

Presupposition Generalised

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Nijmegen, 23-5-06

short abstract:

generalised presupposition theory á la Van der Sandt gives a full system of pragmatics comparable with Gricean pragmatics.

unsurprisingly, presupposition can be fully reduced to this system

longer abstract

Reinhard Blutner and Gerd Jaeger reconstruct Van der Sandt's presupposition theory as follows in OT (I add two of their background assumptions as constraints)

DRT-DEVELOP > CONSISTENT > *ACCOMMODATE > STRONG/HIGH

The reconstruction already applies to other phenomena, but the constraints can and should be generalised:

FAITH > PLAUSIBLE > *NEW > RELEVANCE

And then it becomes a powerful theory of pragmatic and semantic interpretation, comparable to Gricean pragmatics based on the cooperativity principle.

This talk:

1. theory of interpretation
2. particularised implicatures
3. a brief look at the pragmatic wastebasket
4. old marking
5. presupposition proper

A theory of interpretation

FAITH

an interpretation of an utterance should be such that the interpreter could have used the same form, had she been the speaker

PLAUSIBLE

The interpretation should be plausible given the context (It will not do if there is a more plausible interpretation given FAITH)

Implies consistency and consistency with the context

*NEW

referents should be activated, if not activated old, and if new connected

referents include discourse referents for objects, events, states, times, places and topics

connected is in preference part of, otherwise has a.

RELEVANCE

If the utterance addresses an open CG question, the interpretation settles it

John stands by the road waving with his jacket at me.

1. When would I be standing by the road waving with my jacket?
2. Is the answer consistent with what I know? Are there more plausible explanations?
3. Can the answer be connected to the last topic we were addressing?
4. Are there questions I share with John that the answer settles?

E.g. if I had seen the lost cow we are looking for

Ordering and Absoluteness

RELEVANCE

would favour any combination of answers to all open questions that have some interest, regardless of whether the utterance has any relation to it, whether it meets plausibility and whether it is integrated in the context

-Cannot be absolute and needs to be subordinated to the other principles

*NEW would make everything old and without checks would force interpretations with the same topic and the same referents

-Cannot be absolute and needs to be subordinated to the other principles, notably FAITH and CONSISTENT

CONSISTENT would make all interpretations plausible and make it impossible to give corrections or even to state possible but implausible events.

-Cannot be absolute and needs to be subordinated to the other principles, notably FAITH

FAITH would make it impossible to interpret incorrect utterances (ungrammatical, unusual, too long)

-Cannot be absolute either

Model of Production:

NL generation systems like systems providing weather reports, pollen reports, business letters etc.

task: the concept of the text

application: the mapping from the concept to the denotation

common ground: user model

linguistic competence: the linguistic components of the system

Schematically:

a speaker specifies something given as a concept

the denotation of the concept is a model-theoretic object known to the speaker

the speaker has her own knowledge and her common ground with the hearer as a resource

the linguistic competence on how to do this in a given NL is shared with the hearer

concept: denotation

answering a given question: the denotation of the question

stating a wish: the wish

stating a question: the question

motivating a statement: the reason for believing it

stating the result of an event: the consequence of the event

reiterating a statement: the denotation that the statement specified

telling somebody where to get petrol: the location

Given a model of the mapping and a particular common ground a form determines the set of possible inputs

Logical semantics:

this set may be definable by logic

But it is an emergent property, like possible compositional procedures for interpretation.

“Marking properties” instead of “having a meaning”.

The pragmatic wastebasket

definite descriptions

indexicals

tense

modality

pronouns and their kind

defaults

presuppositions

discourse relations

scalar implicatures

conversational implicatures

ellipsis

relevance

clausal implicatures

pronoun resolution

rhetorical structure

bridging

information structure

speech acts

particles

ambiguity resolution

the waste basket is created by logical semantics:

whatever does not fit within logical semantics.

Dominant research programme has been:

extend logical semantics (slide boundary is where I think the frontline currently lies, but there are also many uncertainties above it)

Logic can be extended, but should it?

Ouch!

This tastes great!

Socrates is mortal.

There is no largest prime number.

Logic is emergent in the evolution of language.

II. A look into the wastebasket.

a. Particularised Conversational Implicatures by “deliberately flouting the maxims”

“deliberately flouting the maxims” becomes “producing an utterance that cannot be straightforwardly interpreted”

marked expression: FAITH does not map the interpretation to the form

producing a series of sounds closely resembling the score of “Home Sweet Home”

mapped to: sing “Home Sweet Home”

The implicature is the abduced intention of the speaker

irony, understatement, hyperbole, metaphor

a consistent and plausible interpretation cannot be found:

The abduced intention of the speaker is the implicature. It is partly found by the institution of these stylistic devices.

breaking *NEW:

the speaker does not address the activated topic while being able to and instead addresses a barely connected topic

He is an excellent cyclist

in all cases abduction of a reason for the deviant expression

inference of alternative strategy of expression, supported by experience

b. Scalar implicatures

By Relevance

The utterance is constructed as exhaustively answering the open CG questions that it seems to address

c. Clausal implicatures:

By expressive constraints forcing expression of speaker assent or doubt with respect to non-entailed clauses

If A, then B.

