

Presupposition or Abstract Object Anaphor? : Constraints on Choice of Factive Complement in Spoken English

Jennifer Spenader, University of Stockholm

ABSTRACT

Using results from an empirical study of factives in spoken English, a comparison is made between factive verbs and their presupposed complements, both bound and accommodated, and their non-presupposing alternative: abstract object anaphora that derive and antecedent from a discourse-given linguistic expression. Discourse structural constraints are believed to play a role in the use of abstract object anaphora, but the results do not support a belief that this plays a role in the use of bound factive presuppositions. Bound factives are used functionally to ground unclear or non-explicit information but if the information is explicitly given then an abstract anaphor is used. This suggests that factives and their non-presupposing alternatives are used with complementary functions. The results also show somewhat surprisingly that factives overwhelmingly presuppose discourse new information that needs to be accommodated. Given these results, characterizing accommodation as a repair strategy, as it is commonly described, gives the wrong impression of accommodation's role in discourse.