Semantics 1

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July 24, 2012

1 Presuppositions

1.1 Presupposition trigger

Presuppositions are aspects of the interpretation of a sentence that are conventionally associated with certain lexical items or syntactic constructions, so-called *presupposition trigger*. Typicacl triggers are, among others:u.a.:

- Factive verbs

(1)   a.   Peter *regrets* that he cheated at the exam.
       b.   Peter cheatet at the exam.

- Phase transition verbs:

(2)   a.   Barney *stopped* to write sonnets.
       b.   Barney used to write sonets.

- Cleft constructions:

(3)   a.   *It was* John *who* solved the problem.
       b.   Somebody solved the problem.

- Pseudo-clefts

(4)   a.   What Barney ate was potato chips.
       b.   Barney ate something.

- iterative adverbs

(5)   a.   Peter opened the window again.
        b.   Peter has opened the window before.

- Quantifiers

(6)   a.   The Queen talked to all delegates.
        b.   There were delegates.

- Definite descriptions

(7)   a.   *The pizzeria in the Vatican* has closed.
        b.   There is a pizzeria in the Vatican.

1.2   Presuppositions vs. entailments

- Presuppositions **project** from embedded contexts.

(8)   Barney stopped writing sonnets. $\Rightarrow$ Barney used to write sonnets.

Presuppositions are preserved under embedding.

(9)   a.   Barney did not stop writing sonnets.
        b.   Perhaps Barney has stopped writing sonnets.
        c.   If Barney stopped writing sonnets, his wife will be relieved.

- This distinguishes presuppositions from regular logical consequences of a sentence.

(10)   The Queen talked to all delegates $\Rightarrow$ The Queen talked to all female delegates.

This entailment ist not preserved under syntactic embedding.

(11)   a.   The Queen did not talk to all delegates.
        b.   Perhaps the Queen talked to all delegates.
        c.   If the Queen talked to all delegates, she will have a sore throat now.

1.3   Presupposition projection

Presuppositions are usually inherited from **all** embedded context. In other words, if a sentence φ contains a presupposition trigger that triggers the presupposition χ, then we can infer from an utterance of φ that χ holds.
Systematic exceptions: We have presupposition projection in the (a)-examples, but not in the (b)-examples.

(12) a. It may be that Fred has thought things through, and that he now regrets to have cheatd at the exam.
      b. It may be that Fred has cheated at the exam, and that he now regrets that he has cheated at the exam.

(13) a. If Fred ate canard à l'orange, then what Barney ate were potato chips.
      b. If he has eaten anything, then what Barney ate were potato chips.

1.4   Presupposition tests

Let $\varphi\{\chi\}$ be a sentence that triggers the presupposition χ. Then the following sentences usually entail that χ is true.

- not $\varphi\{\chi\}$

- if $\varphi\{\chi\}$ then ψ

- it may be that $\varphi\{\chi\}$

- either $\varphi\{\chi\}$ or ψ

Examples:

(14) a. Fred does not regret that he kissed Betty.
      b. It may be that Fred regrets to have kissed Betty.
      c. If Fred kissed Betty, then he regrets it.

(15) a. It was not Fred whom Betty kissed.
      b. It may be that it was Fred whom Betty kissed.

     c.   It may be that it was Fred whom Betty kissed.

     d.   If it was Fred whom Betty kissed, he must be overjoyed.

Sentences of the following form do not entail that χ holds:

- If χ then $\varphi\{\chi\}$

- It may be that χ and $\varphi\{\chi\}$

- Either not χ or $\varphi\{\chi\}$

Examples:

(16) a.   If Fred has kissed Betty, then he regrets that he has kissed her.

       b.   It may be that Fred has kissed Betty and that he regrets to have kissed her.

(17) a.   If somebody kissed Betty, then it was Fred who kissed her.

       b.   It may be that somebody kissed Betty and that it was Fred who kissed her.

Usually it is possible to construct *specific* presupposition-blocking instances of the patterns that are usually transparent for presuppositions.

(18) a.   Fred did not kiss Betty, and therefore he does not regret that he kissed her.

       b.   It may be that Fred regrets to have kissed Betty, but is is also possible that he didn't kiss her in the first place.

(19) a.   It wasn't Fred who has kissed Betty — Betty wasn't kissed by anybody.

       b.   It is possible that it was Fred who kissed Betty, but it is also possible that nobody kissed her.

1.5   The pragmatics of presuppositions

Stalnaker   „A speaker presupposes that P at a given moment in a conversation just in case he is disposed to act, in his linguistic behavior, as if he takes the truth of P for granted, and as if he assumes that his audience recognizes that he is doing so." (Stalnaker 1973)

Lewis „… it is not as easy as you might think to say something that will be unacceptable for lack of required presuppositions. Say something that requires a missing presupposition, and straightway that presupposition springs into existence, making what you said acceptable after all.“ (Lewis 1979)

(20) a. I am sorry to be late; my car broke down.
     b. I am sorry to be late; I own a car and used it to come here, and my car broke down.

1.6 Presuppositions and implicatures

Just like presuppositions, implicatures are defeasible inference that are systematically associated with certain lexical items or syntactic constructions. However, presuppositions and implicatures behave differently with regard to projection.

(21) a. Fred kissed one of the girls.
     b. It is not the case that Fred kissed all of the girls.

(22) a. Wilma believes that Fred kissed one of the girls.
     b. It is not the case that Wilma believes that Fred kisssed all of the girls.

- In the following example, presuppositions project but implicatures do not:

(23) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Wilma hopes that} \\ \text{Wilma doubts that} \\ \text{Do you know whether} \\ \text{Let us figure out whether} \end{array} \right\}$ Fred kissed one of the girls.

- Blocking implicatures works differently from blocking presuppositions

(24) a. The water is warm. Perhaps it is even hot.
     b. It was Fred's wife. Perhaps he is not married.

(25) a. The water is warm. Strictly speaking, it is even hot.
     b. It was Fred's wife. But Fred is not married.

(26) a. The water is warm, if not hot.

b. If Fred is married, than it was his wife.

(27) a. If today is Tuesday, then the water is warm.
b. If today is Tuesday, then it was Fred's wife.

1.7 Projection pattern

(28) a. It was Fred who shot the doorman, and Barney took care of the manager.
b. If it was Fred who shot the doorman then Barney took care of the manager.

(29) a. Barney took care of the manager, and it was Fred who shot the doorman.
b. If Barney took care of the manager, then it was Fred who shot the doorman.

(30) a. Somebody shot the doorman, and it was Fred who did it.
b. If somebody shot the doorman, then it was Fred who did it.

Generalizations:

- $\varphi\{\chi\}$ *and* ψ and *if* $\varphi\{\chi\}$ *then* ψ presuppose that χ.

- both φ *and* $\psi\{\chi\}$ and *if* φ *then* $\psi\{\chi\}$ presuppose that χ, unless φ entails χ.

Literatur

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