Reference & Presupposition Assignments

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1 Reference Assignment

1.1 Evidence for discourse referents

Almost all the uses of *it* seem to introduce discourse referents, according to the pronoun test.

1.1. *The tiger* is a dangerous creature. Nevertheless, it is vulnerable to COVID-19.

1.2. If you can't come, *that* will be a shame. It would make me unhappy.

1.3. *Barbara's sincerity* is really touching. It is also a little wearisome.

1.4. *Yesterday* was beautiful. It was also rainy.

1.5. I saw my cousin *yesterday*. *It* was a rainy day.
It was raining *then*. ($\neq$ yesterday)

1.6. *It* 's rain today. *It*'s rain tomorrow too. (Same?)

1.7. *It* 's John who's spreading the rumor. # It / He was breaking the club rules.

The list of examples above is a sufficient answer to the question, but you should read the comments to understand some of the issues they raise:

Comments: There seems to be a difference between *a rainy day* and *raining* in 1.5. Only the first can clearly refer to *yesterday*, as is suggested by the fact that it's hard to add *then*: *It was a rainy day #then*. If the *it* refers to yesterday, its rainyness, like its Tuesdayness (supposing it was a Tuesday), is a property of the whole day, not just the interval during which my cousin and I met.

In 1.6, we have two *weather-it*s. Do they co-refer? Traditionally these are called expletives, NPs with no semantic roles. They are present purely to satisfy a (language-particular) synytactic requirement that every English clause have a subject. If this analysis is correct, it is besides the point to ask if they co-refer, since they have no reference. Some support for this analysis is provided by languages like Italian that routinely drop subjects and lack any element corresponding to *it* in weather clauses. English *it's raining* translates into Italian as *piove*.

The inappropriateness of *it* in 1.7 is interesting and compatible with the analysis of clefts defended in Hedberg (2000). Hedeberg says the *it* is underlyingly adjoined to a clause, and roughly

has the semantics *the one who's spreading the rumor*, so on the surface we have a single discontinous noun phrase and the *it* does not have the status of an independent referring NP. It does however introduce a discourse entity who's clearly human into the discourse, and that entity requires a personal pronoun when referred to. Note: the *it* version of 1.7 does have a reading on which it's it's felicitous, on which it denotes the act of spreading the rumor, but on that reading the two *it*s would not co-refer, since the first sentence certainly does not equate John with the action of spreading the rumor.

1.2 Russell's analysis

For more background on Russell, see "Descriptions" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

The Russellian analysis of (a) has the usual three components, each of which has been placed on a separate line of the translation in (b):

a. I like the visitor from Spain.
b. $\exists x[$ visitor(x) & from$(x,$ Spain$)$ &
$\forall y[($visitor(y) & from$(y,$ Spain$)) \rightarrow (y = x)]$ &
like(j, x)]

The first line is the existence presupposition (there exists an x who is a visitor from Spain); the second is the uniqueness presupposition (x is the only visitor from Spain); and the third is what's asserted. Note that the Noun Phrase *the visitor from Spain* includes the property of being from Spain, so that what belongs on the left hand side of the arrow in the uniqueness presupposition includes both being a visitor and being from Spain. The following is the wrong translation for the given sentence:

$\exists x[$ visitor(x) & from$(x,$ Spain$)$ &
$\forall y[$visitor$(y) \rightarrow (y = x)]$ &
like(j, x)]

This says there exists an x who's a visitor from Spain, and x is the unique visitor. It would be the right translation for *I like the visitor, who's from Spain*.

1.3 Question 15: Specific / Nonspecific

1.1. (a) Leah wants to marry a Swede, but she doesn't know any.
(b) Leah wants to marry a Swede, but her parents don't like him.

1.2. Frank talked to a doctor this morning.

The question:

> In 1.1 (a) the NP a Swede is used nonspecifically – that is, there isn't any particular Swede the speaker has in mind. In (b) this NP is used specifically, — that is, in reference to a particular Swede.
>
> Similarly, 1.2 could mean that Frank talked to a specific doctor, or simply that he had a medical consultation — that is, that a doctor describes the type of person he talked to.

Compare this distinction for indefinite NPs with the referential/attributive distinction for definite NPs. Do Donnellan's tests apply in the same way?

An answer:

Donnellan says: ' "[a] speaker who uses a definite description attributively ... states something about whoever or 'whatever is the so-and-so.' A speaker who uses a definite description referentially ... uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something **about that person or thing**" [Emphasis added] Donnellan's clearest test for discrimating the two use types comes into play when the description applies to no one. For example,

> Fred says: "Smith's murder is insane", intending to refer to Jones, who actually is insane.

