

LSA.311: Lecture 4

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Our Next Topic

- Presupposition
- One of the components of meaning that connect a linguistic expression to the context of utterance
- Question:
 - Are presuppositional facts encoded in the linguistic meaning of expressions or are they “pragmatically predictable”?

First Property of Presuppositions

- 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.

Second Property of Presuppositions

- When a sentence with a presuppositional component is embedded in a larger structure, more often than not the larger structure inherits that presuppositional component.

A Bunch of Examples

- Existence presupposition of definites
- Existence presupposition of quantifiers
- Clefts
- Factive verbs
- Additive particles
- Change-of-Phase Predicates

Existence presupposition of definites

- The mathematician who proved Goldbach's conjecture was a woman.
- The mathematician who proved Goldbach's conjecture wasn't a woman.
- Maybe the mathematician who proved Goldbach's conjecture was a woman.
- It is unlikely that the mathematician who proved Goldbach's conjecture was a woman.
- If the mathematician who proved Goldbach's conjecture was a woman, then she will get the Fields Medal this year.

Existence presupposition of quantifiers

- John invited every foreign graduate student to his party.
- John did not invite every foreign graduate student to his party.
- Maybe John invited every foreign graduate student to his party.
- It is unlikely that John invited every foreign graduate student to his party.
- If John invited every foreign graduate student to his party, we will need more beer.

Clefts

- It was Sam who broke the typewriter.
- It wasn't Sam who broke the typewriter.
- Maybe it was Sam who broke the typewriter.
- It is unlikely that it was Sam who broke the typewriter.
- If it was Sam who broke the typewriter, then he will have to fix it.

Factive verbs

- Bill is aware that Mary kissed John.
- Bill is not aware that Mary kissed John.
- Maybe Bill is aware that Mary kissed John.
- It is unlikely that Bill is aware that Mary kissed John.
- If Bill is aware that Mary kissed John, then he will not talk to John tonight.

Additive particles

- John is going to drop out of school again.
- John isn't going to drop out of school again.
- Maybe John is going to drop out of school again.
- It is unlikely that John is going to drop out of school again.
- If John is going to drop out of school again, his mother will be upset.

Change-of-Phase Predicates

- John has quit smoking.
- John hasn't quit smoking.
- Maybe John has quit smoking.
- It is unlikely that John has quit smoking.
- If John has quit smoking, then we won't need ashtrays at the party.

Research Questions

- Questions of Description
 - Give a catalog of presupposition triggers
 - Describe the facts of presupposition inheritance
- Questions of Explanation
 - What is the nature of the presuppositional component of meaning?
 - Why and how do presupposition triggers trigger the presuppositions they trigger?
 - Why and how do presuppositions get inherited by complex utterances?

The Plan

- Stalnaker 1974
 - What are presuppositions?
 - Requirements on the common ground
 - Why do they get inherited the way they do?
 - Because of the way that the common ground evolves in complex discourses
- Remaining issues and other perspectives

Presuppositions as Requirements on the Common Ground

- A speaker S presupposes that p iff S believes that it is common ground that p .
- It is common ground in a group X that p iff for all members x of the group, x accepts that p , x believes that all members accept that p , x believes that all members believe that all members accept that p , etc.
- A sentence ϕ presupposes that p iff the use of ϕ would *for some reason* normally be inappropriate unless the speaker presupposed p .
 - Stalnaker says “sentence ϕ requires the presupposition that p ”.

A Slightly Different Picture

- Add a soupçon of “objectivity”
 - 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 .
- Add a bit of “generality”
 - A sentence ϕ imposes a presuppositional requirement P iff the use of ϕ would for some reason normally be inappropriate unless the common ground has property P .
 - special case: $P =$ ‘entails that p ’
 - other special case: $P =$ ‘for some salient male x , entails that x was at the party’.

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.
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- 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

- I am sorry that I am late. I had to take my daughter to the doctor.

Presuppositions in Conjunctions

- Thanksgiving will be great. The turkey is organic and Harry's wife is a great cook.
presupposes that Harry has a wife.
- Harry is married and Harry's wife is a great cook.
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

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*. 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*.

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.

What We'll Do Next Week

- Sources of Presupposition
- Systems for Presupposition Inheritance