**PRESUPPOSITIONS**

**GENERAL:**

* **Presuppositions** are assumptions that underlay utterances (of all kinds). They consist of information that must be taken for granted by participants in discourse in order for the utterances that contain them to be understood.
  + **Presupposition triggers** are almost always individual lexical items, and sometime specific surface-level constructions. There are some regularities to this, but many idiosyncratic constructions need to be accounted for. Thus a presupposition evaluator will probably depend on identifying specific words and constructions as trigger candidates.
  + **What distinguishes presuppositions from entailment and implicature** is that negating and utterance usually removes the latter, but the presuppositions remain. This will probably be a useful property in evaluating presuppositions.

**General Types (according to Karttunen, via Levinson):** this list captures thirteen of the most fundamental types of presuppositions. Some of these are already accounted for by our inference system, but not all (as far as I can tell).

* **Factivity:** factive verbs & predicates often involve states of mind, knowledge or other evaluative semantics:
  + *Frankenstein wasn’t aware that Dracula was there* 🡪 Dracula was there.
* **Implicative verbs:**
  + *John managed to open the door* 🡪 John tried to open the door.
* **Definite descriptions:**
  + *I didn’t see the man outside* 🡪 there was a man outside (compare with …*a man outside*)
* **Change-of-state verbs:**
  + *He stopped beating his wife* 🡪 he was beating his wife
* **Iteratives:** *again, anymore, return*
* **Temporal clauses:** *while, before, since*
* **It-clefts:** 
  + *It wasn’t Rose that kissed Harry* 🡪 someone kissed Harry
* **Implicit clefts:**
  + *Chomsky didn’t invent linguistics* 🡪 somebody invented linguistics
* **Comparisons & contrasts:** *back, too, in return*
* **Non-restrictive relative clauses:** 
  + *Emily, who climbed Everest, hasn’t climbed K2.* 🡪 Emily has climbed Everest
* **Counterfactual conditionals:** 
  + *If only I had a match …* 🡪 I didn’t have a match
* **Disjunctive questions:**
  + *Will you be home or away?* 🡪 You will be either home or away.
* **Wh-questions:** 
  + *Who is the director at this company?* 🡪 Someone is the director at the company

**Defeasibility:** Another curious and complicating attribute is that presuppositions can be *defeasible* in certain contexts (i.e. that they are longer actually presuppositional). The circumstances that render a presupposition defeasible are more complicated than triggers – sometimes it will occur due to structures within the same sentence, but other times it will result from background information or preceding sentences.

**Examples:**

* *At least John won’t have to regret that he did a PhD* 🡪 ‘regret’ would usually trigger a presupposition, but if this utterance is used in the context of John not getting into a PhD program, the presuppositional content is overridden.
* *Susan died before she finished her thesis.* 🡪 commonsense knowledge and inference defuse the presupposition that Susan finished her thesis.

Levinson summarizes the potential for defeasibility in three contexts. Modeling these may be more difficult, but frames/schema may offer ways of correctly assuming the instances where presuppositions may be annulled.

1. When common knowledge contradicts the presupposition
2. Where the content of the discourse, together with background assumptions, are inconsistent with (and deemed more salient than) the presupposition
3. In specific conversational contexts (e.g. presentation of evidence for or against some possibility)

**Projection:** The ways in which presuppositions in lower clauses do or do not survive to the highest level is also idiosyncratic and hard to generalize about. One such instance is for complex sentences with connectives (conjunctions, if … then, etc.):

* *If John does math, he will regret doing it* 🡪 only the second clause contains the presupposition (that John will do math), but that doesn’t carry to the sentence level (as the first clause is itself the negation of that presupposition).
  + This instance can be generalized as well for “either … or” sentences and so on

They can also be overtly denied or questioned in certain circumstances – either explicitly, or with a questioning if-clause on the end:

* *John doesn’t regret doing a useless PhD because he never did one!*
* *John won’t cheat again, if indeed he ever did.*