Extra credit

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2018

Distributed Feb 27; close-date Mar 13

This extra credit is optional and open to everyone in the class. Any points you get on it will be added to your total assignment points for the term. To receive credit, the work needs to be submitted via Canvas by 10:30 am on March 13. No late work will be accepted for credit (but we’ll still give you feedback on it).

1 RSA and the division of pragmatic labor [up to 2 points]

The ‘Introduction to pragmatics’ handout from Feb 6 briefly discusses the ‘division of pragmatic labor’ generalization, which says “Normal events are reported with normal language; unusual events are reported with unusual language”. A simple motivating pair of examples is *Kim stopped the car* and *Kim caused the car to stop*. The first uses the normal/unmarked/simple verb *stop*, and conjures an image of a normal braking event. The second uses the unusual/marked/complex causative construction, and conjures images of unusual stopping events (say, jumping in front of the car).

Can the RSA model, as we defined it on the Feb 22 handout, simulate this generalization? The core assumptions we need to adhere to: we have two synonymous messages, one of which is more marked (costly) than the other, and two referents, one of which is more probable than the other.

For your answer:

i. Present a reference game that implements the core assumptions of this scenario.

ii. Provide the RSA literal listener, pragmatic speaker, and pragmatic listener values for your game.

iii. Either explain how RSA models the division of pragmatic labor, or argue that it doesn’t, and develop an argument for why RSA isn’t able to capture this generalization in general.

2 Object QPs [up to 2 points]

Our theory of composition has (at least) one shocking shortcoming: we are not able to interpret QPs when they are the objects of transitive verbs, but rather only when they are grammatical subjects. We can’t give a meaning to a seemingly simple phrase like *tease every Simpson*! Address the shortcoming by completing the following rule of composition:

(QV) Given a syntactic structure $\text{VP} \rightarrow V \text{QP}$, $[\text{VP}] = \ldots$
3 Apologies

Background The comedian Demetri Martin tells the following joke: “Saying ‘I’m sorry’ is the same as saying ‘I apologize’. Except at a funeral.” I take this to be suggesting a broader generalization: in every situation in which saying “I apologize” is appropriate, saying “I’m sorry” is appropriate as well (but not the reverse, with deaths you are not responsible for providing one counterexample to the reverse).

Your task Either identify a situation in which “I apologize” is appropriate but “I’m sorry” is not (which would challenge the above generalization), or else (if you think the generalization is correct) sketch an account (1–2 sentences) of what extra information is conveyed by “I apologize” beyond what is also conveyed by “I’m sorry”.

[up to 1 point]