

LSA.311: Lecture 7

Kai von Fintel

July 18, 2005

The Plan for Today

- Two kinds of presupposition triggers
 - Abusch: soft and hard
 - Abusch's proposal
- Ease of accommodation
 - Attempts at Explanation

Soft vs. Hard

- Soft triggers: presupposition triggers which are so weak and easily suspendable that it is attractive not to analyze them with semantic presuppositions, but instead with a different mechanism.
- Abusch's Taxonomy
 - soft: know, discover, stop, continue, win
 - hard: too, also, even, again, NPI either, it-clefts

Karttunen's Discovery

- Did you discover that you had not told the truth?
- If I discover later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone.
- It is possible that I will discover later that I have not told the truth.
- If Pavarotti discovers that Loren is now in New York, he will be angry.
- Noticing a couple engaged in a furious argument:
 - Perhaps she just discovered that he's having an affair.

Differential Behavior

- I discovered that my brother lives in Norway. *vs.*
- I discovered that I have a brother living in Norway.
- If I discover that my brother lives in Norway, ...
- Whatever analysis we come up with for the soft/hard distinction will have to account for the differential behavior of the two presuppositions here (the factive presupposition of *discover* and the existence presupposition of *my brother*).

Stop Smoking

- A casual conversation between two people who are meeting for the first time:
 - I notice that you keep chewing on your pencil. Have you recently stopped smoking?
- I have no idea whether Jane ever smoked, but she hasn't stopped smoking.

Harder to Cancel

- Simons: "Not all expected presuppositions fail to arise in explicit ignorance contexts. In particular, presuppositions which have clearly identifiable lexical triggers such as *even*, *too*, and *again* are not cancelable in this way."
- Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (2nd edition: 385): "In sum, conversationally triggered presuppositions can be defeated just as other conversational implicatures can. ... Where instead a trigger is conventional, a presupposition is no more defeasible than an entailment."

Again?

- Meeting a slight acquaintance at a video store:
 - Are you renting "Manhattan" again?
- # I don't know if Jane ever rented "Manhattan" before, but perhaps she's renting it again.

Abusch's Proposal

- Using *stop* brings with it a set of alternatives, minimally the set $\{stop, continue\}$.
- There is a default presumption that one of the alternatives is true.
- Since both alternatives entail that the activity was present before the evaluation time, we get the desired inference.
- Things get complicated when we look at projection, since Abusch needs the default presumption to be active in local contexts.

Alternative Idea

- Maybe the difference between soft and hard triggers is that soft triggers trigger presuppositions that are easier to accommodate.

Abusch's argument

- Hard triggers don't allow local accommodation
- John either stopped smoking or started smoking.
- After the first meeting, John will either continue missing meetings, or continue attending them.
- # After the first meeting, John will either miss the second meeting too, or attend the second meeting too.
- John will either attend the first meeting, or miss it.[6pt] #? And he will either attend the second meeting too, or miss the second meeting too.

Ease of Accommodation

- I'm sorry I'm late. I had to take my daughter to the day care centre.

What makes accommodation easy?

- (i) The ease of accommodation should depend on how much trust the hearers have in the speaker's information state about the relevant issue.
- (ii) The ease of accommodation should depend on how well the proposition fits into the hearers' belief systems.
 - I'm sorry I'm late. I had to take my llama to the vet.
- (iii) The ease of accommodation should depend on whether the proposition is expected to be controversial.
 - Oh dad. I forgot to tell you that my fiancée and I are going to Seattle for the weekend.

A Hard Case

- He is very cute. (B&Z)

The Insufficient Content Principle

- Accommodation is only possible when the presupposition is descriptively rich. If a low content presupposition cannot be resolved, infelicity results. (Geurts & van der Sandt)

The Amsterdam father & The Geologist

- A man died in a car crash yesterday evening. The Amsterdam father of four was found to have been drinking.
- The geologist was surprised.

