Action sensitivity in grammar

Goncharov (2020)

January 25, 2022

Roadmap

- Data
  - Szabolcsi's (2004) observation about PPIs under *want*
  - Transposed Szabolcsi's observation (nominal minimizers)
  - Observations we need to explain
- Proposal
  - Ingredients for the proposal
    - Polarity
    - Want
    - Intentional/accidental distinction
  - Dynamic presupposition of 'want'
  - Predictions and other examples from the polarity system
- Conclusion

Data

Szabolcsi's (2004) observation

- Indefinites, such as *someone*, *something*, and *some NP*, are PPIs in that they cannot be interpreted under the immediate scope of clause-mate negation (Klima, 1964; Baker, 1970; a.o.).

  (1) John didn't call someone. (*not>some/✓some>not)

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  (1) John didn't call someone. (*not>some/✓some>not)

- Szabolcsi (2004, fn. 10) observes that anti-licensing of PPIs in the infinitival complement of *want* is sensitive to the interpretation of an action as intentional versus accidental.

  (2) a. I don't want to call someone. (*not>some)
  b. I don't want to eat something. (*not>some)

  (3) a. I don't want to offend someone. (✓not>some)
  b. I don't want to break something. (✓not>some)

Data

- Szabolcsi's observation can be further substantiated:

  (4) A: Why are you switching off your phone? (pocket dialing)
  B: Oh! I don't want to call someone. (✓not>some)

  (5) I don't want to call someone accidentally. (✓not>some)

Data

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  B: Oh! I don't want to call someone. (✓not>some)

  (5) I don't want to call someone accidentally. (✓not>some)

- The sensitivity of anti-licensing of *some* PPIs to the interpretation of an action as intentional vs. accidental is also attested in Hebrew, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, and Russian (Szabolcsi 2010, Goncharov 2020).

Data

Transposed Szabolcsi's observation

- Expressions, such as *a red cent*, *a damn thing*, and *a drop*, are strong NPIs or nominal minimizers. They are licensed in Anti-Additive contexts (*nobody*, *not*), but not in simple Downward-Entailing contexts (*at most*, *less than*).

(6) a. Nobody gave anything/a red cent to the beggar.

b. At most 5 boys gave anything/*a red cent to the beggar.

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  (6) a. Nobody gave anything/a red cent to the beggar.
  b. At most 5 boys gave anything/*a red cent to the beggar.

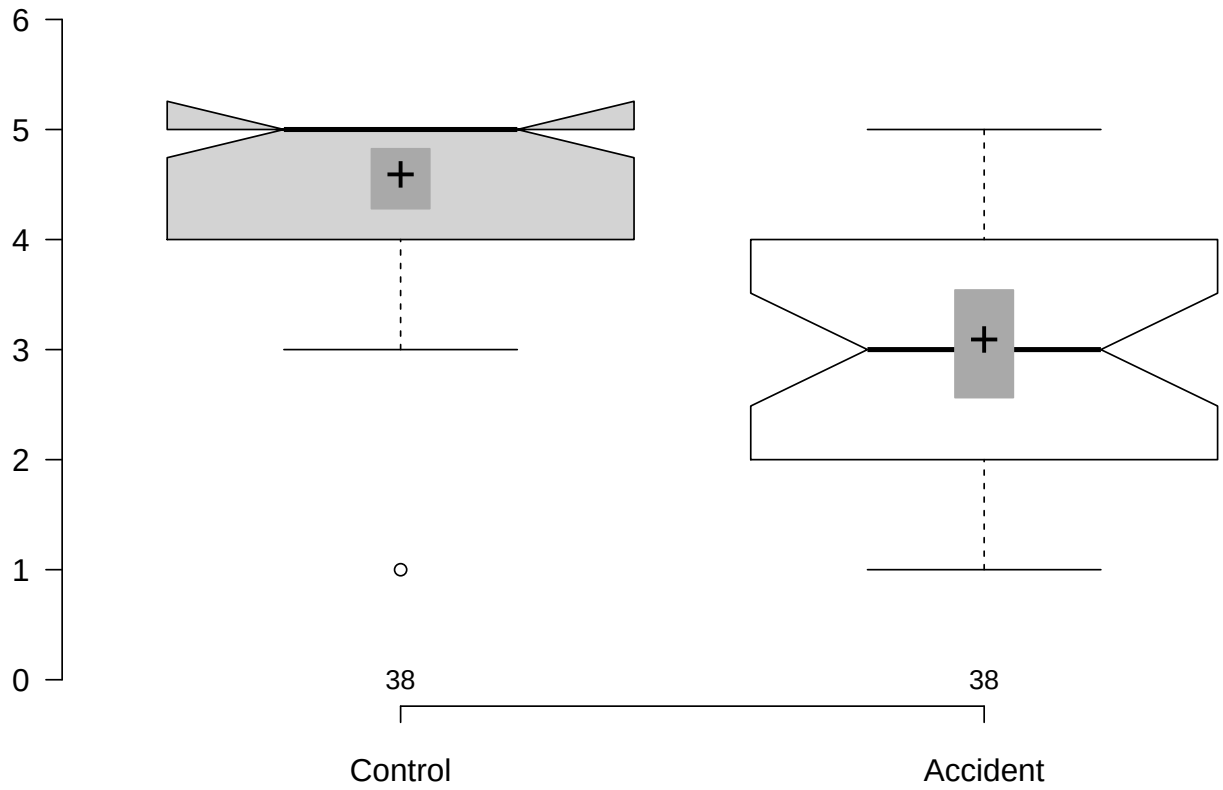
- Nominal minimizers appear to be less acceptable with accidental actions than with intentional actions. *Any* is not sensitive.

