Assignment 6

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2019

Distributed Feb 26; due Mar 5

1 Acknowledgements   [3 points]

Use the negation test, the interrogative test, and the conditional-antecedent test to help determine whether (A) presupposes that Carol won the marathon.

(A)   Joan acknowledges that Carol won the marathon.

For each test, provide:

- The example that results from applying the test to (A).
- A judgment as to whether the example supports or challenges the claim that (A) presupposes that Carol won the marathon, along with your reason for reaching this judgment.

Don't worry if the tests give conflicting results; you can treat them each as independent of the others. However, insights about why the tests behave they way they do are always welcome.

2 Maximize presupposition   [3 points]

Consider the following minimal pair:

(1)   a.   Both of Will Smith's ears are pierced.
       b. $^{\#}$All of Will Smith's ears are pierced.

Both (1a) and (1b) are true in our world, but (1b) seems unusual. Heim (1991)[1] proposes an additional Gricean maxim, commonly referred to as *Maximize Presupposition*, to address this contrast. This proposed maxim states that, given a set of sentences all with identical at-issue content, the speaker should choose the one with the strongest (i.e., most informative) true presupposition.

Your task is to use Maximize Presupposition to formulate a Gricean explanation for the strangeness of (1b). In two parts:

   i. Establish that these sentences have the same at-issue content where the presupposition of *both* is met. For this, use the meaning of *both* from section 7.4 of the 'Presupposition' handout, assume that *all* is synonymous with *every* (whose meaning is given on the 'Semantic composition' handout), and, to avoid getting lost in the details of semantic composition, simply treat *of Will Smith's ears* as an unanalyzed unit whose meaning is a set of entities (ears).

  ii. Describe the implicature that a listener who assumes their interlocutor is obeying Maximize Presupposition will draw on hearing (1b), and the reasoning by which they reach this implicature. Use this description to explain why we tend to think that (1b) sounds unusual. (4–6 sentences)

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[1]Heim, Irene. 1991. Artikel und Definitheit. In *Semantik/Semantics: An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*, 487–535. Walter de Gruyter.

3   Deriving hypothesis N   [4 points]

This is not required for people doing a final project. Final projectors should answer question 4 instead.

This question asks you to assess how two views of presupposition account for hypothesis N. Specific subtasks:

i. The 'Presupposition' handout develops a semantic view of the presupposition of the definite article *the* and shows how hypothesis N follows as a consequence of that treatment. Summarize how that account works, being sure to explain the role of the key concepts concerning partial functions and compositionality. (2–5 sentences)

ii. What is the 'Stalnakarian' view of presuppositions as Simons describes it in 'Foundational issues in presupposition'? Summarize the view. (2–5 sentences)

iii. We expect a successful theory to explain hypothesis N in terms of more basic concepts, rather than having to stipulate it. This seems especially desirable because hypotheses N, Q, and C are unified by the fact that they all involve operators that reduce speaker commitment to the at-issue content while leaving the presuppositions unmodified. How would the Stalnakarian view derive hypothesis N? This is more speculative, asking you to think in new ways about the Stalnakarian view and the nature of hypothesis N. (4–6 sentences)

iv. Which view has the better account of hypothesis N? State your view and summarize the evidence that led you to it, with the goal of convincing others that your view is correct. (4–6 sentences)

4   Final project task   [4 points]

This problem is required only for people doing a final project. Everyone else should answer question 3 instead.

This project question and the one on assignment 7 aim to get you to a complete rough draft of your project write-up, so that we can get you comments on that in advance of the final (due on March 20). As a first step towards that goal, this question asks you to draft an introduction section for your paper. No matter which type of project you are doing (e.g., paper, corpus, implementation), the introduction to the write-up will need to address at least the following questions:

i. Where are we? That is, what area of semantics and pragmatics are we working in? Answering this question is important for orienting the reader.

ii. What hypothesis is being pursued? It's a good sign if you have a sentence that starts with a phrase like "The central hypothesis of this paper is . . . ". You don't need to be this explicit, but, on the other hand, this is a way of ensuring that you don't end up saying only vague things about what your hypothesis is. Also, being direct about this can expose a lack of clarity in your own thinking that you can then work through.

iii. What concepts does your hypothesis depend on? You can't require your reader to fill in the gaps. Try to place all the building blocks of your hypothesis in a way that supports the hypothesis itself. Sometimes this material is best given after the hypothesis statement, but very often it needs to be given before, so that the hypothesis itself makes sense.

iv. Why this hypothesis? What broader issues does it address? This will provide further context for your ideas and help motivate your work.

v. What steps are you taking to address your hypothesis? If you're designing an experiment, implementing a theory, or creating a corpus, then this is probably an easy question to address: just describe your plans. If you're discussing existing literature, you'll probably want to summarize what that literature says in relation to your hypothesis – what evidence it offers. In any case, you should be aiming to convince the reader that the information you have to offer will richly inform your hypothesis.

vi. We would expect the introduction to a completed paper to summarize the key findings as well, in the final paragraphs of the section. If you're discussing existing literature, you can probably do this now, at least in a tentative way. For other kinds of project, you probably don't have findings yet, and you might not have them at all this quarter if you're designing an experiment. Thus, for now, the introduction should close with a clear statement for your expectations: what you think your experiment/implementation/corpus will show, and why you think that.

The paper by Degen and Tanenhaus linked from the course site (in connection with assignment 5) has an exceptionally good introduction: all of the above questions are addressed clearly in a logical sequence. It's longer than we expect yours to be (as is their whole paper), but it's still a great model.

In writing your introduction (and indeed your whole paper), you should imagine that your reader is a smart, scientifically minded person who hasn't studied semantics and pragmatics. You should *not* imagine that your reader is someone from the teaching team, as that might lead you to presuppose crucial things, which will result in a paper that can't stand on its own as a piece of scholarship.