Triggering Verbal Presuppositions

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6th International Symposium of Cognition, Logic and Communication,
Riga, University of Latvia

19th November, 2010

Why do verbs give rise to the presuppositions they do?

- **Lexicalist approach** (Karttunen and Peters 1979, etc.):

Certain words carry a presupposition as part of their lexical meaning.

(1) *John **knows** that it is raining.*

- *Carries a factive presupposition*

(2) *John **believes** that it is raining.*

- *Does not carry a factive presupposition*

- Presuppositions are a completely arbitrary property of the lexical meaning.

Reasons for looking for a predictive mechanism

- **Non-detachability**: words that express a similar meaning stand with a similar presupposition (cf. Simons 2001)

  (3) Has John **stopped** smoking?

  (4) Has John **quit/finished/given up** smoking?

- **Cross-linguistically** stable phenomenon

  (e.g. Levinson and Annamalai 1979. wrt. English and Tamil)

- **Presuppositions everywhere**

  (5) If John killed Bill (at time t_1), then Mary is very sad.

  Inference: Bill was alive at some time t_2 (before t_1).

A Pragmatic Approach

- at least some presuppositions have a conversational source

  - Stalnaker's (1974) suggestion: If an assertion contributes a heterogeneous meaning, one of the components of its entailed meaning gets presupposed

    E.g: John knows that it is raining:

    It is raining + John believes** it is raining

  - **Rationale:** otherwise the hearer would not know *what the main point of the speaker's contribution* to the context is.

  - **But** Stalnaker (1974) makes no prediction as to which component of the meaning should get presupposed

Two Recent Proposals

1. **Simons (2001):**
   - If A raises the question whether q, and q asymmetrically entails p, then A believes p

     E.g: q=*John knows it is raining*

     p= it is raining
   - **Problem**: incorrect predictions

2. **Abusch (2002, 2010):**
   - Some words have alternatives specified to them in the lexicon*:*

     e.g. *stop* | *continue*
   - We pragmatically presuppose that some of these is true:

     John stopped smoking or John continued to smoke

     →What the disjunction still entails is the presupposition
   - **Problem**: We still need a lexical stipulation

Preview of the general idea proposed here

Intuition: Entailments of a sentence S that are independent from the main point of S are presupposed.

- **The main point** of the sentence is given by those entailments that are by nature about the event time of the matrix predicate.

- The additional information that is entailed by a sentence but is not (or does not have to be) about the event time of the matrix predicate is **presupposed**.

Event times

- Following Partee (1973) I will assume that the event times of predicates are their arguments, and behave like a pronoun

(6) $[\![\text{came}]\!] = \lambda t_i.\ \lambda x.\ x \text{ came at } t_i$

(7) John came at t_6.

- **Examples**:

(8) John knows (at time t_1) that it was raining (at time t_2)

Presupposition: it was raining (at time t_2)

(*not about t_1, if t_1 and t_2 don't overlap.)*

(9) John stopped smoking (at time t_1)

Presupposition: John smoked at t_2 (where $t_2 < t_1$)

(*not about t_1*)

Canonical Temporal Representation

- **Canonical temporal representation**: is a sentence in which the independent temporal argument positions of sentences are filled by choosing any constant of the right type.

(10) John knows (at time τ_1) that it was raining (at time τ_2)

Let's call the original temporal arguments of a sentence TS-arguments and the ones that replace them CTS-arguments.

(11) **The CT(S) equivalent p'** of an entailment p of S *($p=_{CTS} p'$)*
   a. p itself, if p does not contain TS arguments
   b. Otherwise p' is the proposition that p can be turned into by replacing its TS-arguments by the corresponding CTS-arguments.

The triggering mechanism

- An entailment p of S is presupposed if S has a CTS-representation such that the CTS-equivalent of p is not about the event time of the matrix predicate of CTS.

Illustration: Let's choose a τ_1 and τ_2 that do not overlap.

(12) S=John knows at time t_1 that it is raining at time t_1

a. CTS: John knows at τ_1 that it is raining at τ_2

b. S|= it is raining at t_1

c. It is raining at t_1 $=_{CTS}$ it is raining at τ_2

d. it is raining at τ_2 is not about τ_1

e. therefore, S presupposes that it is raining at t_1

Being about an argument (FOL):

- Demolombe and Fariñas del Cerro (2000)

♦ to define aboutness, we first need to introduce the notion of **variants** of an interpretation with regard to an object c:

  - **Roughly speaking**, this is the set of interpretations M^c that only differ from *M* by the truth assignment of atomic sentences where *c* appears as an argument.