If were A, then would B

Because A, B.

If A is not an issue, if+indicative does not apply

Exception (in English): attitudes like say, think, believe, hope etc. which lack syntactic alternatives for marking speaker assent or doubt

d. Rhetorical structure

*NEW on topics

keep the activated topic

continue with an older topic

the topic is a part of the activated topic

the topic is connected the activated object by HASA relations like cause and result

Relevance for strengthening discourse relations

concessive structures to override PLAUSIBLE

contrast to override *NEW

e. Information structure

Grasping the topic is a part of grasping the concept of what the speaker is trying to do.

Topic and focus marking supports this recognition

f. Particles

obligatory particles:

expressive constraints often against tendencies enforced by PLAUSIBLE or *NEW or RELEVANCE

adversative, contrastive particles, additive particles

optional particles often against the same tendencies

John fell. Bill pushed him.

John fell. Then Bill pushed him.

John fell. Mary smiled at him.

John fell. Because Mary smiled at him.

g. ambiguity resolution

PLAUSIBLE

enforces consistency

stereotypical interpretation

statistical disambiguation

e.g. Frisian pronouns get emphatic form if a reflexive interpretation is unlikely, a bare form if reflexive interpretation is likely

he wounds him+self

he shaves him

The hearer's ability to reconstruct the decisions of the speaker in production:

based on:

the common ground

the form of the utterance

knowledge about what the speaker knows

the last contributions to conversation

III. The Big Problem: Old Marking

Why is there old marking at all? Things are old by *NEW. *NEW forces the hearer to resolve and not to miss any anaphoric opportunities.

New marking makes sense: it prevents identification, and then *NEW must be transgressed because FAITH > *NEW

But old marking exists:

particles like indeed, immers, deaccented toch, ja

presupposition triggers like factives and lexical presuppositions

tense

indexicals

pronouns

demonstratives

definite descriptions

The problem that old-making solves is that resolutions should sometimes override PLAUSIBLE and prevent that accommodations occur.

He is NOT in Spain.

John believes that that is precious. (pointing at a plastic coffeemug or without pointing)

Accommodations of a linguistic antecedent or of a local antecedent that John has in mind are possible and lead to interpretations where somebody else than the intended referent can continue to be thought in Spain and the conflict between thinking a plastic coffeemug precious and what John believes does not have to be faced.

Old marking allows to break plausibility and thereby increases expressive possibilities.

Also:

FAITH+RESOLVE=DRT development algorithm

If FAITH is just the hearer checking whether her interpretation could lead to the form given the common ground, it is much easier:

reflexives: marks a c-commanding antecedent

indexicals: marks an antecedent that has a particular role in the conversation

3rd person pronouns: marks high activation of referent

proper demonstratives: marks an antecedent that is concurrently pointed at by the speaker

And there are language particular expressive constraints often stated in the form of a referential hierarchy:

first and second person pronouns > reflexives > 3rd person pronoun > deictic pronouns > anaphoric and bridging definites and short names > full demonstrative NPs > full descriptions and full names > indefinites

If one can use a higher kind of NP, do so.

Checking ones interpretation for it being able to lead to the form will only work if it has the required property.

Expressive constraints can also be assumed for tense, additive particles, repetition particles and definite descriptions.

IV: The proper presupposition triggers.

A. They are all lexical presupposition triggers

Factives need complements that are facts

Sleep needs an animate subject

Bachelors: of male adults, unmarried

B. They can apply only to objects/structures of objects meeting a property P

C. Thereby they can only be used if the speaker accepts that P holds of the object/structure of objects to which it is applied

D. The trigger is a sign that the speaker accepts the presupposition when producing the trigger.

Accommodation

“Whether P holds of x” is a plausible open CG question if it is not common ground and the speaker can be taken as addressing it by using the trigger.

Accommodation to the CG by relevance.

Other accommodation sites are dispreferred but possible

negation: belongs to what holds from the perspective of the denied suggestion or assertion

attitude complements: belongs to what holds in the perspective of the attitude subject

restrictor scope structures: belongs to what holds for the speaker if the restrictor holds

Does John believe that somebody solved the problem?

Does every German housewife have a Porsche?

Preferences are due to relevance.

There are no expressive constraints about using normal presupposition triggers. Also the presupposition is not the point of the utterance. The speaker is just using a restricted lexical item. So accommodation is possible (there is no obligatory marking) for these triggers and obligatory when resolution is impossible.

Grice

Meaning_{NN} emphasizes the recognition of the speaker intention and fits the alignment view of interpretation. Literal meaning is the problem. Gricean pragmatics answers the question what is the other ingredient.

Reduction of presupposition to Gricean pragmatics is not possible.

When pragmatics is interpretation, presupposition does not have a special status. In fact, because lexical presupposition triggers do not come with expressive constraints, they allow both resolution and accommodation and so give a better window on the process of interpretation than other words.