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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 <sup>st</sup> person	+	-	-
2 <sup>nd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>
  - 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]

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<sup>1</sup> (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 view<sup>2</sup>): 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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 view<sup>3</sup>): 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 view<sup>3</sup>): 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.