  (7) a. This investment is too risky....
  I don't want to lose any money/??a red cent on it.
  b. I don't want to win any money/??a red cent in the game.

  (8) a. The company wants to harvest new ideas but...
  it doesn't want to spend any money/a red cent on this.
  b. I don't want to give any money/a red cent to the beggar.

Data

Pilot study: MTurk, within subjects, 19 participants, 5pt Likert scale



Data

'¬ **want PSI'** (PSI = Polarity Sensitive Item)

- The effects of the interpretation of an action as intentional or accidental on PSI-licensing are found in a particular configuration:

¬ *want PSI*

Data

'¬ want PSI' (PSI = Polarity Sensitive Item)

- The effects of the interpretation of an action as intentional or accidental on PSI-licensing are found in a particular configuration:

  ¬ *want PSI*

- PSIs in simple sentences do not show sensitivity to the interpretation of an action as intentional versus accidental.

(9) a. John didn't call someone. (*not>some)

b. John didn't offend someone. (*not>some)

(10) a. John didn't give a red cent to the beggar. (=idiom)

b. John didn't win a red cent in this game. (=idiom)

Data

Observations we need to explain

- In '¬ *want PSI*' configuations...
  - (i) *some* PPIs are anti-licensed in intentional contexts, but not accidental contexts
  - (ii) nominal minimizers are less acceptable in accidental contexts than in intentional contexts
  - (iii) weak NPIs like *any* are not sensitive to the interpretation of an action as intentional versus accidental

action	*some*	*a red cent*	*any*
intentional	✗	✓	✓
accidental	✓	✗	✓

- Similar sensitivity is not found in simple sentences.

Proposal

Important ingredients:

- polarity
- *want*
- intentional/accidental distinction

Proposal

Some PPIs and nominal minimizers are mirror images of each other

- They are (anti-)licensed in Anti-Additive (*nobody*, *not*), but not simple Downward-Entailing (*at most*, *less than*) environments:

(11) a. Mary called someone.
b. Nobody called someone. (*nobody>some)
c. At most five men called someone. (✓at most>some)

(12) a. Mary gave a red cent to the beggar. ($\neq$ idiom)
b. Nobody gave a red cent to the beggar. ($=$ idiom)
c. Less than five men gave a red cent to John. ($\neq$ idiom)

Proposal

Some PPIs and nominal minimizers are mirror images of each other

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b. Nobody gave a red cent to the beggar. ($=$ idiom)
c. Less than five men gave a red cent to John. ($\neq$ idiom)

- Qualification: the restrictor of *every* and *if*-clauses are Anti-Additive, but in these environments, *some* PPIs are not anti-licensed and nominal minimizers are not licensed.

Proposal

- Locality constraint: *some* PPIs are anti-licensed locally; nominal minimizers are licensed locally.

(13) a. Mary didn't eat something. (*not>some)

b. John didn't say [that Mary ate something]. (✓not>some)

(14) a. Mary doesn't have a red cent. (= idiom)

b. John didn't say [that Mary had a red cent]. (≠ idiom)

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- Qualification: neg-raising predicates (Fillmore 1963, Bartsch 1973, Gajewski 2005, a.o.)

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- Qualification: neg-raising predicates (Fillmore 1963, Bartsch 1973, Gajewski 2005, a.o.)
- **Summary:** *some* and minimizers are mirror images of each other

positive env.	DE/clause-external	AA/local
some	some	*some
*minimizer	*minimizer	minimizer

Proposal

- **Recall that** weak NPIs like *any* and strong NPIs (or minimizers) are licensed in different sets of environments

positive env.	DE/clause-external	AA/local
*any *minimizer	any *minimizer	any minimizer

Proposal

- **Recall that** weak NPIs like *any* and strong NPIs (or minimizers) are licensed in different sets of environments

positive env.	DE/clause-external	AA/local
*any *minimizer	any *minimizer	any minimizer

- Gajewski 2011 and following him Chierchia 2013: weak NPIs are licensed when an assertion is DE, strong NPIs are licensed when an assertion and presuppositions/SIs are DE

(15) a. Everyone who read any article should raise their hand.

b. * Everyone who left until Tuesday missed the class.

(16) a. Asr: $\forall x$ [x left until Tue $\rightarrow$ x missed class] $\Downarrow$

b. Psp: $\exists x$ [x left until Tue] $\Uparrow$

Proposal

The presupposition of 'want'

- Both weak and strong NPIs are licensed under negated *want*.

