Dynamic presupposition of *want* and polarity sensitivity

Julie Goncharov

U. of Toronto/U. of Göttingen

SALT 30 - August 20, 2020

Introduction

- Heim (1992) proposes that *want* has the presupposition in (1a). Romoli (2012) argues that (1a) is incompatible with recent accounts of strong NPIs and proposes (1b).

  (1) 'x want ϕ' defined only if:
  - a. $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$ (ϕ and $\neg\phi$ are epistemically possible for x)
  - b. $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \rightarrow \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$ (if ϕ is possible for x, then $\neg\phi$ is possible)

- Based on rarely discussed data concerning PPI anti-licensing and strong NPI licensing with intentional/accidental actions, we argue that both (1a) and (1b) are inadequate.
- To account for the data, we say that *want* has a dynamic presupposition whose content is determined using belief revisions (Alchourrón et al., 1985; Grove, 1988, a.o.).
- Sensitivity to the interpretation of the action as intentional vs. accidental is not restricted to polarity phenomena. The effect is wide-spread and touches different domains of the grammar.

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Flow of the talk

Introduction

Data

The puzzle

Analysis

Predictions

Bigger picture

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.).

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

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

  (3) a. I don't want to call someone/eat something.
  (✓some>not/*not>some)

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

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

Data

- The difference between verbs like *call/eat* and *offend/break* can be detected by the following contrasts:

(4) a. # I tried to call Mary, but she didn't get called.

b. I tried to offend Mary, but she didn't get offended.

(5) a. # I intend to call Mary, but I don't (actually) expect that I'll call her.

b. I intend to offend Mary, but I don't (actually) expect that I'll offend her.

(6) a. I didn't want to call Mary, but I did. (✓weakness of will)

b. I didn't want to offend Mary, but I did. (*weakness of will)

Data

- Szabolcsi's observation can be further substantiated by the following examples:

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

  (8) I don't want to call someone accidentally/by mistake.
  (✓not>some)

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

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Data

Transposed Szabolcsi's observation

- Expressions, such as *a red cent*, *a damn thing*, and *a living soul*, are strong NPIs or minimizers (Jackendoff 1995, Szabolcsi 2004...)

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

- The observation that interests us is that strong NPIs appear to be less acceptable with accidental actions than with intentional actions.

  (10) 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 this lottery.

  (11) a. The company wants to harvest new ideas but 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.

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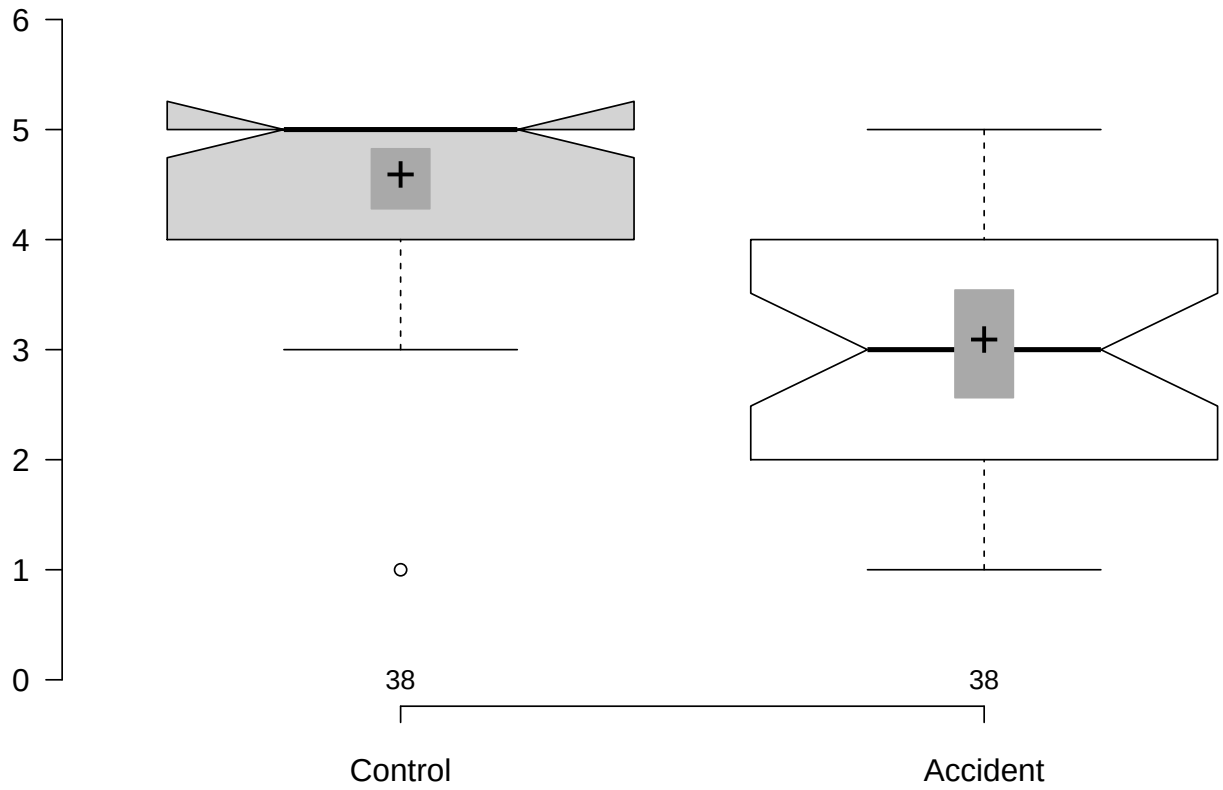
Data

