Not so squeamish, Your Majesty:
On presupposition failure and homogeneity

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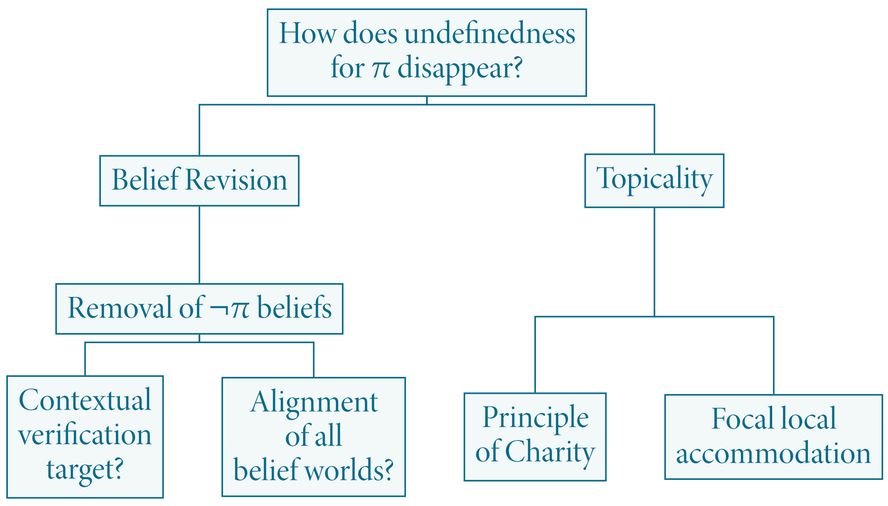
Main Issues

- Presupposition failure leads to squeamish judgments ~ 'undefinedness'.
- Strawson notices that we often have intuitions of truth or falsity inspite of undefinedness.
- Some approaches discriminate between real, **semantic truth values (1, 0, #)** and **pragmatic ones (TRUE, FALSE)**, others make no such distinction.
  - Verification/Belief revision accounts (von Fintel 2004, Lasersohn 1993)
  - Topicality accounts (Strawson 2008, 1950, Partee 1996)
- How does this relate to homogeneity, and the 'true enough'-type judgments from the non-maximality literature? See Križ (2015) and Bar-Lev (2021).
- Can we employ experimental methods to explore these questions? I think so.

One class of approaches favors an information structural explanation for these asymmetries. Partee (1996) argues that local accommodation (cf. Heim 1982, Beaver & Krahmer 2001) is sensitive to information structure; i.e., restricted to focal meanings, Geurts (2008) argues for a Principle of Charity approach.
von Fintel (2004), on the other hand, champions a belief revision procedure.



The Data

Strong quantifiers and the definite article come with domain and existence presuppositions, respectively:

(1) a. It would be strange if **every German** sherpa climbed Mt. Everest. →
b. Do you think that **every German** sherpa climbed Mt. Everest? ?
⇝ $\exists x$[**german-sherpa**(x)]
c. It would be strange if **the king of France** was bald.
d. Do you think that **the king of France** is bald?
⇝ $\exists!x$[**king-of-France**(x)]

But it has been noticed that sometimes speakers, instead of feeling squeamish about assigning a truth value, will readily detect truth or falsity, especially in the presence of context:

(2) a. The king of France owns a Volkswagen. (undefined)
b. CONTEXT: *You are compiling a list of noteworthy people who own a Volkswagen to send promotional material to. A colleague says:*
The king of France owns a Volkswagen. (false)

This extends towards the domain presuppositions of quantifiers (cf. Geurts 2008):

(3) CONTEXT: *Sherpas are exclusively from Nepal.*
a. Every German sherpa climbed Mt. Everest at least once. (undefined)
b. Mt. Everest was climbed at least once by every German sherpa. (false)

Verification-based accounts deal with this contrast readily (von Fintel 2004: 287):

(4) a. The king of France owns a pen. (undefined)
b. The king of France owns this pen. (false)

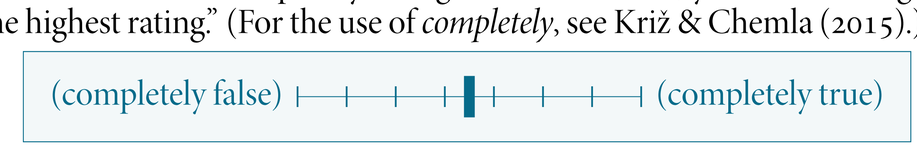
But the question is how to deal with asymmetries when it comes to **homogeneity inferences**, as well as the kind we saw in (2b) above:

(5) CONTEXT: *Two of three boys and a girl carried the piano.* (Križ 2015: 13)
a. A: What happened?
B: The boys carried the piano upstairs. (undefined)
b. A′: Who carried the piano upstairs?
B′: The boys carried the piano upstairs. (false)

