

snippets

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4.

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Presupposition wipe-out can't be all or nothing: a note on conflicting presuppositions

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It has been suggested that cases of conflicting presuppositions like (1) ‘may [...] be amenable to a treatment in terms of local accommodation’ (Heim, 1983:fn.5).

(1) Either John stopped smoking or he started smoking

I will focus on the lexical insertion of an \mathcal{A} -operator, generally regarded as a grammatical reformulation of the process of local accommodation (Beaver and Krahmer (2001:171). \mathcal{A} is used as a ‘presupposition wipe-out device’ in trivalent accounts of presuppositions (Peters 1979, Beaver and Krahmer 2001, Fox 2008 and George 2008). Beaver and Krahmer (2001) propose to handle cases like (1) by inserting \mathcal{A} in both disjuncts as in (3). I will show that there are cases in which this simple account does not work and needs to be amended somehow.

(2) φ $\mathcal{A}\varphi$
1 1
0 0
0

(3) Either \mathcal{A} [John stopped smoking] or \mathcal{A} [John started smoking]

Soames (1979, 1982) observes that other presuppositions, like the one of *too* in (4) below, can survive despite the fact that the conflicting ones are cancelled.

(4) Either Bill stopped smoking and received an award for that too, or Bill started smoking.

As Soames points out, cases like (4) are problematic for an approach to cases like (1) that assumes that disjunction can be a ‘plug’ in the sense of Karttunen (1973): the presupposition of *too* would be incorrectly cancelled. (4), on the other hand, is not a problem for an account in terms of \mathcal{A} because it can be analyzed along the lines of (5), where *too* isn’t in the scope of \mathcal{A} .

(5) Either [\mathcal{A} [Bill stopped smoking] and [received an award for that too]]
or [Bill started smoking]

However, the same kind of solution is not tenable for an example like (6), where we have two presuppositional triggers embedded under *stopped/started* – the triggers *being upset that* and *too*. In this example, the presuppositions coming from *being upset* and *too* – respectively, the presuppositions that John left the country and that somebody else left the country – survive and indeed seem to project as presuppositions, as (7) shows. These propositions do not seem to be mere entailments of (6). It is unclear how to give scope to \cancel{A} in examples like (6) so that it could cancel only the conflicting presuppositions.

(6) Either John stopped being upset that he left the country too, or John started being upset that he left the country too.

(7) If either [John stopped being upset that he left the country too] or [John started being upset that that he left the country too], he will let us know soon.

Summing up, the modified Soames cases above constitute a challenge for an account of cases of conflicting presuppositions in terms of the \cancel{A} -operator.

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