In a situation in which Smith committed suicide, and Fred knows Jones and intends to refer to him, Fred has still successfully referred to Jones, and said something true to boot. Donnellan claims a statement made with a misascribed definite description can only be true on a referential use. So, according to Donnellan, a key feature distinguishing referential uses from attributive uses is that referential uses (and only referential uses) can be true when the description is false (we say the description is *misascribed*). Let's try applying Donnellan's test to Leah's Swede (on a specific use): Can 1.1.b be true even though the guy Leah actually wants to marry, who is in fact disliked by her parents, is not a Swede? My intuition is no. This fact distinguishes specific indefinite uses from referential definite uses: Specific indefinite uses can never be true when the description is misascribed. A similar difference exists between attributive uses and nonspecific indefinites. According to Donnellan, attributive uses of definites can never be true if nothing satisfies the description. But (a) can be true even if there are no Swedes. So that adds another difference: Attributive NPs are not like nonspecific indefinites in truth conditions, at least according to Donnellan's view of attributives.

The above is a perfectly good answer, Read the comment for more.

Comment: However, there is a still strong case for identifying the two distinctions. In both cases, it seems the distinction is fundamentally about speaker intention (and therefore purely pragmatic in nature). A nonspecific use of 1.2 could appropriately be followed by "I wonder whether it was a man." The speaker doesn't know much more about this doctor than his/her doctorhood. In contrast, just as for Donnellans's referential uses, we call an indefinite use specific when the speaker has enough other information beside his/her profession identifying the doctor in question. A specific use of 1.2 could be followed by "He lives across the street." In sum, there is a strong case for calling referential/attributive and specific/non-specific the definite and indefinite realizations of what is fundamentally the same pragmatic distinction.

The next part of the question is:

Notice that even in the nonspecific cases, an anaphoric pronoun can have the NP as its antecedent:

(iii) Leah wants to marry a Swede, and he has to be both rich and handsome.

Does the nonspecific use involve a discourse-model referent? Discuss any other ramifications of your findings for the representation of referents in the discourse model.

Here's an answer

(iii) clearly establishes that we need a discourse model referent/discourse entity even for non specific uses, and this complicates the concept of discourse model referent in various ways. For one thing even though the entity has to be around and referrable to, this example shows that discourse entities don't have to be someone/something the discourse participants are committed to the existence of.

The above is a perfectly good answer. Read the comment for more:

Comment: "provisional entities" like the Swede in (iii) don't have the same status as others. We can't just attribute more properties to them out of the blue.

(iii) Leah wants to marry a Swede,
but she doesn't know any
now. a. # Her parents don't like him.
b. He'll have to be thick-skinned, because her parent won't like him.

Whenever a reference to this entity is made, he has to be clearly marked (by the modal in this case) as existing only in a hypothetical context in which Leah's need for a Swede is met. So in keep tracking of discourse entities we need to somehow take into account that some of them exist only in very specific modal contexts. Big headache.

2 Presupposition

2.1 Question 2

The question:

Use a truth table to show that if Russell is right in his characterization of presupposi tion (given in (157)), then he is also right that the falsity of the presupposition entails the falsity of the entire utterance.

Russell's account of *The king of France is bald.* is the conjunction of three claims, an existence claim p a uniqueness claim q, and a baldness claim r. The first two are presupposed and the third asserted (though Russell is not defending a fundamental distnction between presupposed and asserted).

The King of France is bald

$\exists x$	KofF(x)	&	($\forall y$KoF(y) $\rightarrow x = y$)	&	Bald(x)
	Kof exists	&	Kof is unique	&	Kof is bald
	p	&	q	&	r
	Presupposed				Asserted

So let's just be schematic and spell out the truth table for a conjunction of three statements:

p	q	r	p &q	p & q & r
T	T	T	T	T
T	F	T	F	F
F	T	T	F	F
F	F	T	F	F
T	T	F	T	F
T	F	F	F	F
F	T	F	F	F
F	F	F	F	F

There are two rows in which the presupposition (p & q) is true. In all other cases what's presupposed is false, and the last column (the truth value of the whole sentence) is also false. So falsity of the presupposition does in fact entail falsity of the entire sentence.

2.2 Question 4

The question

> Consider the following examples:
>
> 2.1. The soup has thawed.
>
> 2.2. The soup has not thawed.
>
> 2.3. The soup has not thawed; it was never frozen!
>
> 2.4. The soup has thawed, if it was ever frozen.
>
> Give the two presuppositions found in (i), and for each of the examples in (ii)- (iv), explain what effect (if any) the modification has on what is presupposed , using the terms and concepts from this chapter.

An answer

a. 2.1 has the presupposition that the soup exists and is unique and it has the presupposition that the soup was frozen. It is characteristic of change of state verbs like *thaw* to presuppose the pre-existing state. You can't thaw without being frozen.
b. 2.2 has the same presuppositions as 2.1.
c. 2.3 cancels the presupposition. It is natural in the right context, for example, when countering a claim that the soup (now liquid) has thawed.

d. 2.4 suspends the presupposition. The difference between cancellation and suspension is that whether the soup was frozen or not is left as an open question.