(17) a. John doesn't want to eat anything.

b. John doesn't want to leave until Tuesday.

Proposal

The presupposition of 'want'

- Both weak and strong NPIs are licensed under negated *want*.

  (17) a. John doesn't want to eat anything.

  b. John doesn't want to leave until Tuesday.

- Heim (1992) proposes that *want* has the epistemic uncertainty presupposition in (18). But this presupposition is not DE, thus it is incorrectly predicted that strong NPIs are not licensed under $\neg$ *want*.

  (18) 'x want ϕ' is defined only if $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$
  (x takes it possible that ϕ and x takes it possible that $\neg\phi$)

  (19) John doesn't want to leave until Tuesday.

  a. Asr: $\Box^{Best-B_j}(\neg$ john leaves until Tue) $\Downarrow$

  b. Psp: $\Diamond^{B_j}$(john leaves until Tue) $\wedge$ $\Uparrow$
  $\Diamond^{B_j}(\neg$ john leaves until Tue)

Proposal

- To solve the problem, Romoli (2012) proposed a weaker presupposition for *want* that does not intervene with licensing of strong NPIs.

  (20) 'x want ϕ' defined only if $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \rightarrow \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$
  (if x takes it possible that ϕ, then x takes it possible that $\neg\phi$)

  (21) John doesn't want to leave until Tuesday.

  a. Asr: $\Box^{Best-B_j}(\neg$ john leaves until Tue$) \Downarrow$

  b. Psp: $\Diamond^{B_j}$(john leaves until Tue$) \rightarrow \Downarrow$
  $\Diamond^{B_j}(\neg$ john leaves until Tue$)$

Proposal

- Both Heim-style and Romoli-style presuppositions for *want* make incorrect predictions for the data we are interested in.

(22) 'x want ϕ' defined only if:

a. $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$ (Heim-style psp)

b. $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \rightarrow \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$ (Romoli-style psp)

Proposal

- Both Heim-style and Romoli-style presuppositions for *want* make incorrect predictions for the data we are interested in.

(22) 'x want ϕ' defined only if:

a. $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$ (Heim-style psp)

b. $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \rightarrow \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$ (Romoli-style psp)

- (22a) predicts nominal minimizers to be infelicitous under both intentional and accidental actions, (22b) predicts nominal minimizers to be felicitous under both intentional and accidental actions

Proposal

- The asymmetry in sensitivity to the interpretation of an action as intentional or accidental between weak and strong NPIs suggests that accidental actions introduce an intervening Upward-Entailing (UE) presupposition which is absent with intentional actions.

(23) What we need to derive:

a. 'x not want ϕ^{int}' defined only if $\Box^{B_x}\neg\phi \Downarrow$

b. 'x not want ϕ^{acc}' defined only if $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi \Uparrow$

Proposal

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  b. 'x not want ϕ^{acc}' defined only if $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi \Uparrow$

- This solution can be extended to PPIs, if we say that the intervening UE presupposition 'shields' PPIs. This is corroborated by the observation that *some* PPIs and nominal minimizers are mirror images of each other.

Proposal

Intentional/accidental distinction

- The difference between intentional actions expressed by *call/eat* and accidental actions expressed by *offend/break* can be detected by the presence/absence of **weakness of will** inference ('couldn't resist').

(24) a. I didn't want to call Mary, but I did. (✓wow)
b. I didn't want to eat the cake, but I did. (✓wow)
c. I didn't want to offend Mary, but I did. (*wow)
d. I didn't want to break the vase, but I did. (*wow)

Proposal

- We say that an action is interpreted as intentional when it is *controlled*. That is to say, when the agent x of the action believes that if she acts so as to bring about ϕ, the state of affairs described by ϕ obtains. Similarly for $\neg\phi$. An action is interpreted as accidental when it is *non-controlled*. That is to say, when the negation of the control condition holds.

Notations
$\phi =$ the proposition that describes the action (complement of *want*)
$\psi =$ 'the agent acts so as to bring about ϕ'

(25) a. Controlled actions: $\Box^{B_x}((\psi \rightarrow \phi) \wedge (\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi)) \equiv \Box^{B_x}(\psi \rightarrow \phi) \wedge \Box^{B_x}(\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi)$

b. Non-controlled actions: $\neg\Box^{B_x}((\psi \rightarrow \phi) \wedge (\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi)) \equiv \Diamond^{B_x}(\psi \wedge \neg\phi) \vee \Diamond^{B_x}(\neg\psi \wedge \phi)$

Proposal

Dynamic presupposition of 'want'

- To obtain different presuppositions for intentional/controlled and accidental/non-controlled contexts, we propose that the presupposition of *want* is derived dynamically by revising the neutral belief state with three statements: (i) decision, (ii) control/non-control condition, and (iii) Romoli's conditional presupposition for *want*.