19 participants, 1-5 Likert scale, *a red cent* and (punctual) *until*



Data

- That *lose* and *win* are different from *spend* and *give* can be shown using the weakness-of-will test introduced above.

(12) (*weakness of will)

a. I didn't want to lose money in this investment, but I did.

b. I didn't want to win this game, but I did.

(13) (✓weakness of will)

a. I didn't want to spend $500 on new books, but I did.

b. I didn't want to give $100 to John, but I did.

Data

Summary: Three core observations: (i) PPIs are anti-licensed in intentional contexts, but not accidental contexts, (ii) strong NPIs are less acceptable in accidental contexts than in intentional contexts, (iii) weak NPIs are not sensitive to the interpretation of the action.

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

The puzzle

- Gajewski 2011: the difference in licensing of strong vs. weak NPIs comes from the fact that the former, but not the latter, are sensitive to the monotonicity of non-truth-conditional content.

(14) a. * Everyone who left until Tuesday missed the class.
b. Everyone who read any article should raise their hand.

(15) a. Asr: $\forall x \in D$ [$[\![$left until Tue$]\!](x) \rightarrow [\![$missed class$]\!](x)$]
b. Psp: $\exists x \in D$ [$[\![$left until Tue$]\!](x)$]

- Assuming Gajewski's (2011) approach, neither (1a) nor (1b) can account for the contrast in licensing of strong NPIs in intentional vs. accidental contexts.

(1) 'x want ϕ' defined only if:
a. $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$ (Heim 1992)
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Analysis

In a nutshell

- The asymmetry between strong and weak NPIs suggests that accidental actions introduce an intervening UE presupposition or implicature that is absent with intentional actions.

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

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

- This solution can be extended to PPIs, if we assume that the intervening UE presupposition/implicature 'shields' PPIs from negation. This assumption is corroborated by the fact that *some* is not anti-licensed under DE quantifiers with intervening scalar implicatures, such as *few* and *at most* (e.g., Szabolcsi 2004).

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Analysis

- We start with a terminological note. We distinguish between *(un)intentional* and *(non-)controlled* actions.
- Intentional vs. unintentional distinction refers to the initiation of the action and can be tested using *in order to* clauses (Farkas 1988).

(17) a. Mary refused to eat in order to become thinner.
b. # Mary forgot to eat in order to become thinner.

(18) a. The driver called the police in order to file a report.
b. Eve ate the fruit in order to fulfill forbidden desires.
c. He will offend people in order to achieve his goal.
d. He broke the handle in order to enter the room.

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d. He broke the handle in order to enter the room.

Analysis

- Controlled vs. non-controlled distinction can be tested using the weakness-of-will test (wow).

(19) a. I didn't want to accept the proposal, but I did. (✓wow)

b. I didn't want to forget the keys, but I did. (*wow)

(20) 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)

	controlled
intentional	non-controlled
unintentional	non-controlled

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Analysis

We say that an action is interpreted as *controlled* 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 and similarly for $\neg\phi$, (21a). An action is interpreted as *non-controlled* when the negation of (21a) holds, (21b).

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

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

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

Analysis

- To obtain different presuppositions for controlled and non-controlled contexts, we use tools from dynamic epistemic logic, in particular AGM(-like) postulates (Alchourroń et al. 1985; Grove 1988).

