THE 2^3 VERBS *PRETEND*

PAUL NEUBAUER
University of Illinois

This paper was written in 1970, while Neubauer was a graduate student at the University of Michigan, and was circulated in mimeographed form. The work was supported in part by grant GS-2939 from the National Science Foundation to the University of Michigan. *The paper combines two areas of inquiry that were starting to receive great attention at the time - the logic of complement constructions and inter-speaker variation in syntax and semantics. The question that Neubauer raises about language acquisition in the final paragraph of the paper is particularly worth pondering - given the subtle nature of the facts that distinguish the eight idiolectal variants of the meaning of* pretend, *is there any way that such variation could have arisen other than through random variation in the way that children formed generalizations about* pretend? *Neubauer's conclusions about* pretend *are developed further, and in some important respects contested, in Rosenberg's (1975a,b) studies of "counterfactive" verbs.*

The point of this paper is threefold: (i) to attempt to clear up some of the confusion that has recently been circulating about the verb *pretend*; (ii) to point out an interesting case of syntactic dialect variation where there

seems to be a relatively large but apparently finite number of closely related dialects on a single item; and (iii) to provide some evidence that surface lexical items may be composed of more primitive elements at a deeper level of analysis.[1]

It was suggested in Karttunen (1970b) and G. Lakoff (1971) that the verb *pretend* carries a counterfactive presupposition. Thus the speaker of a sentence such as (1) is committed to the assumption that the complement of *pretend* is false, i.e., that (2) is true.

(1) *Max is pretending that he is sick.*

(2) *Max is not sick.*

In Lakoff (1971), the claim is made that there is a distinction between factive and counterfactive presuppositions in that factive presuppositions have the property of transitivity while counterfactive presuppositions do not. For example, compare (3) with (4).

(3) *Max regretted that he realized he was sick.*

(4) *Max pretended that he realized he was sick.*

The complement of both (3) and (4), (5), itself contains the factive predicate *realize* and thus presupposes (6).

(5) *He* [*Max*] *realized he was sick.*

(6) *He* [*Max*] *was sick.*

The phenomenon of factive verbs such as *regret* and *realize* is at least well known if not well understood, and it is commonly agreed that (3) presupposes (5) and (5) presupposes (6). Lakoff claims that *pretend* is counterfactive and thus (1) presupposes (2) and (4) presupposes (7).

(7) *Max didn't realize he was sick.*

If the presupposition relation is transitive, then both (3) and (4) should presuppose (6), since (6) is a presupposition of their presuppositions, namely (5) and, according to Lakoff, (7), respectively. But Lakoff finds that, for him, (4) does not presuppose (6) and thus concludes that transitivity does not hold for counterfactive presuppositions. [He does note, however, that there is another dialect, which happens to include the present writer, wherein (4) does presuppose (6) and transitivity holds.]

This "failure of transitivity" prompted Bas van Fraassen to suggest (in a letter to Lakoff) that the "presupposition" of a sentence whose main verb is *pretend* might not be ∿ S

(where S is the complement of *pretend*) but "it is not true that S" for those who share Lakoff's judgements. To see the point of van Fraassen's suggestion, consider (8).

(8) *Ed { a. *regrets* / b. *has found out* / c. *realizes* } *that the earth is flat.*

The sentences of (8) are, of course, starred under the assumption that the speaker and/or the hearer believe that the earth is not flat. A member of the Flat Earth Society, for example, would see nothing odd about (8). However, in order to have some constant reference point, we will assume for the remainder of this paper that everyone concerned assumes that the earth is a sphere. Since the verbs of (8) are all factives, which presuppose the truth of their complements, the sentences of (9) are also infelicitous.

(9) *Ed { *does not regret* / *has not found out* / *does not realize* } *that the earth is flat.*

But, notice the difference between (9) and (10).[2]

(10) *It is not* { *true* / *the case* / *so* } *that Ed* { **regrets* / *has found out* / *realizes* } *that the earth is flat.*

Now we are set for the crucial test of van Fraassen's hypothesis, which is given in (11).

(11) *Ed is pretending that he* { a. **regrets* / b. *%has found out* / c. *%realizes*[3] } *that the earth is flat.*

The speakers who find (11b) and (11c) good are exactly those who agree with Lakoff's judgment that (4) does not presuppose (6), a fact that strongly confirms van Fraassen's hypothesis that in Lakoff's dialect the presupposition of (4) is not (7) but (12), which does not commit its utterer to (6).

(12) *It is not true that Max realized he was sick.*

The interesting and important thing about (11) is that (in the appropriate dialects) the pattern of stars matches the pattern of stars in (10); i.e., although it is not completely predictable whether a given verb will produce a good or bad (10)-type sentence for a given speaker, the felicity of the corresponding (11)-type sentence can be

predicted from the (10)-type.

Another question that Lakoff does not adequately discuss is, what is the logical relation between the sentence whose main verb is *pretend* and its complement? Lakoff assumed that it was presupposition, but Karttunen (1970a) attempts to demonstrate that it is not. He points out the difference between sentences like (13) and (14).

