Presuppositions and Cross-Linguistic Variation

Introduction. This paper argues that in St'át'imcets (Lillooet Salish; henceforth St'), typical presupposition triggers ('again', 'stop', 'more', 'also') do not place the same restrictions on the common ground as they do in English. I propose that these St' elements do not induce pragmatic presuppositions in the sense of Stalnaker (1974), but instead involve semantic presupposition.

Pragmatic presuppositions and the 'wait-a-minute' test. According to Stalnaker's pragmatic analysis, a speaker presupposes P just in case she believes that P is in the common ground (the set of propositions representing the shared assumptions of the discourse participants). This predicts that if P is <u>not</u> in the common ground (and cannot easily be accommodated), the hearer may feel justified in challenging the speaker. This can be diagnosed by the 'wait-a-minute' test (due to Kai von Fintel), illustrated in (1). In contrast, the assertion is supposed to be new, and therefore cannot be challenged with 'wait-a-minute' (2).

The 'wait-a-minute' test in St'. It is easy to obtain 'wait-a-minute' *(w-a-m)* responses from native speakers of English or other Indo-European languages (e.g. Conti 1999). However, it has proved impossible to elicit *w-a-m* responses in St'. Using potential presupposition triggers such as *múta7* 'again/more', *tsukw* 'stop', *hu7* 'more', and *t'it* 'also', a battery of methodologies has been employed, including: (a) intentionally causing presupposition failure in real discourse situations; (b) asking consultants to translate English discourses containing *w-a-m* responses; (c) constructing *w-a-m* responses in St' and asking consultants to judge discourses containing them; (d) explicitly discussing the test, using English to illustrate, and asking for similar responses in St'.

None of these methodologies elicits a contrast between presuppositions and assertions. Consultants almost always ignore presupposition failures in discourse. When pressed to express a response to failed presuppositions, consultants agree that they can be denied or questioned, but allow exactly the same denials and questions with unknown asserted material. Representative data are given in (3-4).

Potential analyses. One might suppose that those aspects of meaning which in English are presuppositional, are simply part of the truth conditions in St'. However, this cannot be right. Although *w-a-m* responses by the hearer are not attested, consultants <u>are</u> willing to judge that the speaker 'should not have said that' if the presupposition is false. Importantly, these meta-level judgements survive when the trigger is embedded under negation, an *if*-clause or a question (see (5)). Thus, the relevant aspects of meaning cannot be part of the truth conditions, but rather behave like presuppositions in that they project.

Alternatively, one might suppose that there is a cultural or independent linguistic reason why the *w-a-m* test doesn't work. This is very unlikely, since speakers do challenge other infelicitous utterances. For example, discourse-initial utterances with unclear pronoun reference elicit laughter and responses like 'Who?' or 'What did you say?'. (This does not provide evidence for pragmatic presuppositions. In this case, the hearer not only fails to share an assumption with the speaker, but is unable to assign reference.)

Analysis. The St' elements project, but do not elicit *w-a-m* responses. The natural assumption is that these are bona fide cases of semantic presupposition, as in Gauker (1998). Gauker argues that for an utterance to be defined, its presuppositions must be contained not in the common ground, but instead in the objective propositional context. The propositional context contains propositions relevant to the discourse, which need not be assumed by all the discourse participants.

Predictions. As noted by von Fintel (2000), Gauker's analysis predicts – incorrectly for English – that sentences like (6) should be acceptable out-of-the-blue. Since the hearer can infer that the (speaker's take on the) propositional context contains a proposition of the form *x (≠ John) is having dinner in NY tonight,* and since the hearer is not required to know the exact context, there should be no inappropriateness. Crucially, even sentences like (6) do not elicit *w-a-m* responses in St'. More generally, Gauker's analysis seems to predict – incorrectly for English, but correctly for St' – a general absence of *w-a-m* responses. Even if the hearer disagrees with a presupposition, he can't object that he has been assumed to believe it.

Further implications. Not only do typical triggers like 'also' fail to induce pragmatic presuppositions in St', previous results show that neither St' determiners (Matthewson 1998) nor clefts (Davis et al 2004) are presuppositional. This raises the question of whether the best analysis involves a set of differing lexical entries, or whether there is a single parameter governing the cross-linguistic difference in presuppositions.

Data

(1) A: Mary has stopped smoking.
     B: Wait a minute! I didn't even know she smoked.   √ CHALLENGE TO PRESUPPOSITION

(2) A: Mary has stopped smoking.
     B: # Wait a minute! I didn't even know she stopped.   # CHALLENGE TO ASSERTION

(3) A: plan   **tsukw**   kw-a-s   mán'c-em   s-Bob
             already **stop**   DET-IMPF-NOM   smoke-MID   NOM-Bob
             'Bob stopped smoking.'

     B1:   aoz   t'u7   kw-en-s-wá   zwát-en   kw-s   tu7   mán'c-em
             NEG   just   DET-1SG.POSS-NOM-IMPF   know-DIR   DET-NOM   PAST   smoke-MID
                      s-Bob
                      NOM-Bob
             'I didn't know Bob smoked.'   (PRESUPPOSITION UNKNOWN TO HEARER)

     B2:   aoz   t'u7   kw-en-s-wá   zwát-en   kw-s   tsukw-s
             NEG   just   DET-1SG.POSS-NOM-IMPF   know-DIR   DET-NOM   finish-3SG.POSS
             'I didn't know he stopped.'   (ASSERTION UNKNOWN TO HEARER)

(4) Context: First thing in the morning; no-one has eaten anything yet; people do not eat dried salmon
     first thing.

     wá7-lhkacw   ha   xát'-min'   **múta7** ku   ts'wan?
     IMPF-2SG.SUBJ   YNQ   want-APPL   **more**   DET   wind.dried.salmon
     'Do you want some more dried salmon?'

     Volunteered response from consultant: *aoz* 'no'.

(5) lh-xát'-min'-acw   **múta7** ku   ts'wan,   kwan   láta7
     if-want-APPL-2SG.CONJ   **more**   DET   wind.dried.salmon   take(DIR)   DEIC
     'If you want some more salmon, take some there.'

     Judgment: Speaker should not say (5) if the person they're talking to hasn't eaten any salmon yet.

(6) John can't come to the meeting tonight. He is having dinner in New York, too.

References

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