

Clarifying the point about “A woman walked in” vs. “Not every woman didn’t walk in”:

Grice’s maxim of manner: be perspicuous

“A woman walked in” is (one of) the most straightforward way(s) to express the existential content “at least one woman walked in”.

“Not every woman didn’t walk in” is not a perspicuous way to express the same content, it is longer and more complicated. Longer and more complicated contents tend to implicate different things, even when they are truth-conditionally equivalent e.g. “She sang *Home Sweet Home*” vs. “She produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score of *Home Sweet Home*”; “I stopped the car” vs. “I caused the car to stop”, etc.

So while the sentence containing the indefinite triggers Gricean reasoning that begins with the standard “the speaker said *that at least one woman walked in*”, the truth-conditionally equivalent double-negated sentence is going to trigger different reasoning, based on the maxim of manner (why did the speaker say the more complicated thing?).

Pushing back on the pushback

Key point: the conversational participants are not accurately tracking the conversation if they think that there are two distinct things under discussion, say, a woman who walked in and another individual who ordered lunch.

Think about what this means for the novelty of peg idea. Novelty of peg does not require novelty of referent. But it does require novelty of *object under discussion*. That is, it is not a misunderstanding of the conversation to think that there are *possibly* 2 different individuals under discussion (this is what you are calling the guarantee of indifference). But in the summary cases this *is* a misunderstanding of the objects under discussion in the conversation. There is not indifference, rather it is a misunderstanding of the conversation to think there are, e.g., possibly 2 students under discussion. (Caveat, but not an exception to what I am saying: phrases like “one of them” introduces a new, indifferent dref for existing pegs. It is of course a misunderstanding to think it is not identical to one of the individuals already introduced, but it is also a misunderstanding to think it is identical to a particular one, unlike in the summary uses.) Another way of thinking of things: I take the novelty requirement on indefinites to indicate that the objects under discussion are assumed to be distinct, *until discovered (or revealed) otherwise*. That is to say, of course we can be talking about a professor and a linguist and then discover (or reveal) that this is one and the same person. (This is not unique to indefinites, of course. But this is to say that what is behind the novelty requirement could never have been novelty of referent. It is novelty according to the conversation.) But in the summary cases, there is no sense in which 2 pegs are introduced and then it is revealed or discovered that they are in fact anchored to one and the same referent. If one is tracking the conversation, one knows that there is only one individual under discussion.

Some (relevant) ways in which my views have changed since 2012

1. Relating to the attitude contexts example on slide 13:
In “Anaphora and Negation” (2020), I have a more developed picture of contexts and the lifespan of discourse referents to address modal subordination, negation, and attitude contexts. (I think I had something this mind when writing my dissertation, but the 2012 paper was just supposed to deal with basic, unembedded cases.) The context contains a context set as well as a set of discourse referents, and these have to match in the following way. If the set of drefs contains a dref for a student who walked in, then all the worlds in the context set have to be such that at least one student walked in. Following Stalnaker (2014), certain expressions (modals, attitude verbs) trigger *subordinate or derived* contexts that are temporary. So your (2a) triggers a context set which contains Sue’s thinking worlds. On my view, such a sentence introduces a dref for the same reasons the unembedded one does, and the dref is satisfied by all of Sue’s thinking worlds. But (2b) returns us to the main context, in which there isn’t a unicorn in that Sue saw in every world, so the dref is no longer available.
2. In “Anaphora and Negation”, the Gricean derivation of the novelty implicature is a little different. When I was writing “Discourse dynamics, pragmatics, and indefinites”, I appealed to the maxim of relation because I thought it couldn’t be a quantity implicature, since indefinites are not strictly speaking less informative (or more informative, for that matter) than a name, definite description, etc. E.g. a name picks out a particular person, but an indefinite tells you something about that person that a name might not (e.g. that the person is a student), so they don’t seem to stand in any kind of informativity scale. But I later changed my mind about this. I still think they don’t form anything like a Horn scale, but I do think there’s a contextually determined alternative set of the type posited by Hirschberg (1985). Since “A woman walked in” contains a singular denoting phrase (“a woman”), which is used to pick out a single objects, the natural alternatives are ‘the woman’, ‘that woman’ (and related demonstratives like ‘that woman I was telling you about’), ‘she’ and possibly a name. Then the explanation carries on much as it does in the earlier paper; if the speaker intended to refer to an individual already in the set of discourse referents, all these alternatives are better ways of doing so, so absent contextual or explicit cancellation, she must have intended to talk about something new.
3. In “Descriptions, Pronouns, and Uniqueness” (forthcoming) I take back the idea at the end of “Discourse dynamics, pragmatics, and indefinites” that examples like the *When Harry Met Sally* example require accommodation. I think these are cases of pronouns introducing novel drefs. I do think the pragmatic reasoning still applies, it just explains when it is felicitous to use a pronoun or definite without an appropriate antecedent (rather than triggering accommodation). This matters in the context of my view in that paper, because I argue for an ambiguity theory of definites in which anaphoric ones presuppose discourse uniqueness (and proffer existence) while non-anaphoric ones presuppose worldly uniqueness (and proffer existence). So I take these sorts of cases to

be cases of non-anaphoric definites (whereas with the accommodation explanation they would be cases of anaphoric definites), which I think is warranted by the data. This doesn't matter too much for the present discussion in your seminar, but I thought I'd mention it.