Presupposition

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LING 405: Semantics & Pragmatics

22 September 2023

What we'll cover…

- Quiz #1 review
- Writing Assignment #1 review
- Presupposition
- What's due next week

Quiz #1 Review

1. In the sentence, "My dog is afraid of cats," is "my dog" a referring expression? Why or why not? (Feel free to refer to the textbook in your response.)

"my dog" is a referring expression because you're referring specifically about your own dog and not referring to all dogs.

Yes, my dog is a referring expression because it is referring to one specific dog, "my Dog".

Quiz #1 Review

2. All rigid designators are:

a.   proper names.

b.   natural kinds.

c.   verbs.

d.   referring expressions.

"A referring expression is an expression (normally some kind of noun phrase) which a speaker uses to refer to something. [...] A proper name like King Henry VIII, Abraham Lincoln, or Mao Zedong, always refers to the same individual. [...] For this reason, they are sometimes referred to as rigid designators. 'Natural kind' terms, e.g. names of species (camel, octopus, durian) or substances (gold, salt, methane), are similar. When they are used to refer to the species as a whole, or the substance in general, rather than any specific instance, these terms are also rigid designators [...]" (p.18)

Quiz #1 Review

3. Identify the sense and denotation of the word "tree."

sense- a large plant with a trunk with branches, leaves and roots.
denotation- the set of all trees in the world

Its sense is the literal meaning of the word, which refers to a large plant, with branches, trunk, leaves and supports our lives in many ways. The denotation of a "tree" is the actually physical object or what it represents in the world.

Quiz #1 Review

4. If two words have the same sense, then:

a. they must be referring expressions.

b. they may have different denotations

c. they must have no denotation.

d. they must also share the same denotation.

"[T]wo expressions that have the same sense (i.e., synonymous expressions) must always have the same denotation in any possible situation." (p.22)

Quiz #1 Review

5. "The husband of Dr. Jill Biden" and "the current President of the United States" have:

a. two different senses, but the same denotation

b. the same sense, but different denotations

c. the same sense and the same denotation

d. two different senses and two different denotations

1. Writing Assignment #1

Find a word in a language other than English that has a purely expressive meaning, like oops and ouch. Mention what language it comes from and explain how it is used. Make it clear that you understand what it means for something to have only expressive meaning.

Expressive meaning is about how the **speaker** feels about what they're discussing.

Words with only an expressive meaning, like *oops* and *yay*, lack both sense and denotation.

"Uffa" is a word in Italian that has a purely expressive meaning. It is used by someone when they want to express their emotions of either frustration, anger, annoyance or even boredom. For a word to only have an expressive meaning, it cannot specifically describe a situation or refer to things, but it allows someone to show what they feel in a short utterance. Italians use this word day to day to convey their emotional state in various everyday situations. The word "Uffa" could be used by a student in response to their teacher telling them they have a pop quiz. If the student said "Uffa!" about that it could express that they are mad that the teacher gave them a test at such short notice. This example shows that expressives serve to show the speaker's feelings and reaction to a particular circumstance without being descriptive about it.

2. Last time

- We noted that the meaning of a simple declarative sentence – its **proposition** – can be either true or false.

- We identified **analytic sentences** (always true), **contradictions** (always false), and **synthetic sentences** (truth depends on the world).

- We explored the relationships between sentences, including **entailment**, **paraphrases** (mutual entailment), **contradictory** and **contrary propositions**, and **independent propositions**.

3. Presupposition

- How is presupposition defined early on?

"[I]nformation which is linguistically encoded as being part of the common ground at the time of utterance." (p.40)

- What does utterance mean here?

The speech act – the statement, the question, whatever it may be.

- What is "common ground"?

"[E]verything that both the speaker and hearer know or believe, and know that they have in common." (p.40)

Presupposition

- In our speech, we often refer to information that we believe to be part of the common ground.

"It's nice outside." → We both like the same kind of weather.

"They didn't vote like us." → We both voted the same way.

"I made your favorite cake." → We both know your favorite cake (and we both think it's the same cake).

"Take some more tea," the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.

"I've had nothing yet," Alice replied in an offended tone, "so I can't take more."

Why does Alice seem upset by what the March Hare said?

More is a trigger. What's a trigger?

"The word or grammatical construction which indicates the presence of a presupposition." (p.40)

What is the presupposition indicated by *more* in the above passage?

That Alice has already had some tea.

The March Hare suggested that something was part of the common ground that in fact was not.

What's a presupposition failure?

"[A]n inappropriate use of a presupposition trigger to signal a presupposition which is not in fact part of the common ground at the time of utterance." (p.41)

Presupposition

- There are many kinds of presupposition triggers. P.43 gives an overview of a number of them.

Definite singular noun phrases:
The King of France (presupposes that there's one person who fits the description in a given context)

A possessive phrase:
My cat, Joan's house (presuppose I have a cat, Joan has a house)

Restrictive relative clauses in a definite noun phrase:
The man who killed my father (presupposes some man killed the speaker's father)

Factive predicates (*regret, aware, realize, know, be sorry that*):
She regrets that she falsified her dental records (presupposes that she falsified her dental records)

Presupposition

Implicative predicates (*manage → try*; *forget to → intend*):
She <u>managed</u> to win the race (presupposes she tried to win the race)

Aspectual predicates (*stop, continue, resume, begin*):
He <u>began</u> to cry (presupposes he wasn't crying before)
He <u>continued</u> running (presupposes that he had been running)

Temporal clauses:
<u>Before</u> I moved to Texas, I never attended a rodeo (Presupposes the speaker moved to Texas.)

