + (\phi \text{ and } \psi) = (c + \phi) + \psi$
- Question: Suppose that ψ has a presupposition that is induced by partiality in its semantics. Then what proposition does ϕ and ψ express?
- \Rightarrow The need for a compositional semantics for complex constructions containing partial propositions.
- Question: Should this compositional calculation mirror the asymmetry of the way the context gets changed?
- If so, what is the resulting picture? What explains what? What depends on what?
- Prediction of Heim & Kratzer system: accumulation of partiality.
- Alternative: three-valued semantics. [Truth-table on blackboard!]

Two Strategies

- The "Semantic Strategy"
 - Compute the semantic value of the complex construction.
 - This will involve semantic presuppositions of the preferred kind (Fregean, 3-valued, 2-dimensional).
 - Via bridging principles à la Stalnaker predict the empirically observed pragmatic presuppositions of the whole complex construction.
- The "Pragmatic Strategy"
 - Compute semantic presupposition only for the simple sentence.
 - Analyze the pragmatic use of the complex construction as involving assertion of the simple sentence inside it in an "auxiliary" context.
 - The dynamic relation between the input context and the auxiliary context in which the simple sentence is asserted determines the pragmatic presuppositions of the whole complex construction.

A Third Strategy

- Heim's Project
 - “[A] compositional assignment of CCPs to the sentences of a language can fully replace a compositional assignment of truthconditions of the sort normally envisaged by semanticists, without any loss of empirical coverage.”
 - Of course, this will only work if in general, “the truthconditional aspect of the meaning of any expression is predictable on the basis of its CCP”

What We Will Do Next

- A Look at Negation
- A Look at Disjunction
- Evaluating the Three Strategies of integrating Stalnaker's proposal within a compositional semantics
- Advanced Topic: Kinds of Presupposition Triggers