(26) a. Neutral belief state: $K_0 = \Diamond^{B_x} p \wedge \Diamond^{B_x} \neg p$ (for all relevant p)

b. When a sentence with *want* is uttered, K_0 is updated with:

i. Dec(ision):
$\Box^{B_x} \psi$ when 'x want ϕ' is uttered or
(x believes that x will act so as to bring about ϕ)
$\Box^{B_x} \neg \psi$ when 'x not want ϕ' is uttered
(x believes that x will not act so as to bring about ϕ)

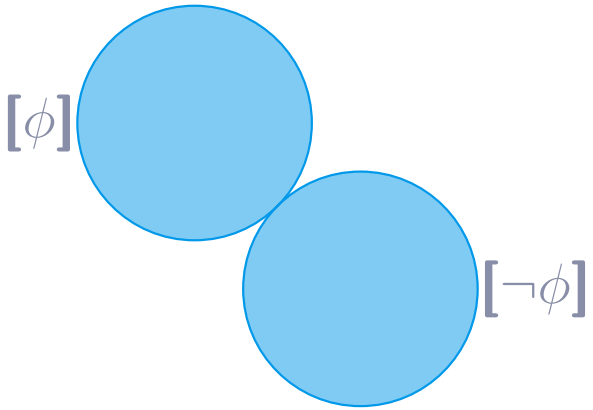
ii. Controlled or non-controlled condition in (25)

iii. Romoli's presupposition for *want*: $\Diamond^{B_x} \phi \rightarrow \Diamond^{B_x} \neg \phi$

...in Venn diagrams

Preliminaries: informativity

ϕ = it is raining, $\neg\phi$ = it is not raining



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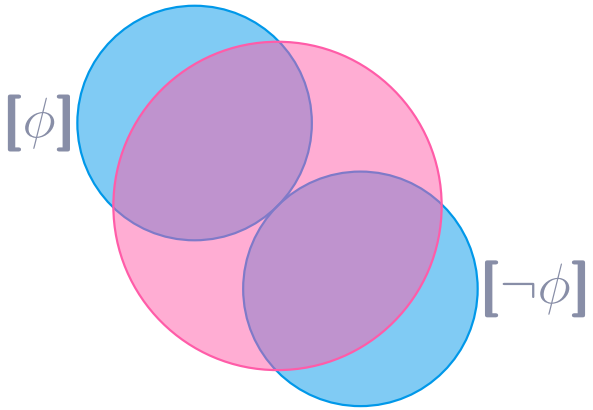

K_0 (neutral belief set)

$\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$

...in Venn diagrams

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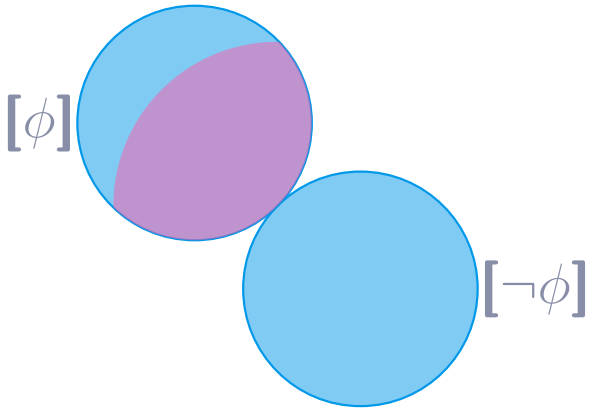

update K_0 with ϕ

$\Box^{B_x}\phi$

...in Venn diagrams

Preliminaries: informativity

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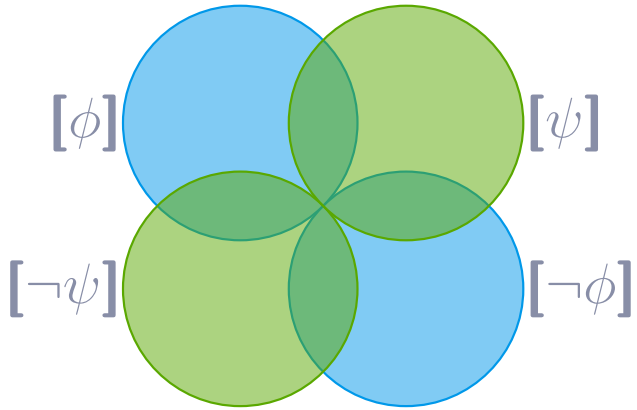

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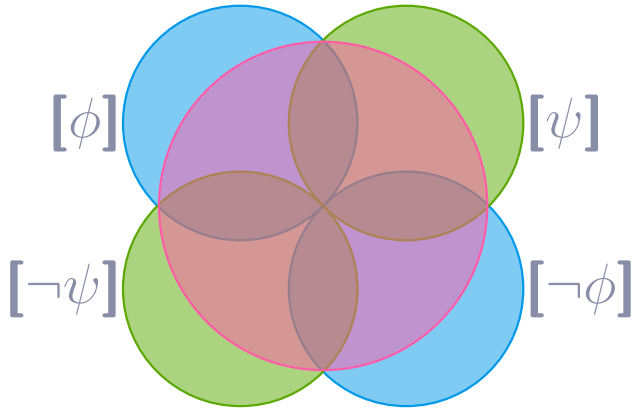

