

# snippets

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# *Maximize Presupposition!* and presupposition satisfaction

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Percus (2010) discusses a challenge for classical formulations of *Maximize Presupposition!* (MP): a sentence like (1a) is infelicitous in the suggested context even though the stronger presupposition of its competitor, (1b), is not assumed to be true.

- (1) *Context: As a rule, Uli takes two students on at a time. The interlocutors have not established whether Uli currently has any students.*
- a. #Uli invited all his students to the party.
  - b. Uli invited both his students to the party.

Percus (2010) suggest reformulating MP by weakening the condition on presupposition satisfaction as follows: a sentence  $S$  is infelicitous at a context  $c$  if  $S$  has a presuppositional competitor  $S'$  that is contextually entailed by  $S$ . This suggestion, taken up in recent work like Anvari 2018, accounts for the case above while preserving the classical MP-cases.

I note that the empirical success of this move depends on one's assumptions regarding how MP is evaluated. To see this, consider first the well-known MP effects in (2):

- (2) a. Uli arrived at noon, and Kazuko {#believes/✓ knows} it.  
b. Every professor with exactly two students told {#all/✓ both} his students to quit.

One way to account for these data is to let MP be evaluated globally and assume that the comparison mechanisms apply at the level of lexical items (Percus, 2006). While this account of (2) is compatible with the above account of (1), note that combining them leads however to undesirable results for cases like (3): their combination incorrectly predicts the presuppositionally weaker sentences in (3) to be infelicitous – locally, the same lexical items are competing, and globally, these sentences contextually entail their presuppositional competitors.

- (3) a. Kazuko {✓ believes/✓ knows} that Uli arrived, and indeed Uli arrived at noon.  
b. Every student who talked to {✓ all/✓ both} his German advisors has only two advisors.

These observations leave us with two options. One is to maintain the above account of (1) but reject the possibility that MP is ever checked globally. This option would be compatible with the proposal in Singh 2011 that MP is to be evaluated locally, i.e. relative to local contexts. The resulting combination would account for cases like (1) and capture the contrasts between (2) and (3) on the assumption that local contexts in conjunctions and universal sentences are asymmetric.

Another option is to offer an alternative analysis of (1) that maintains the classical MP-condition on presupposition satisfaction and thus remains compatible with a global or local account of the contrasts in (2) and (3). This analysis could start from the observation that (1a) and (1b) both carry an informative presupposition (noted as  $p$  and  $p^+$ ) in the global context  $c$ , as schematized below:

- (4)  $c \subseteq$  *If Uli has any student, he has exactly two.*
- a. Uli invited all his students to the party.  
 $p :=$  *Uli has students.*
  - b. Uli invited both his students to the party.  
 $p^+ :=$  *Uli has exactly two students.*
- FACT: For any  $c' \subseteq c$ , if  $c' \subseteq p$ , then  $c' \subseteq p^+$  by Modus Ponens

For (4a) to be felicitous, two requirements must thus be met: (i) for presupposition satisfaction,  $c$  must be adjusted to obtain a context  $c'$  such that  $c' \subseteq p$ , and (ii) by MP, the context to which (4a) is added should not entail  $p^+$ . However, these requirements can never be met together in this case: if (i) is met (i.e.,  $c' \subseteq p$ ), then (ii) isn't, since  $c' \subseteq p^+$ , and so infelicity ensues by MP; and if (ii) is met (e.g.,  $c' = c$ ), then (i) isn't, since  $c \not\subseteq p$ , and so infelicity ensues due to presupposition failure. If this explanation is on the right track, then the infelicity of (1a) could simply reflect the interplay of two pressures already familiar to us, the pressure that the context be or become one in which the presuppositions encoded in the semantics are satisfied and the extra pressure from MP that those presuppositions be as strong as possible in that (possibly adjusted) context.

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