Notations
K = a belief set, i.e. a set of propositions
if A is a consistent set, $[A] = \{w \in W \mid A \subseteq w\}$, otherwise $[A] = \emptyset$
$[p] = \{w \in W \mid p \in w\}$

Analysis

We propose a selection function $\gamma : [K_0] \rightarrow [K_1]$ that takes a neutral belief state $[K_0]$, which has the form in (22a), and returns a new (smallest) state $[K_1]$ updated with (i)-(iii) in (22b) if (i)-(iii) are compatible **(Expand if compatible!)**. Otherwise, γ returns the neutral state $[K_0]$ **(Do not revise with contradictions!)**.

(22) a. Neutral belief state:
$[K_0] = [\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi]$

b. In *want*-sentences, the neutral belief state is updated with:

(i) Dec(ision): $\Box^{B_x}\psi$ when 'x want ϕ' is uttered or $\Box^{B_x}\neg\psi$ when 'x not want ϕ' is uttered (e.g., Condoravdi and Lauer 2012)

(ii) Controlled or non-controlled condition in (21)

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

Analysis: Belief revisions

Thus, sentences with *want* can have four possible revisions:

Revision 1: x want ϕ^{contr}
(i) $\Box^{B_x}\psi$
(ii) $\Box^{B_x}(\psi \to \phi) \wedge \Box^{B_x}(\neg\psi \to \neg\phi)$
(iii) $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \to \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$

$\gamma([K_0]) = [K_0]$ ((i)-(iii) are incompatible) **Do not revise with contradictions!**

Revision 2: x want $\phi^{non-contr}$
(i) $\Box^{B_x}\psi$
(ii) $\neg\Box^{B_x}(\psi \to \phi) \vee \neg\Box^{B_x}(\neg\psi \to \neg\phi)$
(iii) $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \to \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$

$\gamma([K_0]) = [K_1] = [\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi \wedge \Box^{B_x}\psi]$
Expand if compatible!

Analysis

Revision 3: x not want ϕ^{contr}

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

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

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

$\gamma([K_0]) = [K_1] = [\Box^{B_x}\neg\phi \wedge \Box^{B_x}\neg\psi]$

Expand if compatible!

Revision 4: x not want $\phi^{non-contr}$

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

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

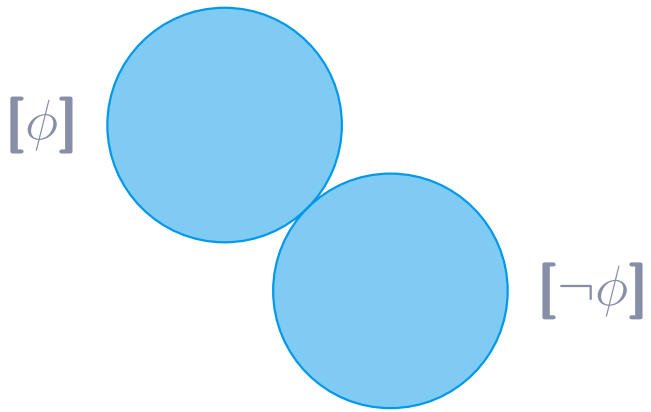
(iii) $\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \rightarrow \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi$

$\gamma([K_0]) = [K_1] = [\Diamond^{B_x}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_x}\neg\phi \wedge \Box^{B_x}\neg\psi]$

Expand if compatible!

...in Venn diagrams

- We start by constructing a neutral belief set K, such that [K] ∩ [p] ≠ ∅ and [K] ∩ [¬p] ≠ ∅ for all relevant propositions p.



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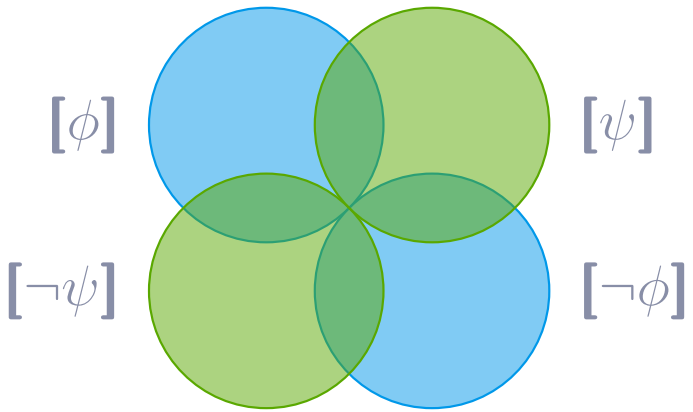