K_0 (neutral belief set)

$\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\psi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\psi$

...in Venn diagrams

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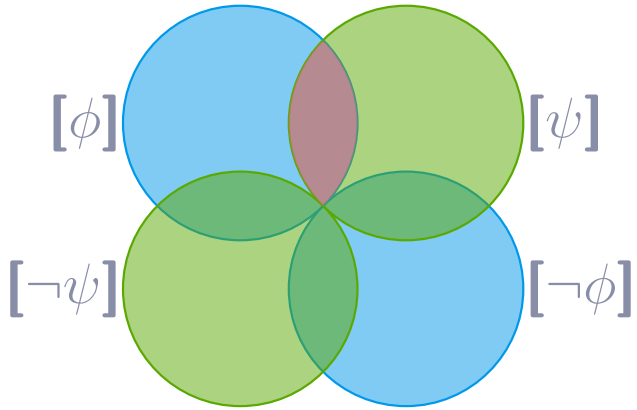

update K_0 with $\phi \wedge \psi$

$\Box^{B_x}(\phi \wedge \psi)$

...in Venn diagrams

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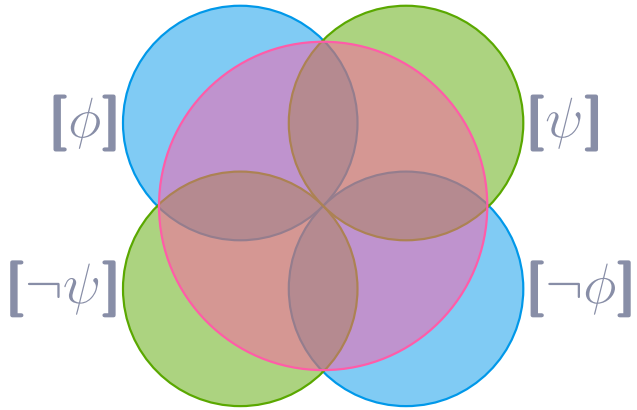

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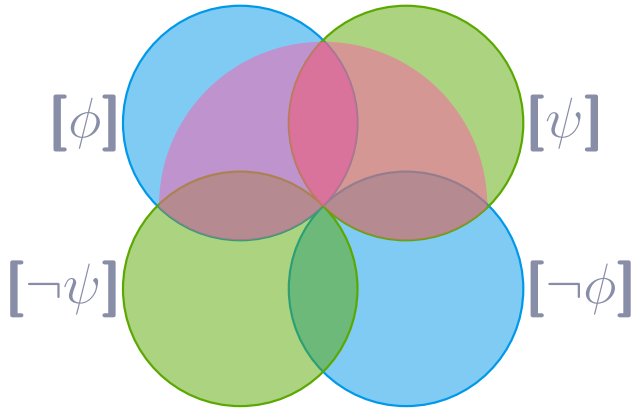
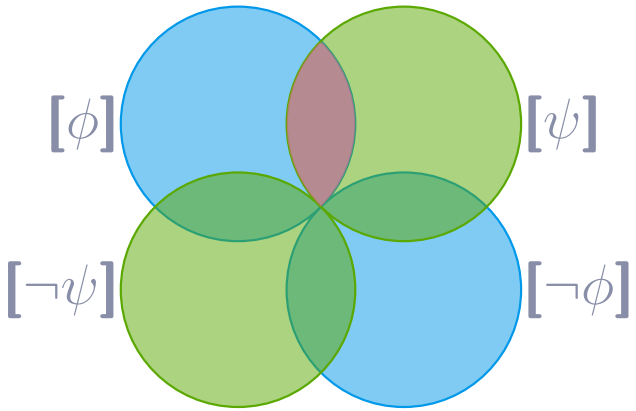


update K_0 with $\phi \vee \psi$

$\Box^{B_x}(\phi \vee \psi)$

Proposal

Why 'and' is stronger than (inclusive) 'or'?



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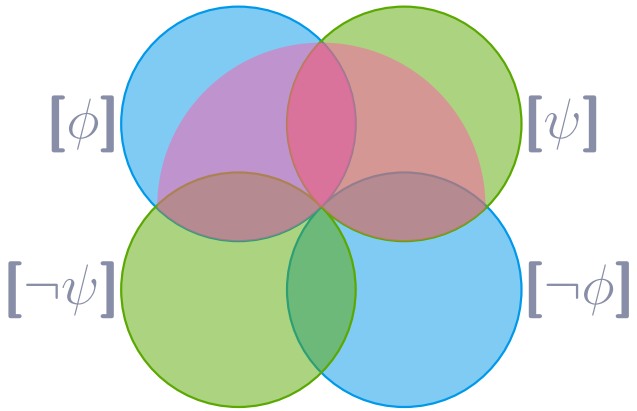
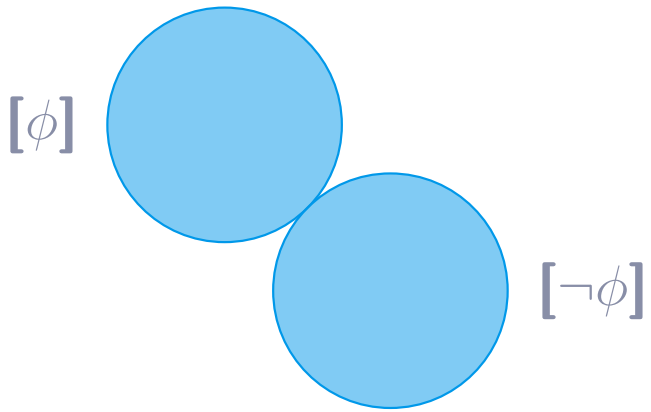


