

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

Presuppositions II

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PRESUPPOSITION VS. ASSERTION

- Assertion can be **targeted by negation** (and other operators like questions or conditionals); presuppositions typically **“project”** (survive the effect of negation or other operators).

(1) Alice didn't know that Ben left.

a. 'It is **not true** that Alice knows that Ben left.'

NEGATED ASSERTION

b. 'It is **true** that Ben left.'

PRESUPPOSITION (UNAFFECTED BY NEGATION)

- Yet, both assertions and presuppositions are **ENTAILMENTS** and as such they cannot be easily cancelled:

(2) a. Ben's dog is sick...

(i) 'Ben has a dog.'

PRESUPPOSITION

(ii) 'Ben's dog is sick.'

ASSERTION

b. #but luckily he has no dog.

CONTRADICTION OF (i)

c. #but luckily the dog is healthy.

CONTRADICTION OF (ii)

- Cf. **conversational implicatures** (to be discussed in the upcoming lectures).

PRESUPPOSITIONS IN DISCOURSE

- Presuppositions are old information, assertion is new information. Presenting a proposition as assertion first (new) and then as presupposition (old) is fine. Presenting it as presupposition first (old) and then as assertion (new) is not.
- ASSERTION > PRESUPPOSITION ✓
 - (3) a. Dave ordered a pizza. Ben **also** ordered a pizza.
 - b. Dave baked two cakes. **Both** cakes had banana in them.
- PRESUPPOSITION > ASSERTION ✗
 - (4) a. #Ben **also** ordered a pizza. Dave ordered a pizza.
 - b. #**Both** cakes had banana in them. Dave baked two cakes.
- Cf. **conventional implicatures** (to be discussed in the upcoming lectures).

PRESUPPOSITION ACCOMMODATION

- By default, presuppositions are old information.
- Yet, non-controversial presuppositions can be relatively easily **accommodated**.

(5) *Situation*: Hearer doesn't know that Ben has a daughter.

A Ben's daughter is a musician.

'Ben has a daughter.'

EASY-TO-ACCOMMODATE PRESUPPOSITION

'Ben's daughter is a musician.'

ASSERTION

- Controversial presuppositions are hard to accommodate:

(6) *Situation*: Hearer doesn't know that Ben has a tarantula.

A Ben's tarantula is at the vet.

'Ben has a tarantula.'

HARD-TO-ACCOMMODATE PRESUPPOSITION

'Ben's tarantula is at the vet.'

ASSERTION

PRAGMATIC PRESUPPOSITION

PRAGMATIC PRESUPPOSITIONS are **not triggered** by anything lexical or grammatical. They just represent whatever knowledge or beliefs conversation participants share or whatever they are willing to assume for the purposes of the conversation at hand; so called **COMMON GROUND** (Stalnaker 1974).

(7) *Situation*: A and B talking on the phone...

A Are you there yet?

B My bus is late, I'll be there in 10 minutes.

'B is coming by bus.'

there = B's office

SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION
PRAGMATIC PRESUPPOSITION

(8) A How was last night?

B The pumpkin soup was incredible.

'They served a pumpkin soup last night.'

'B was invited for dinner to a friend's house.'

SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION
PRAGMATIC PRESUPPOSITION

READING AND WATCHING TIPS

Kissine, Mikhail and Myrto Pantazi. 2021. Pragmatic accommodation. In Daniel Gutzmann, Lisa Matthewson, Cécile Meier, Hotze Rullmann, and Thomas E. Zimmermann (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell companion to semantics*. John Wiley & Sons.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118788516.sem140>

YouTube video:

- The Ling Space on common ground: <https://youtu.be/gQqXmhqM13U>

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