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24.910 Topics in Linguistic Theory: Propositional Attitudes
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Part I – Presupposition (cont'd)

1. Presupposition Projection / Filters

[Finishing up from last time]

1.1. Conditionals

❖ **Generalization (Karttunen, p. 178, no. 13):**

1. Given a sentence of the form **If A then B**:
 - a) If A presupposes C, then S presupposes C
 - b) If B presupposes C, then S presupposes C unless A semantically entails C

Examples:

2. If Sue has stopped smoking cigars, all of John's students will be happy.
 ~> Sue previously smoked cigars
 ~> John has students

1.1.1. *A entails C; B presupposes C*
 → C is not projected (but other presuppositions are)

❖ **Simple Case: A is a presupposition of B (A = C)**
 → A is not projected

Example:

3. If John has students, all of them will be happy.
 OR ... they will all be happy.
 ~/> John has students

❖ **Case 2: A merely entails C, where C is a presupposition of B**
 → C is not projected [but other presuppositions are projected]

New Attempts:

4.
 - a) John has quit smoking cigars.
 [entails: John doesn't (now) smoke cigars]
 ~> John previously smoked cigars
 - b) John regrets that he doesn't smoke cigars.
 ~> John doesn't smoke cigars.
5. If John has quit smoking cigars, he will regret that he doesn't smoke them (when he takes his next trip to Cuba).
 ~/> John doesn't smoke cigars.
 ~> John previously smoked cigars.

- 6.
- a) John has quit smoking cigars.
[entails: John doesn't (now) smoke cigars]
~> John previously smoked cigars
 - b) John regrets that he doesn't smoke cigars or pipe tobacco.
~> John doesn't smoke cigars
~> John doesn't smoke pipe tobacco
7. If John has quit smoking cigars, he will regret that he doesn't smoke cigars or pipe tobacco (when he goes to Cuba next week).
~/> John doesn't smoke cigars.
~> John previously smoked cigars.
~> John doesn't smoke pipe tobacco.

1.2. Conjunction

❖ Generalization (Karttunen, p. 179, no. 17)

8. Given a sentence of the form **A and B**:
- a) If A presupposes C, then S presupposes C
 - b) If B presupposes C, then S presuppose C unless A semantically entails C

Examples:

9. Bill has children and all of his children are girls.
~/> Bill has children
10. # All of Bill's children are girls and he has children.
[K's claim: (10) does presuppose that Bill has children]

More complicated:

- 11.
- a) John has quit smoking cigars.
[entails: John doesn't (now) smoke cigars]
~> John previously smoked cigars
 - b) John regrets that he doesn't smoke cigars or pipe tobacco.
~> John doesn't smoke cigars
~> John doesn't smoke pipe tobacco
12. John has quit smoking cigars, and now (that he's going to Cuba) he regrets that he doesn't smoke cigars or pipe tobacco.
~/> John doesn't smoke cigars.
~> John previously smoked cigars.
~> John doesn't smoke pipe tobacco.

Same asymmetry?:

13. # (Now that he's going to Cuba) John regrets that he doesn't smoke cigars or pipe tobacco, and he has quit smoking cigars.

1.3. Disjunction

- ❖ **Generalization:** If a presupposition of one disjunct is contradicted by the other disjunct, it does not project. (Other presuppositions project.)

[Note: no asymmetry, though Karttunen tries to make it parallel to the others]

14.

- a) Jack has no children.
[contradicts: Jack has children.]
- b) All of Jack's children are boys.
~> Jack has children

15. Either Jack has no children or all of his children are boys.
~> Jack has children

16. Either all of Jack's children are boys or he has no children.
~> Jack has children

1.4. Further complications

In some cases, “entailment” should be taken to be a broader relation:

[Background: Fred believes that all Mormons wear special “holy underwear”]

17. Either Geraldine is not a Mormon or she has given up wearing her holy underwear
~> If Geraldine is a Mormon, she wears / wore holy underwear

→ This is one argument for a more pragmatic view of presupposition

[since these kinds of background assumptions shouldn't be in the semantic theory]

2. Stalnaker on Pragmatic Presupposition

- Stalnaker, 1974. ‘Pragmatic Presuppositions.’

2.1. Some initial points:

- Giving a pragmatic explanation of presupposition does not have to mean giving an informal explanation – we just need a formal pragmatic theory.
- Some pragmatic view of presupposition is necessary anyway:
Even if presupposition is a semantic notion, we still have to explain why presuppositions need to be background beliefs [see, e.g., p. 53]
- Certain inferences could potentially be both presuppositions AND entailments (e.g., factive verbs)
- We can give default definitions of “assertion,” “presupposition,” etc. in terms of belief, etc. even though there are cases that deviate from this.