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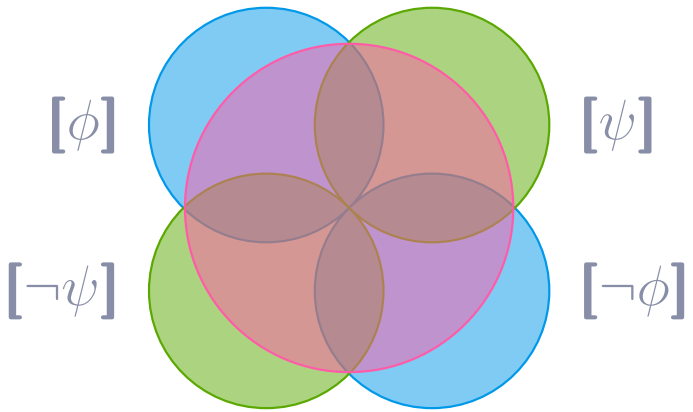


...in Venn diagrams

- recasting update conditions from (22b):

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

  $[K] \subseteq [\psi]$ when 'x want ϕ' is asserted

  $[K] \subseteq [\neg\psi]$ when 'x not want ϕ' is asserted

  (ii) Either controlled or non-controlled action conditions:

  Controlled: $[K] \subseteq [(\psi \rightarrow \phi) \wedge (\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi)]$

  Non-controlled: $[K] \cap [\neg((\psi \rightarrow \phi) \wedge (\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi))] \neq \emptyset$

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

  if $[K] \cap [\phi] \neq \emptyset$ then $[K] \cap [\neg\phi] \neq \emptyset$

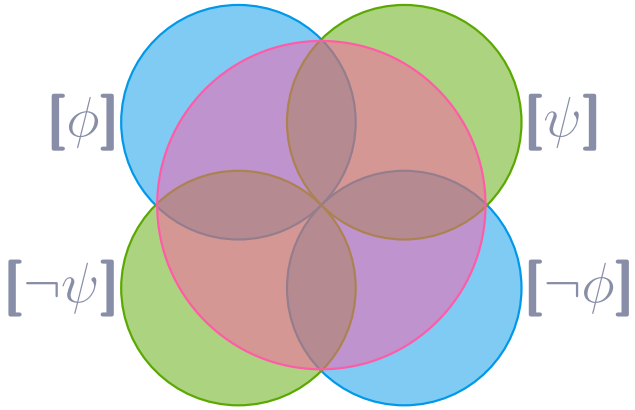
...in Venn diagrams

Revision 1: x want ϕ^{contr}

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

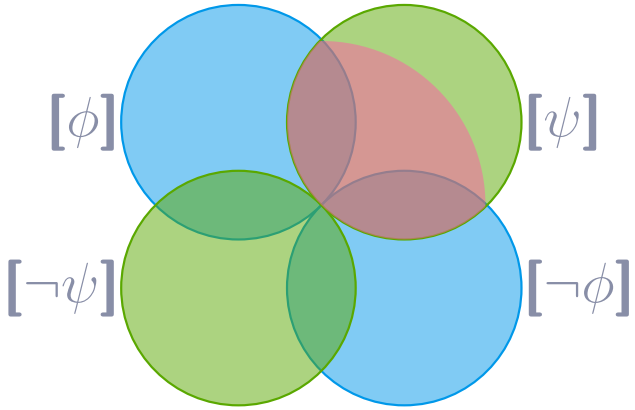


(neutral belief set)

...in Venn diagrams

Revision 1: x want ϕ^{contr}

(i) [K]⊆[ψ]
(ii)
(iii)



Expand if compatible!

...in Venn diagrams

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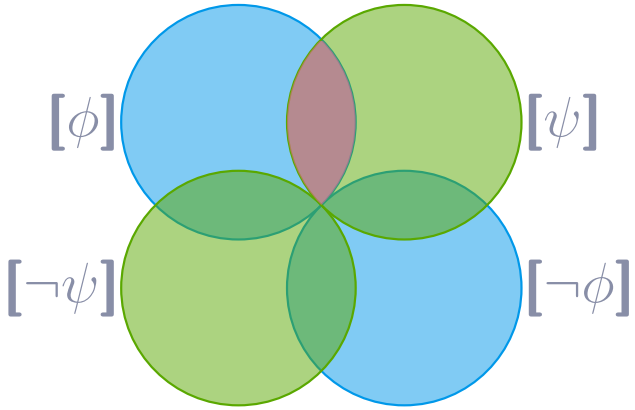
(ii) $[K] \subseteq [(\psi \rightarrow \phi) \wedge (\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi)]$

(iii)