Counterfactuals presuppose their antecedent (*if*) clauses
are **false**:
<u>If you didn't drink all the gravy</u>, you wouldn't be sick.
(Presupposes the hearer did drink all that gravy.)

Comparisons presuppose the statement is true for the object of comparison:
John isn't <u>as talented as Billy</u>. (Presupposes Billy is talented.)

Practice (p.49 q.C)

Identify the presuppositions and presupposition triggers in the following examples:

John's children are very well-behaved.

Susan has become a vegan.

Bill forgot to call his uncle.

After he won the lottery, John had to get an unlisted phone number.

George is sorry that he broke your Ming dynasty jar.

After I heard The Beatles, my life changed forever.

While his wife was in the hospital, John worked a full 40 hour week.

Presupposition

- We must be able to identify a presupposition vs. an entailment.
- If p entails q, then any speaker who states that p is true must believe that q is also true.

Presupposition

- If *p* entails *q*, a speaker may refute or doubt *p* while keeping their judgment of *q* independent. With a presupposition, this isn't so.

1a. I broke your jar.   2a. John killed the wasp.   3a. The king is strong.

1b. Your jar broke.   2b. The wasp died.   3b. There is a king.

Someone saying "Did I break your jar?" or "I didn't break your jar" may fully accept that your jar broke, or may doubt that it did.

1a entails 1b.

Someone saying "Did John kill the wasp?" or "John did not kill the wasp" may fully accept that the wasp died, or may deny that it did.

2a entails 2b.

But someone saying "Is the king strong?" or "The king is not strong" **must** accept that there is a king, and cannot doubt that there is a king.

3a presupposes 3b.

Presupposition

Usually, when a sentence triggers a given presupposition, a whole "family" of sentences that contain the same trigger will also do so.

a. Susan has stopped dating that Albanian monk.

b. Susan has not stopped dating that Albanian monk.

c. Has Susan stopped dating that Albanian monk?

d. If Susan has stopped dating that Albanian monk, I might introduce her to my cousin.

e. Susan may have stopped dating that Albanian monk.

In a–e, what's the presupposition?   In a–e, what's the trigger?

Practice (pp.49–50 q.D)

Show how you could use the negation and/or question tests to decide whether the (a) sentence entails or presupposes the (b) sentence. Evaluate the two sentences if spoken by the same speaker at the same time and place.

1a. Dave knows that Jim crashed the car.
1b. Jim crashed the car.

2a. Zaire is bigger than Alaska.
2b. Alaska is smaller than Zaire.

3a. The minister blames her secretary for leaking the memo to the press.
3b. The memo was leaked to the press.

4a. Everyone passed the examination.
4b. No one failed the examination.

5a. Mr. Singleton has resumed his habit of drinking stout.
5b. Mr. Singleton had a habit of drinking stout.

Practice (p.52 q.D)

Show how you could use the negation and/or question tests to decide whether the (a) sentence entails or presupposes the (b) sentence. Evaluate the two sentences if spoken by the same speaker at the same time and place.

6a. The boss realized that Jim was lying.
6b. Jim was lying.

7a. Singapore is south of Kuala Lumpur.
7b. Kuala Lumpur is north of Singapore.

8a. I am sorry that Arthur was fired.
8b. Arthur was fired.

9a. Nobody is perfect.
9b. Everybody is imperfect.

10a. Leif Erikson returned to Greenland.
10b. Leif Erikson had previously visited Greenland.

Presupposition

- What's a presupposition failure, again?

"[A]n inappropriate use of a presupposition trigger to signal a presupposition which is not in fact part of the common ground at the time of utterance." (p.41)
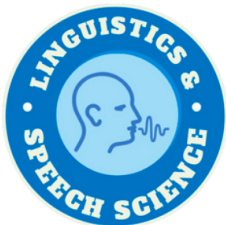
- What can happen when "the hearer [is] confronted with a mismatch between a presupposition trigger and the current common ground"?

- Communication breakdown, for one.

- Or... accommodation. The hearer "may choose to accept the presupposition as if it were a part of the common ground."

Presupposition

- Accommodation usually happens when the presupposition is uncontroversial and consistent with the information already in the common ground. The hearer will integrate this new info into their model of the common ground.

- In a way, presupposition is poorly named.

- Both speakers don't really need to <u>pre</u>suppose the same common ground.

- One must, and the other must accept it. Common ground can be expanded on the fly.
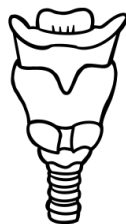
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Sunday 10/1/23
Clove Lakes Park
Registration at 10:00am, Walk starts at 11:00am

Scan the QR code to donate to the cause and register for the walk!

For 29 September:

- Read chapter 5, sections 5.1—5.4.2 (pp.79–98).
- Do quiz #2, to be sent out this weekend.