SPR 4106 Syntax and semantics in formal terms

Chapter 9 "Presuppositions": 5 essentials

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May 7, 2015

Presuppositions must be true for the utterance to make sense

- For example: ⟦ the coastline of Mongolia is scenic ⟧$_s$ = ?
  if s is 'our', 'the actual' situation, or world

Presuppositions are entailments that are insensitive to negation

The relevant sense of **make sense**:
be either true or false, – have a truth value at all;
this explains why negation does not affect presuppositions

- ⟦ the coastline of Mongolia is not scenic ⟧$_s$ = just as ? !

Presupposition Triggers, Part I

The a. sentence presupposes the b. sentence:

The definite article

(1) a. The coastline of Mongolia is rugged.
     b. Mongolia has a coastline (and only one).

Factive predicates

(2) a. She does not know that I am married.
     b. I am married.

(3) a. It's a shame that Hallström has lost his touch.
     b. Hallström has lost his touch.

Presupposition Triggers, Part II

Aspectual verbs and adverbs

(4)   a.   I have finally <u>stopped</u> having sex with my ex,
               but we remain <u>good</u> friends.

        b.   I have had sex with my ex.

(5)   a.   I am sober <u>again</u>.

        b.   I have been intoxicated.

Cleft constructions

(6)   a.   <u>It was</u> her father <u>who</u> killed Laura Palmer.

        b.   Somebody killed Laura Palmer.

Discourse and Presupposition Projection

Where are presuppositions checked: in the world or in the text?

- Some presuppositions are strongly context-dependent

  (7)   The ship foundered off the coast of Norway.

  (8)   Her eye make-up was blue, too.

- Presuppositions can be 'trapped'

  (9)   If she is pregnant, it doesn't show that she is.

Common Ground: our shared information

- a set of worlds that presuppositions should include
- the local context can change the global context

Presupposition Accommodation

Sometimes presuppositions are informative and yet . . .

. . . the sentence makes sense

- Total accommodation:

  (10) It was later discovered that he had been doping.

  (11) It was Tang who taught me how to tango.

- Partial accommodation:

  (12) Lou brought a bottle of Kressmann. Sue, too, brought a bottle of German wine.

The context is adjusted so as to satisfy the presupposition after all