The above is a perfectly good answer. Read the comment for more.
Comment:
We can identify three natural conversational states when it comes to the soup question.

a. The previous status of the soup is unsettled in the conversation; speaker and hearer are both leaving it open as to whether the soup was frozen. The default state (for example, when the soup has never been mentioned).
b. It is accepted that the soup was frozen. The state after an unchallenged utterance of 2.1.
c, It is accepted that the soup was **not** frozen. The state after an unchallenged assertion of *The soup was not frozen.*

A successful cancellation puts us in state (c). A successful suspension puts us back in state (a).

2.3 Question 5

The question:

> Abbott (2006) offers the following example to illustrate the difference between presupposition and conventional implicature:
>
> (i) Even the King of France is bald. (Abbott 2006 , example 12)
>
> This is true if there's a King of France and he's bald , regardless of whether or not he's the least likely person to be bald. However, it cannot be true if there's no King of France. Explain how these two facts distinguish what is presupposed in (i) from what is conventionally implicated.

An answer

> The conventional implicature that *even* adds depends on a scale, describable as a likelihood scale (which might follow from some background assumption characterizing what kind of people are bald, or from assumptions about what typical perceptions of bald people are). The implicature is that the king is the least likely (on that scale) to be bald (for example, because he is not associated with the kind of unfavorable image bald people have). Abbot says that even (!) if it's false that the king is the least likely to be bald, (i) can be true. This would make the implicature false even though the sentence is true. If that can happen, and it seems it can, that would give us a **test** distinguishing conventional implicature from from presupposition, because a sentence cannot be true if one of its presuppositions is false (all the theories discussed in the chapter agree on that).
>
> Summarizing the test: Let's say we have some **implication** q of a statement p, and we want to decide whether q is a conventional implicature or a presupposition of p. We ask whether p can still be true when q is false. If p can still be true when q is false, then we have a conventional implicature, though we might want to check a little further to see whether q is a conventional implicature or just an ordinary (general) implicature. If p **can't** be true when q is false, we have, potentially, a presupposition. (Before we conclude that, we want to be sure this passes our original test for presupposition: it's implied by both p and the negation of p.)

2.4 Question 7

The example sentence for this question is:

> (i) Zizi brought the basin again.

The implication in question is

> (ii) Someone brought the basin before.

Can (i) be true even if (ii) is false?

If (i) can be true even when (ii) is false, that's evidence that (ii) is a conventional implicature, per our discussion for Question 5. If (i) can't be true when (ii) is false, that's evidence that we have a presupposition.

My intuition is that (i) can't be true if (ii) is false. Therefore (ii) is either an entailment a presupposition of (i). Ther fact that it is still implied by the negation of (i):

(i') Ziz didn't bring the vase again.

nails down the case that it's a presupposition.

2.5 Question 9

The question:

> We observed with respect to (182a), repeated below, that it's possible to suspend a presupposition:
>
> (i) John has stopped smoking, if he ever did smoke. (= (182a))
> (ii) # I realize that I broke the vase, if in fact I did.
>
> Explain why suspension appears to be available in cases like (i) but unavailable in cases like (ii).
>
> Try to formulate a rule that will distinguish between these two categories of attempted suspensions.

An answer (there are **many** good answers):

> Example (ii) uses the verb *realize*, which seems to be what Abusch (2004) calls a hard triggers. Hard triggers (like clefts) carry presuppositions that are very hard to cancel and suspend. The question is: why is it a hard trigger? Maybe all factive verbs are equally hard triggers. Let's try that, provisionally. The first-person present tense nature of (ii) and the factiveness of *regret* both contribute to the difficulty of successful suspension in (ii), so we'll try using 3rd person past tense examples. The following suggests factiveness is the key factor that that makes suspension hard:
>
> (i) # He realized that he had broken the vase, if in fact he did.
> (ii) # He discovered that he had broken the vase, if in fact he did.

The above is a perfectly good answer, Read the comment for more details.

Comment: Don't go away thinking all factives are equally hard triggers. That's wrong:

(a) If I discover that you're lying to me, ...
(b) # If I realize that you're lying to me, ...
(c) If he realizes that you're lying to him, ...

Examples (a) and (b) give a potential suspension context; both *discover* and *realize* are factive verbs and yet (a) is much more natural than (b). Example (b) seems to be odd precisely because it carries a presupposition that contradicts the need for an *if*-clause, meaning the presupposition hasn't been successfully suspended, while it has been in (a). Example (c) still carries the presupposition, but is not odd, because the contradiction of the antecedent clause is removed. So suspension is easier in some context with *discover* than with *realize*.

2.6 Question 10

The following sentence contains a presuppositional expression:

(i) Charlie regrets that he is tall.

Tell which category of presupposition trigger is involved here, and list five more members of this category other than those presented in the text.

This is a **factive** verb.
Other examples are: *notice*, *discover*, *realize*, *know*, and *forget*.

3 Bibliography

Abbott, Barbara. 2006. Unaccommodating presuppositions: A neogricean view. In *Draft paper for Workshop on Presupposition Accommodation at The Ohio State University*.

Hedberg, Nancy. 2000. The referential status of clefts. *Language* 891–920.