


# Gestural Presuppositions\*

Philippe Schlenker







(Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS; New York University)

Revised, October 31, 2014

For Ebert\_and\_Ebert\_2014, co-speech gestures contribute supplementary meanings, analyzed as 'appositive impositions' (AnderBois\_et\_al.\_to\_appear). Thus (1)a (with the gesture co-occurring with the bracketed part in bold) is analyzed as in (1)b-c, with  $p$  corresponding to at-issue and  $p^*$  to non-at-issue proposals. We suggest that some gestural enrichments are better analyzed as presuppositions – which makes them comparable to iconic enrichments in sign language, as in Schlenker\_et\_al\_2013.


- (1) a. I brought  **[a bottle of water]** to the talk.  
b. At-issue: the speaker brought a bottle of water to the talk  
Non-at-issue: the bottle is big  
c.  $\exists z \wedge z = [\text{bottle } g] \wedge \exists x \wedge \text{bottle}_p(x) \wedge \text{SIM}_{p^*}(x, z) \wedge \text{bottle}_{p^*}(z) \wedge \text{bring}_p(\text{speaker}, x)$

Appositives are highly restricted in downward-monotonic environments, but some gestural enrichments aren't, as suggested by (2)a-(3)a-(3)a, which contrast with (2)b-(3)b-(4)b. Furthermore, for some speakers these gestural enrichments project like presuppositions: they 'project out' of conditionals/modals, and yield universal inferences under *no NP* (Chemla\_2009). We suggest that for these speakers they might be presuppositions that can be justified on the basis of the clause or predicate they attach to; underlining gestural presuppositions, (2)a/(3)a have the LFs *if p*  $\wedge$  *p'*, *q/unlikely p*  $\wedge$  *p*, and both yield the presupposition  $p \Rightarrow p'$ ; while (4)a has the LF *[No P](Q*  $\wedge$  *Q'*) and yields *[Every P](Q*  $\Rightarrow$  *Q'*). For other speakers it would seem that the gestural contributions are assertive and do not 'project out' – which is also inconsistent with a standard supplementary behavior.

- (2) a. If the session chairman brings  **[a bottle of beer]**, I'll feel free to bring one too.  
=> if the session chairman brings a bottle of beer, it will be a small one.  
b. ? If the session chairman brings a bottle of beer, which is  **[this]** large, I'll feel free to bring one too.
- (3) a. It's unlikely that the next speaker will bring  **a bottle of beer** to his talk.  
=>? if the session chairman brings a bottle of beer, it will be a large one  
b. #It's unlikely that the next speaker will bring a bottle of beer, which is  **[this]** large.
- (4) a. No philosopher brought  **[a bottle of beer]** to the workshop.  
=>? when a philosopher brings a bottle of beer, it is usually a large one  
b. #No philosopher brought a bottle of beer, which is  **[this]** large.

Potts\_2005 argues that supplements cannot contain bound elements. But we believe that gestural enrichments can – just like presupposition triggers: in (5), the 'high glasses' gesture triggers a universal inference that each of the five relevant individuals was tall; it is somewhat similar to sign language agreement verbs or pronouns pointing upwards, as in Schlenker\_et\_al\_2013.

- (5) *Context: Context:* The speaker uses body-oriented psychotherapy to help people who are self-conscious about their height deal with their emotions. He usually encourages participants to remove non-essential accessories.






I had five guys standing in front of me, and not a single one allowed me to remove  **[his glasses]**.

A supplementary approach could deal with (2)-(3)-(4) by taking the gestures to behave like the appositives in b., but with *which would be* replacing *which is*; but the question is why this option should be

available. It could also try to analyze the gesture in (5) as a supplement modifying the verb (with its unsaturated argument slots), but the interaction with quantification would need to be worked out.

Finally, the analogy with sign language iconic enrichments is further highlighted by the behavior of gestural enrichments under *only* and ellipsis: in both cases, the gesture can be ignored in the focus dimension, just as iconic enrichments in Schlenker\_to\_appear.

(6) I had two guys standing in front of me, one of them very short and the other one very tall.

- a. The tall one allowed me to remove  [his glasses], but the short one didn't.
- b. The tall one allowed me to remove  [his glasses], but the short one didn't allow me to remove #  [his glasses]/ok  [his glasses]
- c. Only the tall one allowed me to remove  [his glasses].

## References

- AnderBois, S., Brasoveanu, A. and Henderson, R.: to appear, At-issue proposals and appositive impositions in discourse. To appear in *Journal of Semantics*.
- Chemla, Emmanuel: 2009, Presuppositions of quantified sentences: experimental data. *Natural Language Semantics* 17(4), pp 299-340
- Ebert, Cornelia and Ebert, Christian: 2014, Gestures, Demonstratives, and the Attributive/Referential Distinction. Handout of a talk given at *Semantics and Philosophy in Europe (SPE 7)*, Berlin, June 28, 2014.
- Potts, Christopher. 2005. *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures*. Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schlenker, Philippe: to appear, Iconic Features. To appear in *Natural Language Semantics*.
- Schlenker, Philippe, Lamberton, Jonathan and Santoro, Mirko: 2013, Iconic Variables. *Linguistics & Philosophy* 36, 2, 91-149.

---

\*Thanks to Emmanuel Chemla, Cornelia Ebert, Masha Esipova, Jeremy Kuhn, Nathan Klinedinst, Salvador Mascarenhas, Rob Pasternak, Benjamin Spector, Brent Strickland, Adina Williams, and participants to my NYU Fall 2014 seminar for discussions and criticisms; I alone am responsible for remaining errors.

**Note:** An earlier version included the claim that gestural enrichments do not have to obey a 'non-triviality requirement', and behave in this respect like presuppositions but unlike supplements. But the initial judgments appear to be in error, and were contradicted by several native speakers; in this respect, the latter speakers' judgments might in fact provide an argument for Ebert and Ebert's supplementary analysis.