The Former – the Latter

- Flynn came up to bat followed by Blake; the former got a hit and the latter bunted safely.
 - A: Who’s been up in this inning?
 - B: ??The former was Flynn and the latter was Blake.

Anaphoric cases

- Another man came in.
- John is having dinner in New York too.
- John is indeed having dinner in New York.

Du

- Wie geht es Dir?how goes it you:FAMILIAR’How are you?’

Soames

- [The foreman]_F was fired too.
- “The crucial point is that what [the foreman sentence] requires is not that the general proposition [that someone other than the fireman was fired] be in the preceding background, but that one or more members of a set of more specific propositions be there. If this requirement is not met, hearers will typically not know which propositions to add, and so will have to ask for clarification. Here, resistance to accommodation is explained by the nature of the requirement to be accommodated.”

Focus and Clefts

- Mary ate a [HAM]_F sandwich.
- It was Mary who broke the typewriter.

Soames

- “Accommodation may take place and the conversation might proceed without comment. However, there is something a bit off about such a case – a kind of pretense that the (or a) topic of conversation prior to the remark was that of determining who broke the typewriter.”
- “This suggests that [the typewriter cleft sentence] pragmatically requires the (or a) topic of conversation prior to the utterance be that of determining who broke the typewriter.”

The Discourse Record Principle

- Presupposition about what is in the discourse record may not be accommodated. (B&Z)

Medias in res

- The man with the black hat returned to the café. The gazed look in his eye suggested trouble. I was trapped inside, and he was headed my way.
- I wanted to go to Sweden too, but my many nights at the casino and at the shady bar in Central Square prevented me from being able to do so.
- It was one of the grand lawyers of Lahore who suggested that I should go to the Hira Mandi, the Diamond Market, the area of the singing and dancing girls, the prostitutes’ area. (V.S. Naipaul)

Informative Clefts

- John entered the room. It was at that moment that I realized that he was my brother.
- cf. work by J. Delin

Presupposition trigger	Excerpted types
factive verbs	
with sentential subject complement	count, make sense, suffice, amuse, bother, matter
with sentential object complement	know, realize, resent, find out, discover, see, notice
factive adjectives	
with sentential object complement	glad, proud, lucky
with sentential subject complement	significant, odd, tragic, exciting, relevant
aspectual verbs	begin, start, stop, finish, cease, continue, carry on, avoid, force, prevent, hesitate
<i>it</i>-clefts	it is/was C _i which/whom/that S-C _i
definite NPs	
definite NPs	the N, 'dhi' N
demonstrative NPs	this N, that N, those N, these N
possessives	genitive's +N, possessive pronoun + N
<i>too</i>	Jennifer likes to eat chocolate too.

Table 1 Excerpted Triggers

- from Jennifer Spenader's Thesis (Stockholm 2002)

Table 2 Number of tokens of each trigger type, number of tokens for each lexical item of each trigger type

Trigger type	Total number of tokens		Binding		Accommodation		
	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	
factive verbs	subject complement	0	28 (26%)		81 (74%)		
	object complement	109 (47) ¹	{9}		{38}		
factive adjectives	subject complement	0	0				
	object complement	0					
aspectual verbs	1st		10 (15%)		58 (85%)		
<i>it</i> -clefts	31		19 (61%)		12 (39%)		
annotator	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	
definite NPs ²		411	390	137 (33%)	113 (30%)	115 (28%)	155 (40%)
	the NP	248	235	78 (31%)	67 (28%)	56 (22%)	82 (35%)
	demonstrative NPs	53	47	27 (50%)	16 (34%)	9 (19%)	10 (21%)
	possessives	110	108	32 (29%)	30 (28%)	50 (45%)	63 (58%)
<i>too</i>	45		43 (96%)		2 (4%)		

What We'll Do on Wednesday

- Start talking about indexicality
- Read Stalnaker's "Pragmatics"