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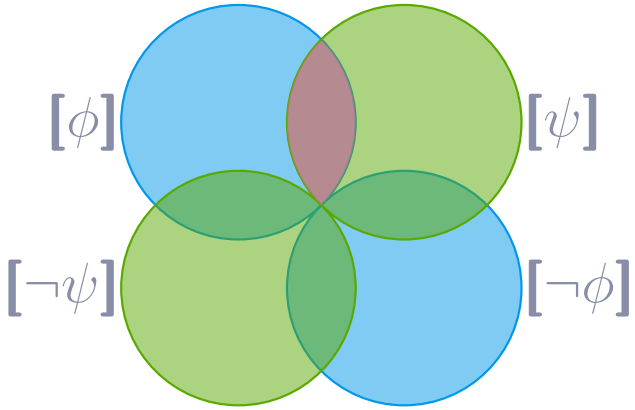
(i) $[K] \subseteq [\psi]$

(ii) $[K] \subseteq [(\psi \rightarrow \phi) \wedge (\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi)]$

(iii) if $[K] \cap [\phi] \neq \emptyset$, then $[K] \cap [\neg\phi] \neq \emptyset$



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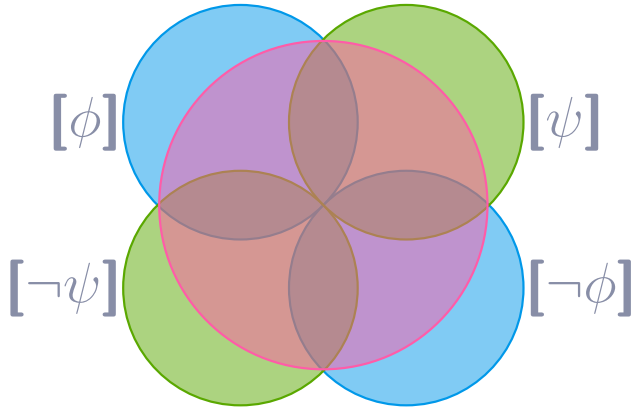


Do not revise with contradictions!

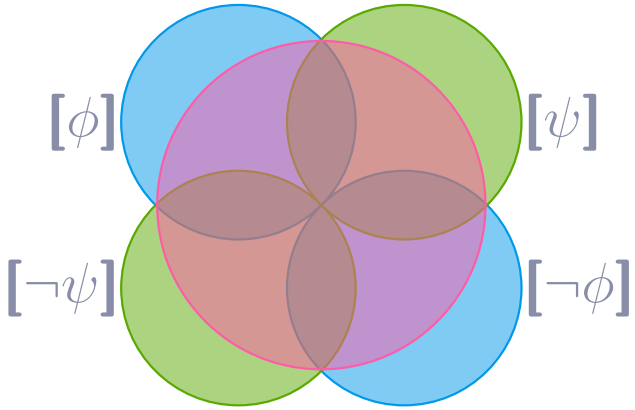
...in Venn diagrams

Revision 2: x want $\phi^{non-contr}$

(i)

(ii)

(iii)



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(i) [K]⊆[ψ]
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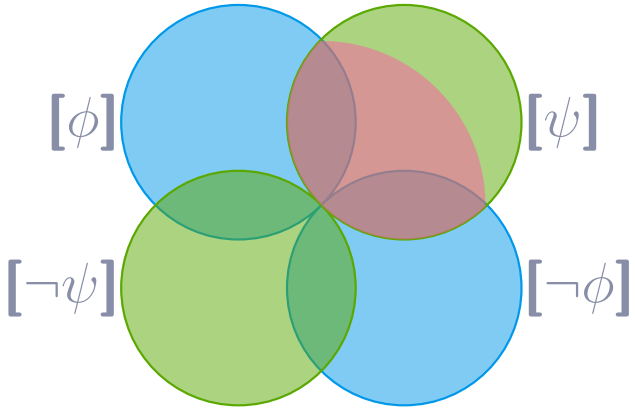

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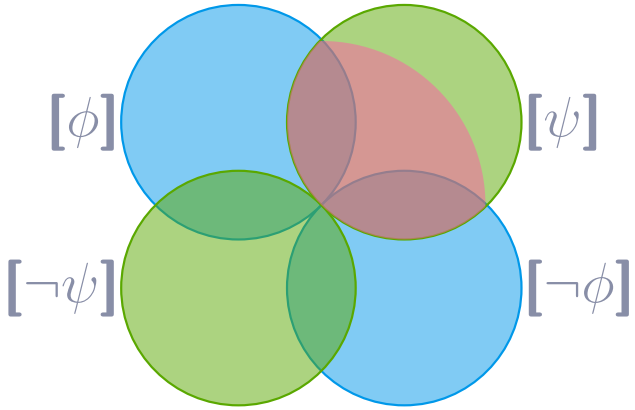
(ii) $[K] \cap [(\psi \wedge \neg\phi)] \neq \emptyset$

