Negotiating lexical uncertainty and expertise with disjunction

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Communicating in language about language

- Languages are neither fixed across time nor identically reproduced in all speakers, but rather continually renegotiated during interactions.
- People accommodate to each other's usage patterns, form temporarily lexical pacts, and instruct each other about their linguistic views.
- Some of this communication in language about language is direct, as with explicit definitions, but much of it arrives via secondary pragmatic inferences.
- Disjunction supports what appear to be opposing inferences about language.
  - **Hurfordian pressure:** *X or Y* conveys that *X* and *Y* are disjoint
  - **Definitional inference:** *X or Y* conveys that *X* and *Y* are synonymous
- This pattern is cross-linguistically robust, so we seek a single pragmatic model that can derive both of these meanings from the semantics of disjunction given different contextual assumptions.

Hurfordian perceptions and intentions

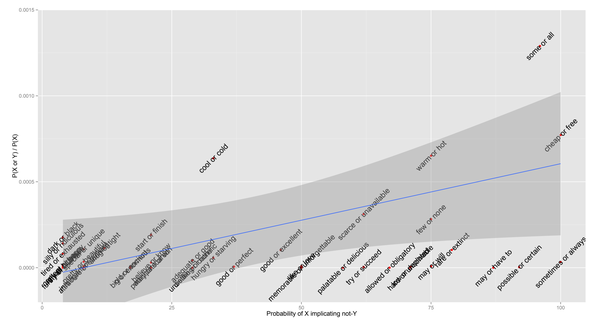
Generalization: *X or Y* conveys that the speaker is using a lexicon where *X* and *Y* are disjoint, or addresses a speaker concern that the listener is using such a lexicon.

(1) the nuptials will take place in either France or Paris

(2) the canoe or boat will be held by the stream's current

(3) In 1940, 37% of us had gone to a church or synagogue in the last week.

Our corpus	
'general or specific'	75
'specific or general'	86



X or Y usage correlates with *X* implicating *not Y*

Disjunctive definition and identification

Generalization: *X or Y* can convey $[\![X]\!] = [\![Y]\!]$ when the speaker is mutually, publicly known to be an expert or would like to establish expertise.

(4) wine lover or *oenophile*

(5) A Geological History of Manhattan or New York Island

(6) New Haven or "the Elm City"

(7) woodchuck or "land beaver"

- Motivation: speaker is a known 'instructor'; listener is a known non-expert
- Motivation: speaker wishes to display expertise to another expert
- Motivation: speaker sees value in (temporarily or permanently) defining a term

Attested in Chinese, German, Hebrew, Ilokano, Japanese, Russian, and Tagalog. Seems to survive even where the language has a dedicated definitional disjunction morpheme (e.g., Finnish, Italian).

Further information

Paper, references, model code, corpus data: `http://github.com/cgpotts/pypragmods/`

Modeling communication with anxious experts

$$\cdots$$

world information − lexical preferences − costs

$$S_2(m \mid t, \mathcal{L}) \propto \exp\left(\log\left(\alpha\, L_{k-1}(t \mid m, \mathcal{L})\right) - \beta \log\left(L_{k-1}(\mathcal{L} \mid m)\right) - \gamma\, C(m)\right)$$

$$L_1(t, \mathcal{L} \mid m) = L_k(t \mid m, \mathcal{L}) L_k(\mathcal{L} \mid m)$$

world information ∗ lexical discrimination

← suffices for manner implicature and embedded scalar implicature

$$l_1(t \mid m, \mathcal{L}) \propto s_1(m \mid t, \mathcal{L}) P(t)$$

← suffices for unembedded scalar implicature

$$s_1(m \mid t, \mathcal{L}) \propto \exp\left(\log\left(\alpha\, l_0(t \mid m, \mathcal{L})\right) - \gamma\, C(m)\right)$$

← suffices for many kinds of ambiguity avoidance

$$l_0(t \mid m, \mathcal{L}) \propto \frac{\mathbb{I}(t \in \mathcal{L}(m))}{|\mathcal{L}(m)|} P(t)$$

← literal listener, a simple semantic agent

Hurfordian contexts

With high disjunction costs, exclusivization maximizes the justification for the long form.

l_0	w_1	w_2	$w_1 \vee w_2$
$\mathcal{L}^*$			
A	1	0	0
X	.33	.33	.33
A *or* X	.33	.33	.33
$\mathcal{L}_1$			
A	1	0	0
X	0	1	0
A *or* X	.33	.33	.33
$\mathcal{L}_2$			
A	1	0	0
X	1	0	0
A *or* X	1	0	0

←

s_1	A	X	A *or* X
$\mathcal{L}^*$			
w_1	.8	0	0
w_2	09	09	.45
$w_1 \vee w_2$	03	03	.16
$\mathcal{L}_1$			
w_1	.91	0	0
w_2	0	.41	0
$w_1 \vee w_2$	04	02	.42
$\mathcal{L}_2$			
w_1	.41	0	0
w_2	.41	0	0
$w_1 \vee w_2$	.15	0	0

←

l_1	w_1	w_2	$w_1 \vee w_2$
$\mathcal{L}^*$			
A	1	0	0
X	.14	.14	.71
A *or* X	.14	.14	.71
$\mathcal{L}_1$			
A	1	0	0
X	0	1	0
A *or* X	08	04	.89
$\mathcal{L}_2$			
A	1	0	0
X	1	0	0
A *or* X	1	0	0

Lexicon-specific agents

←

L_3 hears A *or* X	w_1	w_2	$w_1 \vee w_2$
$\mathcal{L}^*[A{:}\{w_1\}, B{:}\{w_2\}, X{:}\{w_1, w_2\}]$	0	0	0.16
$\mathcal{L}_1[A{:}\{w_1\}, B{:}\{w_2\}, X{:}\{w_2\}]$	0	0	0.47
$\mathcal{L}_2[A{:}\{w_1\}, B{:}\{w_2\}, X{:}\{w_1\}]$	0	0	0.38

$\alpha = 2$; $\beta = 1$; $C(or) = 1$

Joint world–lexicon listener

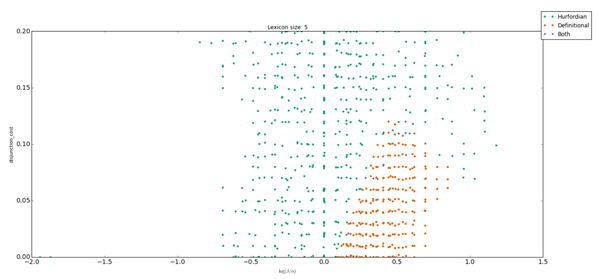
Definitional contexts

Require low disjunction costs and high β: the speaker is invested in communicating about the lexicon and can tolerate the cost of a disjunction that is synonymous with one of its disjuncts.

L_3 hears A *or* X	w_1	w_2	$w_1 \vee w_2$
$\mathcal{L}^*[A{:}\{w_1\}, B{:}\{w_2\}, X{:}\{w_1, w_2\}]$	0	0	0
$\mathcal{L}_2[A{:}\{w_1\}, B{:}\{w_2\}, X{:}\{w_2\}]$	0	0	0
$\mathcal{L}_3[A{:}\{w_1\}, B{:}\{w_2\}, X{:}\{w_1\}]$	.88	0	.12

$\alpha = 5$; $\beta = 7$; $C(or) = 0.01$

Characterization



Summarizes a search over many parameter settings using a large lexicon and large world space.