(13) *Is John pretending to be a milkman?*

(14) *Does John realize that he is a milkman?*

Notice that (14) requires the assumption that John is a milkman, but that (for some speakers, obviously including Karttunen) (13) is neutral with respect to that assumption. Karttunen cites some additional examples, which, due to their complexity and varying amounts of relevance from dialect to dialect, will not be discussed here at all. The simplest examples showing what the appropriate logical relation(s) might be, and thus also the most revealing in the study of the dialects, are those such as (15) and (16), just a sentence and its negation.

(15) **Sam is pretending that the earth is a sphere.*[4]

(16) *%Sam is not pretending that the earth is a sphere.*

If a presupposition relation held, then (16) would be ungrammatical, read with normal intonation, in exactly the same way that (9) is. But, this is the case for only some speakers, interestingly (a minority that includes this writer). For most people, however, (16) is perfectly well formed and appropriate whether the earth is a sphere or not [which is not true of (15)]. For them, (16) indicates that the relation is not presupposition, but entailment.[5]

Karttunen (1970a) pointed out yet another problem with *pretend*, namely, the question of who must believe the complement of *pretend* to be false or not true. Karttunen hypothesizes the following situation: John is a milkman who is suffering from amnesia; he is persuaded to dress up in a milkman's uniform and carry out the duties of a milkman in the hope that this will jog his memory. Under these circumstances, would it be appropriate to report his actions with (17)?

(17) *John is pretending* $\left\{\begin{matrix} \textit{to be} \\ \textit{that he is} \end{matrix}\right\}$ *a milkman.*

Karttunen finds this perfectly alright, but to some others (including the present writer), (17) would not be an

appropriate report of that situation. Thus, we see that there is an additional point of differentiation, namely, whether or not the speaker must agree[6] with the subject of *pretend* that its complement is false or not true.

We have discussed three points with respect to which speakers may differ in their use of *pretend*. Those who find (16) grammatical have an entailment that the complement of *pretend* is (at least) not true, while those who find it ungrammatical have a presupposition. Those who find (11b) and (11c) grammatical merely require untruth of the complement of *pretend*, while those who find them ungrammatical have the stronger requirement of falsity. And finally, those who find (17) to be unacceptable in the circumstances have additional complications in terms of agreement of the speaker about the situation described in the lower sentence, where those who find (17) acceptable do not. As it turns out, these points are all logically independent, and, in fact, all possible combinations of the various choices seem to exist. In tabular form the eight possible dialects (resulting from three independent binary choices) are shown

(18)	a.	E	∿ T(S)	∿ A
	b.	E	∿ T(S)	A
	c.	E	∿ S	∿ A
	d.	E	∿ S	A
	e.	P	∿ T(S)	∿ A
	f.	P	∿ T(S)	A
	g.	P	∿ S	∿ A
	h.	P	∿ S	A

E indicates entailment; P, presupposition; ∿ T(S), that the complement is not true; ∿ S, that it is false; A, that the speaker (or the subject of the next higher world-creating verb) must agree; ∿ A, that he need not.

An important corollary of all this is that there can be no single atomic predicate, i.e., semantic concept, corresponding to the English word *pretend*, since in each of the dialects there would have to be a different set of meaning postulates associated with it. However, one would not want to say that there are eight different atomic predicates and that a given speaker merely picks one of them to associate with the word *pretend*, for to do so would be to claim that the difference between the various meanings of *pretend* lies in a single eight-way choice rather than three binary choices. But, if we accept that account, then we are left with no principled reason why there should be eight (and particularly those eight) dialects rather than five or thirteen or some other random number; any hypothesis that there is only a

single choice to be made among a number of independently existing atomic predicates forfeits any claim to the capability of explaining why those predicates are so closely related in simple, independently motivated[7] ways.

What is even more interesting about these dialects than the fact that they all exist, however, is their relative frequency and stability. Dialect (a) seems to be the most frequent and the most stable. It is the dialect toward which speakers tend to drift when pushed. This fact is not totally surprising. It is completely consistent with the facts found by Carden found that speakers in the NegQ and (to a lesser extent) NegV dialects tended to move into the AMB dialect when faced with a number of sentences over a period of time which were only grammatical in the other dialect. In other words, Carden found that when confronted with a mass of data which was not acceptable in his own current dialect, a speaker frequently liberalized his restrictions. This is precisely what seems to happen with respect to the *pretend* dialects. Dialect (a) is the most liberal of the eight possible; it allows (8b), (8c), (9), and (13), all of which would be ungrammatical in dialect (h) and some of which would be ungrammatical in any of the others.

That the above principle might be true is probably the most important suggestion raised by the present work. It is probably not true in its full generality[8], but the question is to what extent is it true and what interesting generalizations might be made about that extent. Another question that is raised by this sort of work is, how do these dialects arise in the first place? Certainly there could not have been sufficient information in the form of crucial examples available to the child learning the language in the first place, so he must have made his decisions on the basis of insufficient evidence. Did he then simply make his choices completely at random, or did he have a strategy of some sort which might be discerned from some other features of his idiolect? There is obviously insufficient data at the present time to even attempt any sort of answer to these questions, but they seem to this writer to be potentially fruitful future lines of investigation.