(iii)

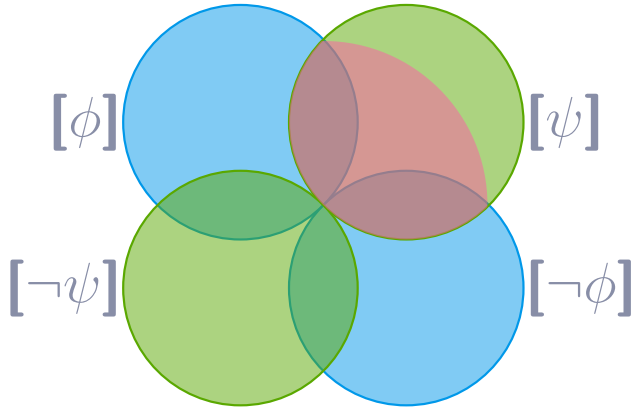


(vacuous)

...in Venn diagrams

Revision 2: x want $\phi^{non-contr}$

(i) [K]$\subseteq[\psi]$
(ii) [K]$\cap[(\psi \wedge \neg\phi)] \neq \emptyset$
(iii) if [K]$\cap[\phi]\neq\emptyset$, then [K]$\cap[\neg\phi]\neq \emptyset$



(vacuous)

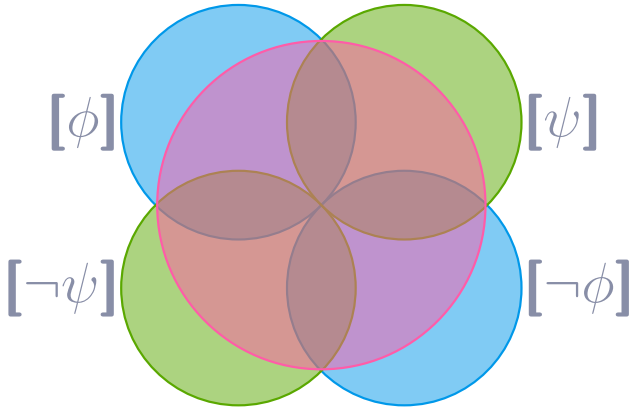
...in Venn diagrams

Revision 3: x not want ϕ^{contr}

(i)

(ii)

(iii)



(neutral belief set)

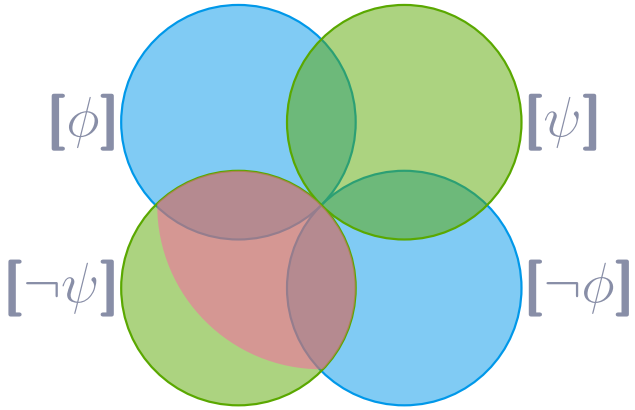
...in Venn diagrams

Revision 3: x not want ϕ^{contr}

(i) $[K] \subseteq [\neg\psi]$

(ii)

(iii)



Expand if compatible!

...in Venn diagrams

Revision 3: x not want ϕ^{contr}

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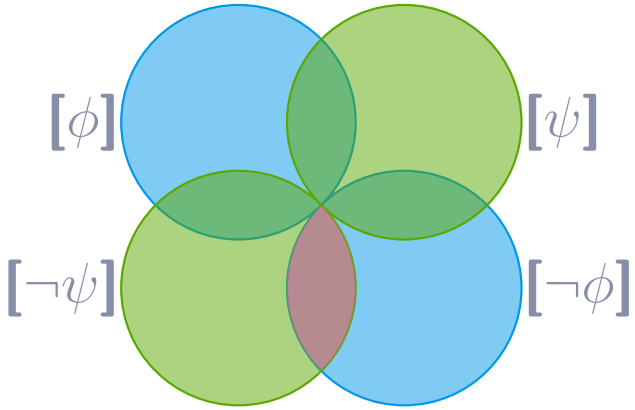
(ii) $[K] \subseteq [(\psi \rightarrow \phi) \wedge (\neg\psi \rightarrow \neg\phi)]$

