Discussion Points
Moss, Djalali & Potts, Perry & Shan

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Inference and Grammar

What inferences do interlocutors draw?

How do these inferences arise?
Starting point (Djalali & Potts)

A: Is that a huge gap in the system?
B: It is a gap.

Scalar Implicature

– Normally explained via reasoning about speaker
Problem: characterizing this

Novick and Sperber (2007)
   – Need to factor out background world knowledge

He is a bachelor or he is divorced.
Jane is in Paris or in Madrid.
Bill will arrive Monday or Tuesday.

My own favorite example:
   I tried to kill myself.
Problem: characterizing this

Novick and Sperber (2007)
  – Not a general default

She wears sunglasses or a cap.
Our employees speak French or Spanish.
Bill will sing or play the piano.
Problem: characterizing this

Meaning signaled by intonation/coherence.

A: The handkerchief was red.
B: It looked red.

(after Kripke 1978)

I tried to log in, but I got an error.
Problem: characterizing this

Meaning signaled by intonation/coherence.

A: The handkerchief was yellow.
B: It looked red.

(after Kripke 1978)
Opportunity

RTE as Experimental Pragmatics

– Elicit judgments carefully and in theoretically-informed terms.
– Recognize that research requires science as well as engineering.
– Competing explanations: logic, psychology, grammar.
Similar issues with entailments

Soundness for monotonicity inference
  – Instrumenting grammar to do inference (Moss)
  – Enriching grammar with meaningful distinctions

 Lots of sound systems
  – Program invites singling out some as “natural”
Key issue

Variability in NPI licensing (cf Chierchia 2004).

- Strong vs. weak NPIs
  Weak NPIs OK in downward entailing contexts
  
  No/Few students said anything.

  Strong NPIs require actual negation

  No/*Few students have attended class in weeks.
Key issue

Variability in NPI licensing (Linebarger 1987).

- Intervention effects

Nobody has given John a red cent.

*Nobody has given most people a red cent.*
Suspicion

Natural monotonicity inferences (and NPI licensing)

a conspiracy between

– information structure – what’s at issue
– coherence – what are you saying about it
– lexical meaning – “perspective” of NP items
Research program

Crosslinguistic investigation

– Universals of natural inference.
– Lots of variation in licensing and the inferences and meanings it draws on.
Closing Thoughts

Language, inference and the world
– Katz vs. Kripke

Truth is just as useful as inference
(e.g., Perry & Shan)

Good reason to think that truth is prior
as when we discover Zinfandel is Primitivo