Experiment

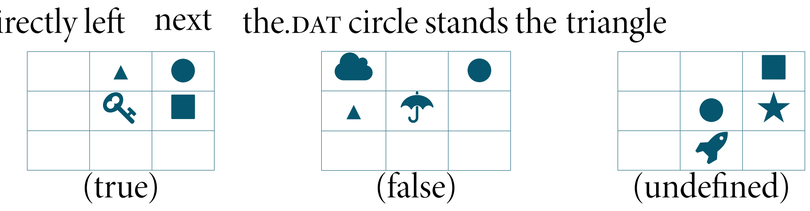
(6) **2 × 3 × 3-Design** (within-within)
a. TRIGGER-POSITION (sentence-initial vs. sentence-medial)
b. TRIGGER-TYPE (DP_{SG} vs. DP_{PL} vs. *alle* ('all') vs. *einige* ('some'))
c. TRUTH-VALUE SCENARIO (true vs. false vs. undefined)

(7) "If the sentence is completely true given the scenario, you should assign it the highest rating." (For the use of *completely*, see Križ & Chemla (2015).)



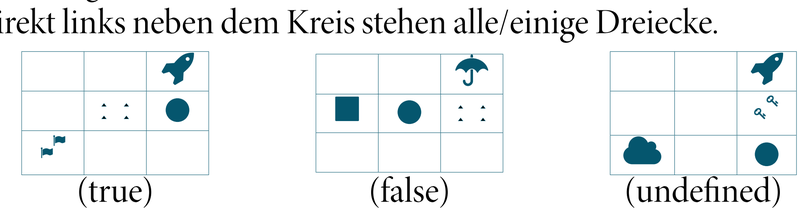
DP_{SG}: Existence (and uniqueness) presuppositions

(8) a. Das Dreieck steht direkt links neben dem Kreis.
the triangle stands directly left next the.DAT circle
b. Direkt links neben dem Kreis steht das Dreieck.
directly left next the.DAT circle stands the triangle


(true) (false) (undefined)

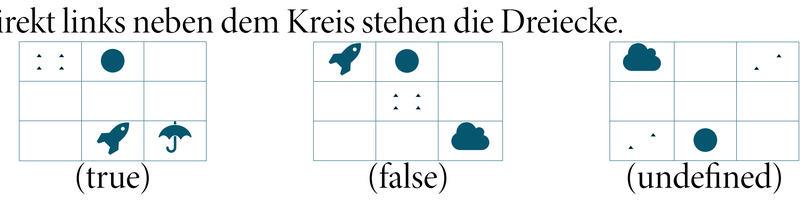
Quantifiers: Domain presuppositions (if available)

(9) a. Alle/einige Dreiecke stehen direkt links neben dem Kreis.
b. Direkt links neben dem Kreis stehen alle/einige Dreiecke.

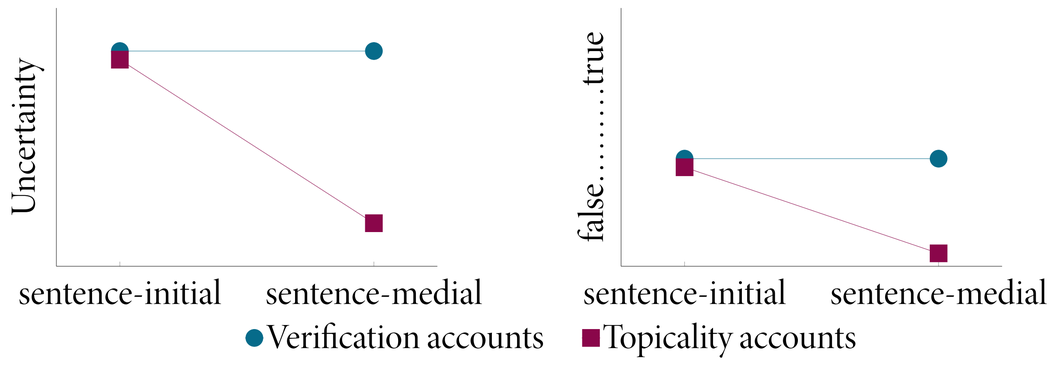

(true) (false) (undefined)

Homogeneity: Truth-value gaps

(10) a. Die Dreiecke stehen direkt links neben dem Kreis.
b. Direkt links neben dem Kreis stehen die Dreiecke.


(true) (false) (undefined)

Hypotheses



Outlook and Further Issues

- Note that negation sometimes interacts strangely with the cases here. This appears to be more in line with pragmatic accounts. (First example from Schoubye 2009: 613.)

(11) a. The king of France lives in a spaceship. (false)
b. The king of France does not live in a spaceship. (undefined)

- It is worth having a look at the projection facts. It appears that the inferences still project, despite intuitions of falsity. Bad for local accommdation accounts.
- Local accommodation accounts cannot account for truth:

(12) a. The last prime number is bigger than three. (true)
b. The second syllable in the word *drink* follows its first. (true)

- What about presuppositions unrelated to individuals, like *win* and *again*? Do they show the same asymmetries?

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