(iii)



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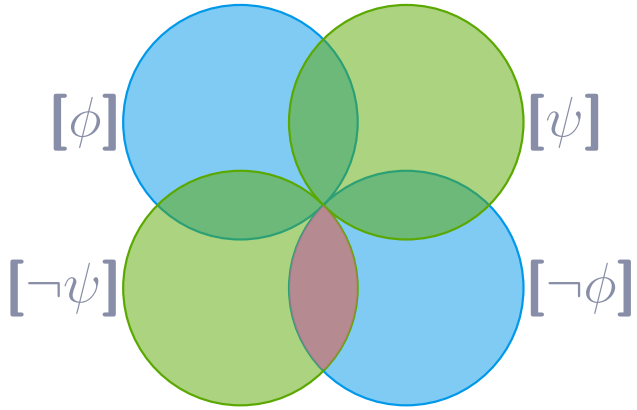


(vacuous)

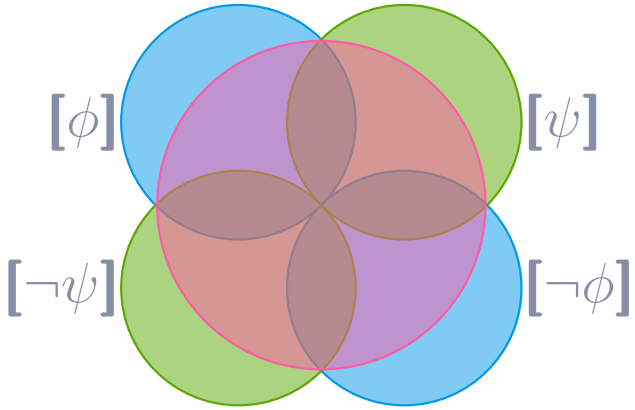
...in Venn diagrams

Revision 4: x not want $\phi^{non-contr}$

(i)

(ii)

(iii)



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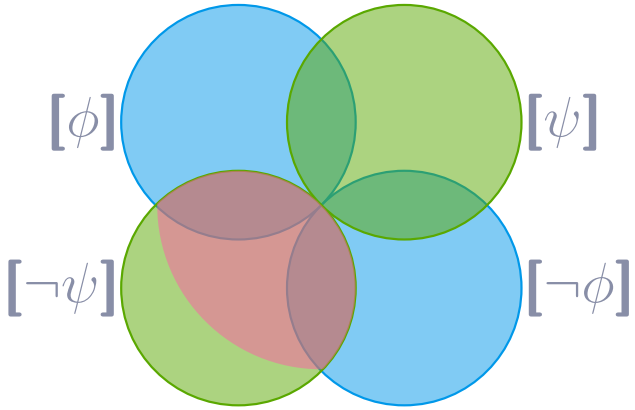

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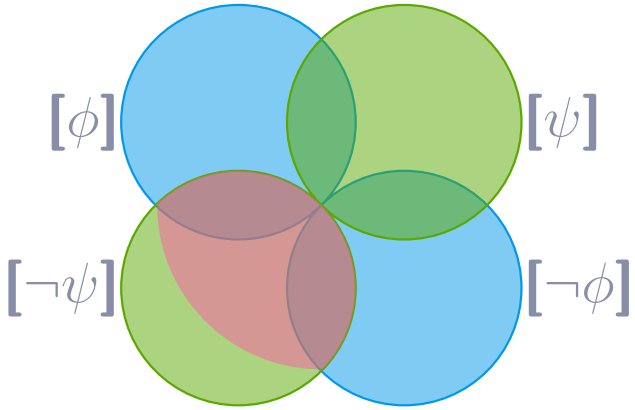

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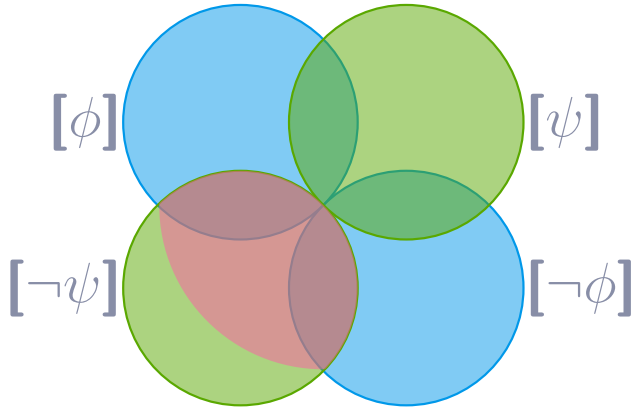