update K_0 with $\phi \vee \psi$
$\Box^{B_x}(\phi \vee \psi)$

...in Venn diagrams

Deriving different presuppositions for want

- As a first step, we construct a neutral belief set K_0 for two relevant propositions we need ϕ = the prejacent of *want* and ψ = 'the agent acts so as to bring about ϕ'.



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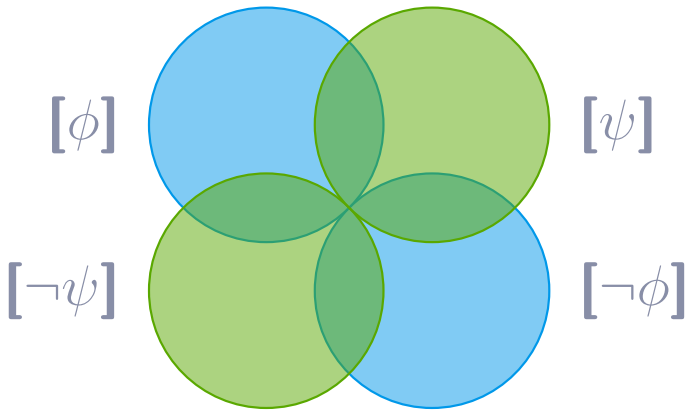

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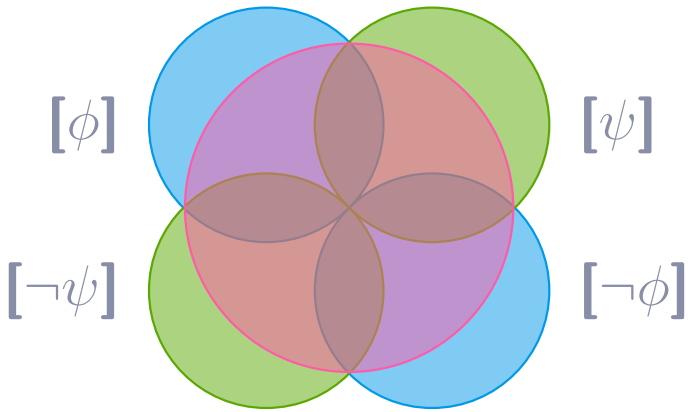

...in Venn diagrams

- Then, we update K_0 with three ingredients

  (i) *Dec(ision)* (x's beliefs about how he is going to act):

  $\Box^{B_x}\neg\psi$ as we have 'x not want ϕ'

  (ii) Either controlled or non-controlled conditions:

  Controlled: $\Box^{B_x}(\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi)$

  Non-controlled: $\Diamond^{B_x}(\neg\psi \wedge \phi)$

  (iii) Romoli's (2012) presupposition for *want*:

  $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \rightarrow \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$

...in Venn diagrams

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- We will have two updates: one for intetional actions which will derive the presupposition in (23)a (i.e., $\Box^{B_x}\neg\phi \Downarrow$); one for accidental actions which will derive the presupposition in (23)b (i.e., $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi \Uparrow$). The later is an intervener for strong NPI-licensing and a 'shield' for PPI-anti-licensing.

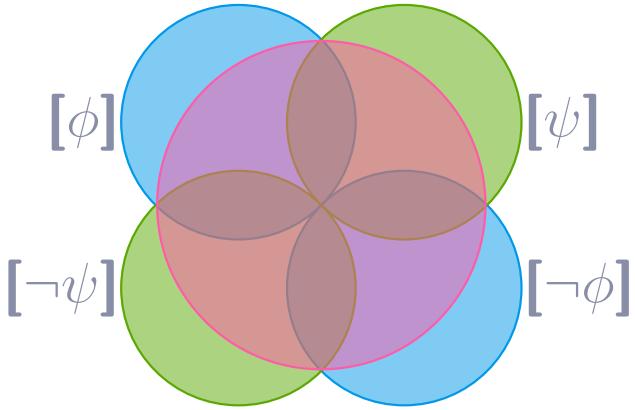
...in Venn diagrams

Update 1: x not want ϕ^{contr}

(i)

(ii)

(iii)



(neutral belief set)