♦ A formula F is **about** an object c iff there are two models $\{M, M'\} \in M^c$ and $M \models F$ and $M' \not\models F$)

Being about an argument (FOL):

- **An example**

Let L be a language with a unique unary predicate symbol *tired*, and the constant symbols *Fido, John, Mary*.
Let *M* be an interpretation of L defined by:

D = {Fido, Mary, John, Sue};
i_M(*Fido*) =Fido; i_M(*Mary*) = Mary; i_M(*John*) = John
i_M(is tired) = { Fido, John, Sue }

- *S=Fido is tired* is **about** Fido, because there is an M'$\in M^{Fido}$, such that M |= S and M' |≠ S, e.g. where $i_{M'}$(is tired) = {John, Sue }

- *F=John is tired* is not about Fido, because for every M'$\in M^{Fido}$, M' |=F

Being about an argument (FOL):

- *Fido is tired or Fido is not tired* **is not about Fido**, because for every $M' \in M^{Fido}$, $M' \models T$.

- *Every individual is tired* **is about Fido**, because there is an $M' \in M^{Fido}$ such that $M \models F$ and $M' \not\models F$, e.g. where $i_{M'}(is\ tired) = \{John, Sue\}$

Interestingly,
suppose originally in our example we had $i_M(is\ tired) = \{Fido\}$

- *Some individual is tired* **is about** Fido, because there is an $M' \in M^{Fido}$, such that $M \models F$ and $M' \not\models F$, e.g. where $i_{M'}(is\ tired) = 0$

Being about an argument (possible worlds semantics)

- **Variants**: w, w' are c-variants iff they only differ in the interpretation of atomic sentences that contain an expression referring to c as an argument[1]

- **Aboutness:**

  A sentence S is **about** an object c iff there are two worlds w, w' which are c variants and F(w)=1 and F(w')=0

[1] I am assuming that the language does not contain expressions st. A↔P(b), i.e. possible worlds are defined by the combinatorial possibilities of the elements in the language

The proposal

- The mechanism looks at the set of all the entailments of a sentence S, and checks if any of them are predicted to be presupposed.

Example:

S= John knows at t_1 that Mary is tired at t_1

- **Logical entailments:** $S \vee Q$ (if $S \models q$, then $q = S \vee (q \wedge \neg S)$)
  (Existential sentences: Someone knows that Mary is tired)

- **Lexical entailments**:
  φ =John knows at t_1 that Mary is tired at t_1
  ψ=John believes at t_1 that Mary is tired at t_1
  χ=Mary is tired at t_1

The proposal

- An entailment p of S is presupposed if S has a CTS-representation such that the CTS-equivalent of p is not about the event time of the matrix predicate of CTS.

Illustration: Let's choose a τ_1 and τ_2 that do not overlap.

(13) S=John knows at time t_1 that it is raining at time t_1

a. CTS: John knows at τ_1 that it is raining at τ_2

b. S|= it is raining at t_2

c. It is raining at $t_2 =_{CTS}$ it is raining at τ_2

d. it is raining at τ_2 is not about τ_1

e. therefore, S presupposes that it is raining at t_1

The proposal

- An entailment p of S is presupposed if S has a CTS-representation such that the CTS-equivalent of p is not about the event time of the matrix predicate of CTS.

Compare: Let's choose a τ_1 and τ_2 that do not overlap.

(14) S=John knows at time t_1 that it is raining at time t_1

a. CTS: John knows at τ_1 that it is raining at τ_2

b. S|= John believes at t_1 that it is raining at t_2

c. John believes t_1 raining at t_2 $=_{CTS}$ John believes τ_1 raining at τ_2

d. that John believes τ_1 it is raining at τ_2 is *about* τ_1

e. S does **not** presuppose that John believes at t_1 it is raining at t_1

Know vs. Believe

φ =John **knows** that Mary is tired

K={φ, ψ, χ, Someone knows that Mary is tired, $\varphi \vee \omega$, etc. }

- That Mary is tired is presupposed

ψ=John **believes** that Mary is tired

K={ψ, Someone believes that Mary is tired, $\psi \vee \omega$, etc. }

- Nothing is presupposed

Example: Stop

(15) **S= John** stopped **smoking** at t_1.

ψ=John does not smoke at t_1

φ=John smoked at t_2 (where t_2 refers to some time before t_1)

χ=John stopped smoking at t_1.

- Let's choose a τ_1 that does not overlap with t_1 or t_2

(16) S= **John** stopped **smoking** at t_1.

a. CTS: John stopped smoking at τ_1

b. S|= John smokes at t_2 (where t_2 refers to some time before t_1)

c. John smokes at t_2 $=_{CTS}$ John smokes at t_2

d. John smokes at t_2 is not about τ_1

e. therefore, S presupposes that John smokes at t_2

Compare: Kill

(17) John killed Bill at t_1

- Some lexical entailments:

  φ=John killed Bill at t_1

  ψ=Bill is dead at t_1

  χ=Bill was alive at t_2

Entailments that are predicted to be presupposed: χ

(≈ change of state verbs)

Implicatives

(18) John managed to solve the exercise

(19) *John managed to solve the exercise tomorrow

- The tense argument of the embedded clause is not independent: it cannot be substituted by a new constant in the CT(S): only with that of the matrix tense.
- The complement is not predicted to be presupposed

Compare:

(20) John is happy to leave tomorrow

Adding common knowledge: Sortal Presuppositions

- The lexical entailment φ of (17) is not predicted to be presupposed:

  (21) John knows that Mary is tired at t_1

  φ = John is sentient at t_1

- However, φ contextually entails (24):

  (22) John is sentient in general

  Gen t [C(j,t)] [sentient (j,t)]

  - Generics do not express universal quantification over times (they allow exceptions, in fact not even a single verifying instance is needed, etc.)
  - Therefore, the generic entailment of a sentence is not about the event time t_1, hence (24) is predicted to be presupposed.