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Analysis

- Revision 1 is an unsuccessful revision. This is because (i)-(iii) are incompatible. By **Do not revise with contradictions!**, the revised belief state is the same as the neutral belief state in which x does not believe ϕ nor $\neg\phi$.
- Revision 1 straightforwardly derives Heim's (1992) stipulation that in cases like (23a), the modal base of *want* is not a belief set where John goes to the movies tonight, which leads to Stalnaker's (1984) fallacies, but rather is a superset s.t. John considers it possible that he goes to the movies tonight and that he does not.

(23) a. (John hired a babysitter because) he wants to go to the movies tonight.

b. Dox*(j,w) $= [\Diamond^{B_j}\phi \wedge \Diamond^{B_j}\neg\phi]$ (j = John)

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Analysis

- When the action is non-controlled (Revisions 2 and 4), the result of the revision is expansion by ψ and $\neg\psi$ respectively.
- Holton 1999, 2009: weakness of will is different from akrasia. Weakness of will is unjustified reconsideration of one's intentions, whereas akrasia is acting against one's best judgements.

(24) a. I didn't want to call Mary, but I did.
$[K] \subseteq [\neg$ I call Mary$]$

b. I didn't want to offend Mary, but I did.
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Analysis

- Revisions 3 and 4 derive the desired presuppositions in (16) which explain the distribution of strong NPIs and PPIs with intentional vs. accidental actions.

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

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

- As weak NPIs are not sensitive to non-truth-conditional content, the interpretation of the action as (non-)controlled does not affect their acceptability.

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

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Predictions

- Simple sentences do not show sensitivity to the interpretation of the action.

  (25) a. John didn't win a red cent in this game.
  b. John didn't offend someone. (*not>some)

- In object control constructions, PPIs are not anti-licensed and strong NPIs are not fully acceptable when the complement of *want* is a controlled action.

  (26) 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.

Revision 3′: x not want ϕ^{contr}
(i) $\Box^{B_y}\neg\psi$
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$\gamma([K_0])=[K_0]$ (vacuous)

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Bigger picture

- Collins and Postal's (2014) observation:

(27) a. Byron refused to do a damn thing.
b. * Jane forgot to do a fucking thing.

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

(28) 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.'

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Subjunctive obviation and such

- In many European languages, including Hungarian, Romance, and Slavic, the subject of the subjunctive clause cannot co-refer with the subject of the matrix clause (Bouchard, 1983; Ruwet, 1984, 1991; Farkas, 1992; Constantini, 2006; Schlenker, 2005, 2011, a.o.)

(29) a. Je veux partir. 'I want to leave.'

b. * Je veux que je parte. 'I want for me to leave.'

- ...unless the degree of agency of the embedded subject or matrix subject is reduced (Zaring, 1985; Ruwet, 1984; Farkas, 1992, a.o.)

(30) a. Je veux absolument que j'amuse ces enfants.
'I absolutely want for me to amuse the children.'

b. Je voudrais bien que je parte tôt.
'I would like it well for me to leave early.'

- Newari has a similar phenomenon with conjunct/disjunct inflection on verbs (Hale 1980; Wechsler 2018; Zu 2018; Kaufmann 2019).

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Aspect in Slavic

- Across Slavic languages, negative imperatives are generally ill-formed with perfective verbs (Forsyth, 1970; Paducheva, 2013; Despić, 2020, a.o.)

  (31) Ne otkryvaj / *otkroj okno!
  'Don't open (IPFV/*PFV) the window!'

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  (32) Smotri, (slučajno) ne otkryvaj / otkroj okno!
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Nominal marking and 'out-of-control' morphology

- Some other phenomena sensitive to the interpretation of the action concern case assignment in languages like Hindi/Urdu, Georgian, and Central Pomo (Tuite et al., 1985; Mithun, 1991, a.o.)

(33) a. Ram=**ne** khas-a 'Ram-ERG coughed (purposefully).'

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- St'át'imcets/Lillooet (Salish) has a dedicated 'out-of-control' circumfix *ka...a* (Demirdache, 1997; Davis et al., 2009, a.o,)

(34) a. sek'w-p ti nk'wan'ústen-a
'The window broke.'

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Thank you!

All comments are very welcome at

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