Assignment 7

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2021
Distributed Mar 9; due Mar 16

Note This assignment is only for people who are not doing final projects. If you are doing a final project, that’s your only work for this assignment cycle.

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 the 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) 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).

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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)

3 Deriving hypothesis N

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)