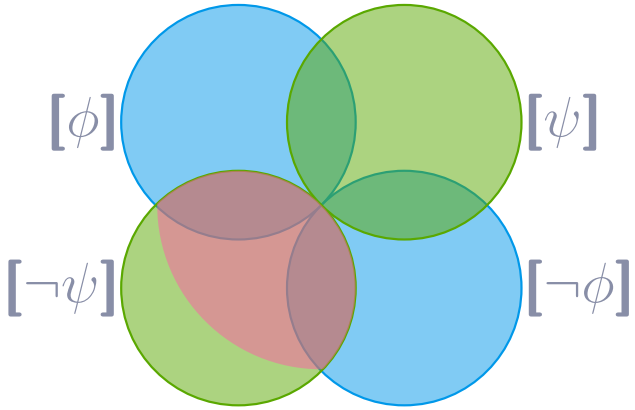
...in Venn diagrams

Update 1: x not want ϕ^{contr}

(i) $\Box^{B_x}\neg\psi$

(ii)

(iii)



Expand if compatible!

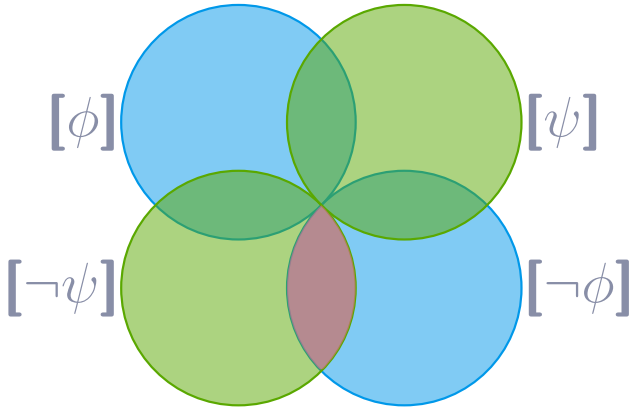
...in Venn diagrams

Update 1: x not want ϕ^{contr}

(i) $\Box^{B_x}\neg\psi$

(ii) $\Box^{B_x}(\neg\psi \to \neg\phi)$

(iii)



Expand if compatible!

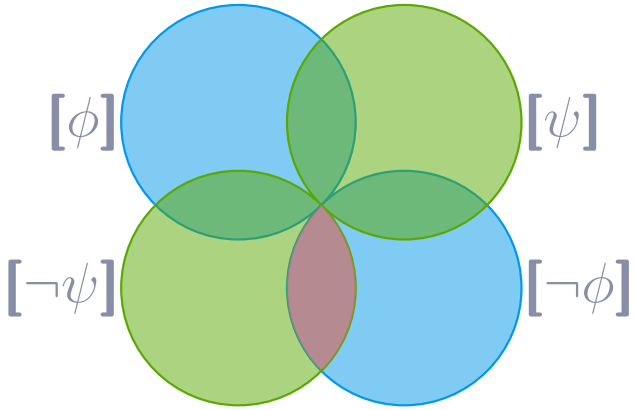
...in Venn diagrams

Update 1: x not want ϕ^{contr}

(i) $\Box^{B_x}\neg\psi$

(ii) $\Box^{B_x}(\neg\psi \to \neg\phi)$

(iii) $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \to \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$



(vacuous)

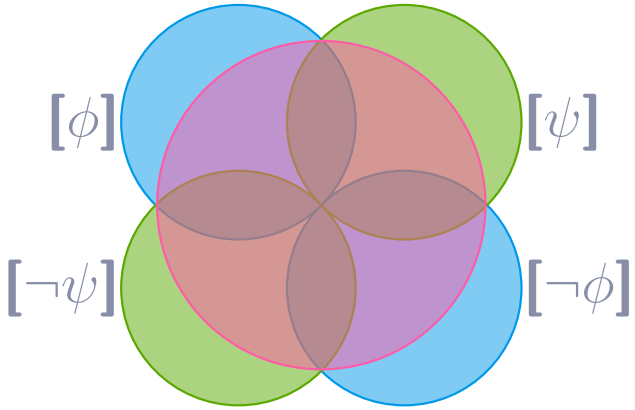
...in Venn diagrams

Update 2: x not want $\phi^{non-contr}$

(i)

(ii)

(iii)



(neutral belief set)

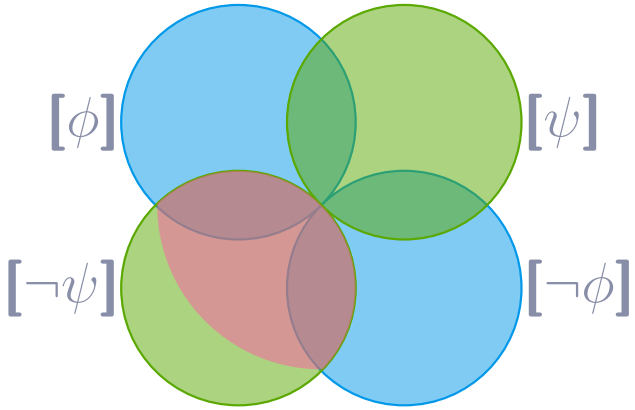
...in Venn diagrams

Update 2: x not want $\phi^{non-contr}$

(i) $\Box^{B_x}\neg\psi$

(ii)

(iii)



Expand if compatible!

