Presuppositions

– accommodation & dynamic theories

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pragmatic presuppositions

so far presuppositions are a semantic phenomenon

pragmatic view going back to Robert Stalnaker:

by using an expression that has a semantic presupposition P,
the speaker presupposes P, i.e. the speaker indicates that he takes P for granted/that he takes P to be already known

Stalnaker developed an influential formal model of conversation based on the notion of common ground (CG):

the common ground comprises all and only those propositions that are mutually known to the speaker and the hearer
(and that are known to be mutually known, and known to be known to be mutually known, ...)

speaker presupposes P → speaker takes P to be (in the) common ground
accommodation & denial

for instance:

(24) *The Swedish minister of enterprise energy and communications hates fish.*

   semantic presupposition:

       (*) Sweden has a minister of enterprise energy and communications

   speaker presupposition: the speaker indicates that he takes (*) to be known.

but what if (24) is not known by the hearer (and hence not in the CG)?

→ the hearer may *learn* (*) from (24),

   i.e. he may **accommodate** the presupposition

Knowing that hearers may accommodate presuppositions, this may in turn be exploited by speakers for reasons of efficiency:

(25) *Sorry I am late. I had to take my son to the doctor.*
(25') *Sorry I am late. I have a son and I had to take him to the doctor.*
accommodation & denial

if the presupposed information is inconsistent with what the hearer knows or the hearer is reluctant to accommodate → presupposition denial (as opposed to normal negation)

(26) A: The German minister of bakery loves sausages.
(27) B: No, that's not true!
(meaning: the German minister of bakery does not love sausages)
(27') B: Hey, wait a minute! Germany does not have a minister of bakery!

(28) A: Sorry I am late. I had to take my giraffe to the vet.
(29) B: No, that's not true!
(meaning: you did not have to take your giraffe to the vet)
(29') B: Hey, wait a minute! I can't believe you have a giraffe!

presupposition denial is a different type of negation (sometimes called meta-linguistic) that can also be used as a presupposition test (von Fintel, 2004)
common ground

Stalnaker's model of the common ground (simplified):
set of **possible worlds** models the speakers beliefs about the world and each other's beliefs
common ground

a plain assertion of a proposition is a proposal to update the CG
the update is accomplished after the hearer's positive feedback
we write $c + \varphi$ for the result of updating the common ground $c$ with (the proposition expressed by) $\varphi$
common ground

for a plain assertion of $\varphi$: $c + \varphi = c \cap \varphi$

special cases:

- $\varphi$ is already known (and known to be known...) by interlocutors: $c + \varphi = c$
- $\varphi$ is contradictory with what is known (...) by interlocutors: $c + \varphi = \emptyset$

Hence we have the following rule for an update of the CG by an asserted proposition $\varphi\{\psi\}$ (i.e. one where $\psi$ is presupposed):

$$c + \varphi\{\psi\} = c + \varphi \quad \text{if} \quad c + \psi = c$$
$$c + \varphi\{\psi\} = \text{(undefined)} \quad \text{if} \quad c + \psi \neq c$$
a theory for presupposition projection

Karttunen & Peters (1979) „explained“ the projection behaviour of constructions by stipulating two types of rules, e.g.

\[ \varphi \{ \psi \} \text{ and } \varphi' \{ \psi' \} \]

- semantic rule: \( \varphi \& \varphi' \)
- presupposition projection rule: \( \psi, \psi' \) if \( \psi' \) is not entailed by \( \varphi \)

Irene Heim (1983):
projection behaviour should follow from semantic behaviour, i.e. meaning of an operator

change in view of the notion of meaning:
meaning of an expression is not its contribution to truth conditions but its context change potential
(read: „common ground change potential“)
a theory for presupposition projection

Heim's rules:

\[ c + \text{not } \varphi \quad = \quad c - (c + \varphi) \]

\[ c + \varphi \text{ and } \psi \quad = \quad (c + \varphi) + \psi \]

\[ c + \text{if } \varphi \text{ then } \psi \quad = \quad c + \text{not } (\varphi \text{ and not } \psi) \]
\[ = \quad c - ((c + \varphi) - ((c + \varphi) + \psi))) \]
accommodation

accommodation of unfulfilled presuppositions by addition to common ground

exact point of addition determines type of accommodation: **global** vs. **local**

(1) *The king of France is not bald.* \( \varphi \{ \psi \} \)

global: \([c + \psi] - ([c + \psi] + \varphi)\)

\[c + \text{there is a king of France}\]

\[-([c + \text{there is a king of France}] + \text{the king of France is not bald})\]

*There is a king of France and he is not bald*

local: \(c - ([c + \psi] + \varphi)\)

\(c - ([c + \text{there is a king of France}] + \text{the king of France is not bald})\)

*It's not the case that there is a king a france who is bald*

general observation: global accommodation is preferred
accommodation

there is yet another type of (or rather: place for) accommodation: intermediate

(2) Every linguistics student drives to the uni in his car
presupposition (introduced by his car): he has a car

Three options for accommodation:

global: *He has a car and every linguistics student drives to the uni in it
(out, because he is not bound by every)

local: Every linguistics student has a car and drives to the uni in it

intermediate: Every linguistics student who has a car drives to the uni in it