For example: Asserting something that's already common ground

- “Windy out, isn’t it?”

[Interlocutors are acting as if it weren’t already common ground so as to have something to say]

Or: Presupposing something in order to convey it indirectly:

- A: The new guy is really good looking.
B: Yeah, his wife is gorgeous, too.

[B is pretending that A already knows that the new guy is married in order to de-emphasize the fact that B is telling A that the new guy is married and/or make it less obvious that B realized what A was getting at when she said he was handsome.]

2.2. The flavor of a Stalnakerian explanation:

[Stalnaker uses examples based on Karttunen’s]

❖ Example 1: Different kinds of factive verbs: *regret*, *realize*, *discover*

Observation: Factivity can vary based on apparently non-grammatical factors:

- 18. If I regret later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone.
~> I have not told the truth
- 19. Did you regret that you had not told the truth?
~> You had not told the truth
- 20. If I realize later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone.
~/> I have not told the truth
- 21. Did you realize that you had not told the truth?
~> You had not told the truth
- 22. If I discover later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone.
~/> I have not told the truth
- 23. Did you discover that you had not told the truth?
~/> You had not told the truth

	<i>regret realize discover</i>		
~> p ?	<i>that p</i>		
1 st person	+	-	-
2 nd person	+	+	-

❖ **Explanation of (20) (for example):**

- Assumption 1: x realizes that p entails 2 things:
 - p
 - x comes to believe that p
- Assumption 2: By default, we expect the “belief” part to be the main point of the utterance (so that the factive entailment should be presupposed)
- The *if*-clause temporarily adds to common ground, but also indicates that this is not already a background belief:
 - the speaker did not tell the truth
 - the speaker comes to believe that they didn’t tell the truth
- If this is not already a background belief, then one of the following must hold:
 - (i) the speaker does not know whether they told the truth
 - or (ii) the speaker has not come to believe that they didn’t tell the truth

But if (ii) holds, then (i) must hold as well.

❖ **Compare (21):**

- The *if*-clause temporarily adds to common ground, but also indicates that this is not already a background belief:
 - the addressee did not tell the truth
 - the addressee comes to believe that they didn’t tell the truth
- If this is not already a background belief, then one of the following should hold:
 - (i) the speaker does not know whether the addressee told the truth
 - or (ii) the addressee has not come to believe that they didn’t tell the truth

In this case (ii) can hold without (i) holding.

❖ **Example 2: Asymmetry in conjunction**

24. Bill has children and all of his children are girls.
 ~/> Bill has children

25. # All of Bill’s children are girls and he has children.

[Stalnaker doesn’t talk about these specific examples, but I take it this is approximately what he would say]

- Assumption: If you assert a conjunction, you assert each conjunct
- In (24): The speaker has made it a background belief that Bill has children by asserting the first conjunct, *Bill has children*.

- In (25): For the first conjunct to be assertable, it must (normally) already be background belief that Bill has children.

If it IS initial background belief that Bill has children: no point going on to assert the 2nd conjunct.

If it is NOT initial background belief that Bill has children: first conjunct is already odd.

- Important note / assumption: If someone asserted *All of Bill's children are girls* when there is no background belief about Bill having children, it's possible that the interlocutors will choose to pretend as if that background belief were there – but they won't pretend it's there and then immediately pretend it's not there after all.

Part II – Presupposition and Embedding Verbs

3. Simons on Embedding Verbs

3.1. Your examples

Discuss (at least a few of your favorites):

- How can you tell what is the “main point” of the utterance? (Evidence from general context, earlier statements, etc.)
- Is the speaker committed to the truth of the embedded proposition?
- What does the embedding verb tell us about the speaker’s evidence for or against the embedded proposition?

3.2. Syntactically parenthetical cases

Certain proposition-embedding predicates can be displaced:

26. [Someone asks: *Where was Louise yesterday?*]
- a) Louise was with Bill, I believe.
 - b) ... I surmise.
 - c) ... I heard.
 - d) ... I guess. [see note]
 - e) Louise was with Bill, Henry said.
 - f) ... Henry hinted.
 - g) ... Henry said.
 - h) ... Henry told me.
 - i) Louise, Henry said, was with Bill.¹
 - j) Louse, Henry told me, was with Bill.
[etc.]

This corresponds somewhat with:

- Use in the simple present
- Second, less specific meaning (e.g., for *guess*)
- Tendency towards having no overt complementizer (*that*)

27. [Someone asks: *Where was Louise yesterday?*]
- a) I hear Louise was with Bill.
 - b) I guess Louise was with Bill.
[≈ I’m assuming / concluding this; ≠ I’m making a guess]
 - c) ?? I guess that Louise was with Bill.
[≈ I’m assuming / concluding this; ≠ I’m making a guess]

¹ (26.i) and (26.j) may be more natural as answers to a question like *Where were Louise and Sue yesterday*, since this gives a reason to use (and put some stress on) Louise’s name.