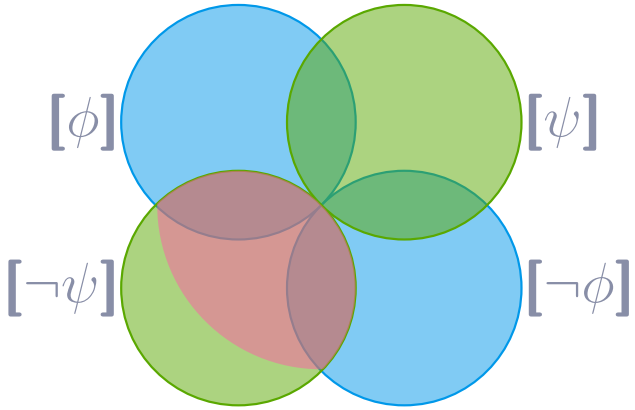
...in Venn diagrams

Update 2: x not want $\phi^{non-contr}$

(i) $\Box^{B_x}\neg\psi$

(ii) $\Diamond^{B_x}(\neg\psi \wedge \phi)$

(iii)



(vacuous)

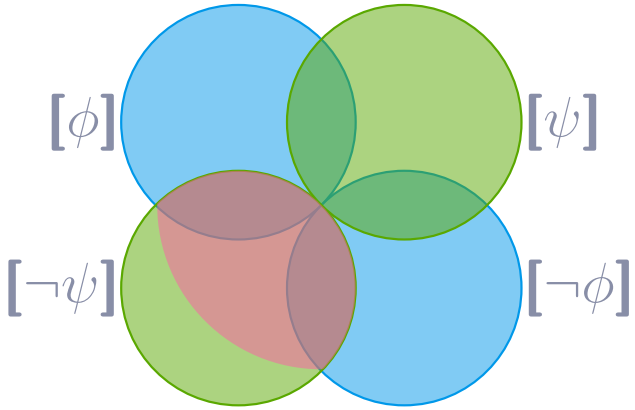
...in Venn diagrams

Update 2: x not want $\phi^{non-contr}$

(i) $\Box^{B_x}\neg\psi$

(ii) $\Diamond^{B_x}(\neg\psi \wedge \phi)$

(iii) $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \rightarrow \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$



(vacuous)

Proposal

- **Update 1** and **Update 2** derive the desired presuppositions which explain the distribution of nominal minimizers and *some* PPIs with intentional versus accidental actions.

(23) a. 'x not want ϕ^{contr}' defined only if $\Box^{B_x}\neg\phi \Downarrow$

b. 'x not want $\phi^{non-contr}$' defined only if $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi \Uparrow$

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- As weak NPIs like *any* are not sensitive to presuppositional content, the interpretation of an action as intentional or accidental does not affect their acceptability.

action	PPI	strong NPI	weak NPI
intentional	✗	✓	✓
accidental	✓	✗	✓

Proposal

Predictions

- In object control constructions, PPIs are not anti-licensed and strong NPIs are not fully acceptable with controlled actions.

(27) a. I don't want Paul to call someone. (not>some)

b. ? I don't want Paul to give a red cent to the beggar.

Update 1′: x not want ϕ^{contr}
(i) $\Box^{B_y}\neg\psi$
(ii) $\Box^{B_y}(\psi\rightarrow\phi)\wedge\Box^{B_y}(\neg\psi\rightarrow\neg\phi)$
(iii) $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi\rightarrow\Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$

$\gamma([K_0]) = [K_0]$ (vacuous)

Update 2′: x not want $\phi^{non-contr}$
(i) $\Box^{B_y}\neg\psi$
(ii) $\neg\Box^{B_y}(\psi\rightarrow\phi)\vee\neg\Box^{B_y}(\neg\psi\rightarrow\neg\phi)$
(iii) $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi\rightarrow\Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$

$\gamma([K_0]) = [K_0]$ (vacuous)

Extensions

Other polarity phenomena

- Collins and Postal's (2014) observation:

(28) a. Byron refused to do anything/a damn thing.
b. Jane forgot to do anything/*a damn thing.

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  b. Jane forgot to do anything/*a damn thing.

- Free Choice Items (Choi and Romero, 2008; Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito, 2017; a.o.)

  (29) a. ?? Ayer Juan tropezó con un objeto **cualquiera**.
  'Yesterday Juan stumbled against a random object.'
  b. Juan necesitaba un pisapapeles, de modo que cogió un libro **cualquiera** dela estantería y lo puso encima de la pila.
  'John needed a paperweight, so he took a random book from the shelf and put it on top of the pile.'

Conclusion

- We started with three observations concerning sensitivity of PSIs to the interpretation of an action as intentional versus accidental.

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- We started with three observations concerning sensitivity of PSIs to the interpretation of an action as intentional versus accidental.
- To account for the distribution of PSIs, we argued that *want* has a dynamic presupposition whose content is determined (among other things) by the interpretation of the action in its complement.

Thank you!

For references see here.