Conclusion

- A predictive mechanism for verbal presuppositions
- Certain entailments are distinguished: The entailments that are not necessarily about the event time.
- This triggering mechanism itself is context independent, but the pool of relevant entailments (candidates for presuppositions) is sensitive to common knowledge.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Denis Bonnay, Daniel Rothschild, Nathan Klinedinst and Philippe Schlenker for multiple discussions as well as to Emmanuel Chemla, Benjamin Spector, Paul Egré, Chris Barker, Giorgio Magri, Jacopo Romoli, Kyle Rawlins, François Recanati, Nicholas Asher, Pascal Amsili, Laurent Bartholdi, Ofra Magidor, Eytan Zweig, Edgar Onea and the audience of JSM10 and SALT20 for helpful suggestions and questions on various versions of this paper.

This work was supported by the ESF/Euryi grant (to P. Schlenker) and a Mellon Career Development Fellowship (Oxford).

Appendix 1: Fillmore's cases: *be right* vs. *be aware*

(23) John **is right** that dinner is ready
asserts: Dinner is ready
presupposes: John believes that dinner is ready

(24) John **is aware** that dinner is ready
asserts: John believes that dinner is ready
presupposes: Dinner is ready

The proposal predicts a factive presupposition for both. However, syntactically the two do not behave alike (cf. Schlenker 2008):

(25) John is right in claiming that dinner is ready

ψ=John claimed that dinner was ready (at a previous time)

φ= John's claim is correct

Now (27) will presuppose both ψ and the factive entailment. The latter can be canceled however, if it contradicts the asserted meaning.

Appendix 2: Context sensitivity? Part-time triggers

Schlenker's (2006, 2010) case of context dependency:

(26) Mary has **announced** that she is pregnant

- **Case 1**: Mary is assumed to be reliable and therefore the context entails the truth of the embedded proposition

  →it is presupposed that Mary is pregnant

- **Case 2**: Mary is assumed to be unreliable (e.g. she is 7-years old) and therefore context does not entail the truth of the embedded proposition

  → it is *not* presupposed that Mary is pregnant

- **Here: At first blush,** it seems that when the embedded proposition is contextually entailed, it is also presupposed.

Context sensitivity? Part-time triggers

But look at the following example (from Schlenker 2006)

(27) George the butler has **announced** that dinner is ready

- **Case 3**: George is assumed to be superreliable (if He says p→p, and if He does not say p→not p)

  → it is *not* presupposed that dinner is ready

- The contextual inferences of part time triggers are not monotonic: It is not enough for the embedded proposition to be contextually entailed, to be presupposed. It also has to be the case that certain further entailments are not present.

- The present mechanism cannot predict such a non-monotonic pattern.
- Presumably, such inferences are due a different mechanism.

Appendix 3: *Regret*

(28) John regrets that it is raining

What does (30) presuppose?

- Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1970), Gazdar (1979): *it is raining*
- Klein (1975), Egré (2005): *John believes that it is raining*

  - Here: *regret* triggers a true factive presupposition.

  (and assume that there is a mechanism that can weaken it in some cases, e.g. using the weakening mechanism proposed in Geurts (1999))

Appendix 4: Disjunctions

- An entailment P of S is expressibe as $S \vee Q$, where $Q=P \wedge \neg S$.
- Assuming that S is a sentence about c, is $S \vee Q$ about c?

1. If $S \vee Q$ is a tautology, then the whole disjunction is not about c.

2. If $S \vee Q$ is not a tautology, then the disjunction is about c.
[A disjunction is true in a world w if at least one of its disjuncts is true in w, and false if no disjuncts are true in w. Therefore the disjunction $S \vee Q$ will be about c if it is possible to find two c-variants st. one of them makes all the disjuncts $S \vee Q$ false, while the other makes at least one disjunct true. Since Q does not contain a disjunct that is entailed by S, and S is about c, it is possible to find two c-variants w,w', st. $[[Q]]^{w}=[[Q]]^{w'}=0$ and $[[S]]^{w}=1$ and [[S]]w'=0. Thus $S \vee Q$ will be true in w and false in w', and therefore $S \vee Q$ is about c.]

(Elements of W are assumed to be derived via the combinatorial possibilities of the elements in the language. E.g. if the language contains one individual, three 1-place predicates, and no other predicate, there will be exactly eight possible worlds in W.)

Example: Discover

(29) Peter discovered at t_1 that Mary is tired at t_1

φ=Mary is tired at t_1 *(≈factives)*

ψ=Peter did not know that Mary is tired at t_2 (where $t_2 < t_1$)
(≈change of state verbs)

→ φ and ψ are presupposed