❖ **Observation:** This is not possible with all proposition-embedding predicates:

28. [Someone asks: Where were Louise and Sue yesterday?]

- a) I believe that Louise was with Bill.
- b) Louise was with Bill, I believe.

29.

- a) Louise e-mailed me that she was with Bill.
- b) ?? Louse was with Bill, she e-mailed me.

❖ **Observation:** Certain adverbs are not possible in the “displaced” cases:

30. [Someone asks: Where was Louise yesterday?]

- a) I’m afraid she was with Bill.
- b) She was with Bill, I’m afraid.

31.

- a) I’m really afraid that she was with Bill.
- b) ?? She was with Bill, I’m really afraid.

❖ **Previous proposals**

- “Embedded” sentence is what is said / asserted / the main point
- Parenthetical speech/attitude clause behaves as an evidential or speaker-level adverbial (much like *frankly*, *fortunately*, ...)
- Background assumption: This is actually part of the grammar (syntax / semantics) of these constructions

3.3. Simons’s cases

Simons’s observation: Even outside of these constructions, most speech/attitude predicates can be used in this way (where the embedded proposition is the “main point”):

32. [Someone asks: *Where was Louise yesterday?*]

- a) I believe she was with Bill.
 - b) I heard she was with Bill.
 - c) Henry said she was with Bill.
 - d) Henry told me she was with Bill.
- [etc.]

Simons’s point: there could be a grammatically “parenthetical” use of certain speech / attitude phrases, but these other cases must still be explained pragmatically.

3.4. (Possible) General Conclusions

- Separate pragmatic functions from specific grammatical forms [e.g., declarative tense morphology typically corresponds to asserted propositions, but not always]
- A more general notion of “assertion” as “putting proposition on the table” for consideration. Depending on the context and/or adverbs, evidentials, etc., it could be understood that:
 - The speaker has good evidence for the proposition and would like the hearers to add it to the common ground
 - It’s understood that the speaker has some evidence for the proposition and wants the hearers to consider adding it to the common ground
 - The speaker has evidence against the proposition and wants to make sure it’s not added to the common ground.

3.5. Big Questions

- Constraining the pragmatics
- Figuring out what the role is of declarative morphology, truly parenthetical attitude phrases, etc.
- Prediction: If presupposition is truly purely pragmatic, then there shouldn’t be two lexical items in any language that differ only in their presuppositions. Is this true?
- Always keep in mind: Things we call “presuppositions” may not all really be the same kind of thing. Some could be purely pragmatic, others not.

4. Our Pragmatic Tool Box

Some key pragmatic concepts we’ve talked about:

- Common Ground: The set of propositions taken for granted by a group of people in a conversation
- Context set: The set of worlds compatible with the common ground (= the intersection of the propositions in the common ground)
- Conversational moves:
 - Assertion (traditional view): proposal to add proposition to common ground
 - Assertion / “Putting forward” (alternative view²): mentioning a proposition as a possibility (something that could potentially be added to the common ground), where other parts of the context / sentence indicating whether the speaker is trying to actually add it.

² Simons is suggesting something along these lines. Work on so-called evidentials also often takes this kind of line, sometimes in a somewhat informal way.

- Supposition: temporarily adding proposition to common ground, then removing it after the conversational move is over (as in Stalnaker's view of conditionals).
 - Presupposition (traditional view): Taking it for granted that a proposition holds (and that interlocutors are taking this for granted as well).
 - Presupposition (alternative view³): Adding a proposition to the common ground without the mediating step of proposing it (i.e., without giving hearers a chance to object)
 - Question asking: Inviting addressee to assert one of a set of propositions
- Rules of the Game: "Norms"
- Norm of assertion (traditional view): Speaker must believe the asserted proposition
 - Norm of supposition: Speaker must believe that the proposition is NOT already taken for granted
 - Norm of presupposition (traditional view 1): Speaker must believe that interlocutors take the proposition for granted
 - Norm of presupposition (traditional view 2): Speaker must believe that interlocutors can be reasonably expected to take the proposition for granted (once it's clear that they should) [perhaps derivable from version 1]
 - Norm of presupposition (alternative view³): Speaker must believe that interlocutors will have no reason to object to adding the proposition to the common ground
 - Norm of question asking: Speaker must generally be willing to accept the responding assertion of the addressee

³ This is the view I suggested in class on April 14. I don't mean to take credit for it – it's in the spirit of some of the 'pragmatic' views we've looked at and may have been proposed, but I'm not sure where.