NOTES

[1]I particularly wish to thank George Lakoff, John Lawler, and Andy Rogers for many enlightening discussions of this topic and for their criticisms of an earlier draft of this

paper, which was uncirculated under the title "A *Pretend* Paper". They are not to be held responsible for any, much less all, of the inadequacies and inaccuracies in the final product.

[2]Note that, as usual, a given reader is not really expected to agree with a given writer's placement of asterisks. What is important is not the particular lexical items that correlate with asterisks, but the existance of a pattern of the claimed type.

[3]The symbol % is a nonstandard symbol recently introduced into the literature by Larry Horn and myself to indicate dialect variation that is important for the point being made.

[4]Some will at first rule (15) out for quite irrelevant reasons, namely, a difficulty in conceiving of someone pretending something that is not about him. The following situation may help such a reader imagine a non-equi-subject pretense. Suppose Tom enters wearing a raincoat, shaking water off his umbrella (or just pretending to), stamping his feet, etc. . If one knows that the sun is shining and it is a perfectly dry day outside, one might report the situation, I think, as (i).

(i) *Tom is pretending that it is raining.*

[5]The notions of presupposition and entailment as used here can be defined as follows:

S_1 presupposes S_2 iff whenever S_1 is true, S_2 is true, and whenever S_1 is false, S_2 is true.

S_1 entails S_2 iff whenever S_1 is true, S_2 is true.

Notice that the definition of entailment is just like that of presupposition, but without the second clause of the definiens, so that anytime S_1 presupposes S_2, it also entails it, but not vice versa. Presupposition is a stronger relation than entailment and therefore fewer pairs of sentences will satisfy it.

[6]The notion of agreement seemed to be a handy one at first, but now it is clear that it is primarily useful as a

terminological rug for sweeping facts of the following sort under. Karttunen (1970a) pointed out the following situation. Suppose John is a patient in a mental institution because he thinks he is Napoleon Bonaparte; he realizes that the psychiatrists are not going to release him as long as they think he thinks he is Napoleon; therefore, he decides to act as if he no longer thinks he is Napoleon. Karttunen then asks if this is reportable as (ii).

(ii) %*John is pretending that he is not Napoleon.*

He concludes that (ii) is acceptable under these circumstances, which is reasonable, since, as we already know, he is not in a dialect that requires agreement. But now consider (iii) instead.

(iii) *John is pretending that he realizes that he is not Napoleon.*

To the best of my knowledge, (iii) is acceptable universally; in particular, it is acceptable in my own dialect. What is remarkable about that is that *John*, the subject of *pretend*, would dispute the felicity of the use of *realize* in the complement. For the speaker, in my dialect, it must be false that he realizes that he is not Napoleon, but for John, it is enough to think it not true. It may be the case that in all dialects, the subject of *pretend* need only believe that the complement is not true [or, as Karttunen (almost) pointed out, perhaps he need only not believe the complement to be true].

[7]Independently of the matter of *pretend*, there are other cases where there is variation on what the logical relation between two propositions related to a sentence is. Consider the analysis presented in Fillmore (1971): Take, for example, the verb *criticize*, which according to Fillmore asserts that a situation or act is bad and presupposes that the person being criticized is responsible for it. Fillmore's analysis predicts that (iv) should be appropriate only if the speaker assumes that Carol did, in fact, drop a dish.

(iv) *Bob criticized Carol for dropping a dish.*

For some people, this may not be true, but their dialects are irrelevant to the discussion that follows. For me, Fillmore's analysis seems to be correct in that it is a presupposition, but there is another dialect in which the relation is not presupposition, but entailment. Therefore, I find (v) bad,

unless Alice did drop a dish, while speakers of this other dialect [who do have the restriction in (iv)] have no such restriction for (v).

(v) %*Ted didn't criticize Alice for dropping a dish.*

Similarly, there are cases where informants differ on questions of who must share certain opinions or beliefs in order for certain sentences to be appropriate in a given context. Thus, I find that my political views can affect my judgements about the appropriateness of (vi), while others may find it sufficient that Spiro thinks that "The Selling of the Pentagon" was blameworthy.

(vi) %*Spiro accused CBS of claiming that the Pentagon spends too much money on public relations.*

At this time, I know of no other cases where the difference between "false" and "not true" is the subject of dialect variation, but I am confident that additional cases will be discovered in the near future. What this means is that at least two of the three parameters on which people vary with *pretend* are also subject to dialect variation with other verbs. This would seem strange to me if one were to accept the view that there are eight different, independent atomic predicates, of which each speaker selects one to pair with the word *pretend* and discards the other seven.

[8]See, for example, the discussion of SUPER-EQUI in Grinder (1970) and Neubauer (1970). I know of no cases where anyone has been influenced by exposure to my, more liberal, SUPER-EQUI dialect to shift over into it.