

## Presupposition, Assertion and Accommodation

### 1. SOME PRESUPPOSITION TRIGGERS

- *Lexical*

(1) *Definites*

The pizzeria in the Vatican is closed.

**P:** There is a pizzeria in the Vatican

**A:** It is closed.

(**P** for 'presupposition')

(**A** for 'assertion')

(2) *Quantifiers*

Sue has photographed every unicorn in the Catskills.

**P:** There are unicorns in the Catskills.

**A:** Sue has photographed every one of them.

(3) *Factives*

Fred regrets that he cheated on the exam.

**P:** Fred cheated on the exam.

**A:** He regrets it.

(4) *Aspectual verbs*

John has stopped beating his wife.

**P:** John used to beat his wife.

**A:** He has stopped doing that.

(5) *Iterative adverbs*

Tom cried, too.

**P:** Somebody other than Tom cried.

**A:** Tom cried.

- *Constructional*

(6) *It-Clefts*

It was in July that Ann left for France.

**P:** Ann left for France.

**A:** Ann did that in July.

(7) *Wh-Clefts*

What Tom took a picture of was a unicorn.

**P:** Tom took a picture of something.

**A:** It was a unicorn.

- *Phonological*

(8) *Destressing*

John introduced Sue to **BILL**.

**P:** John introduced Sue to somebody.

**A:** It was Bill.

## 2. PRESUPPOSITION PROJECTION FROM NON-ENTAILING CONTEXTS

• *Negation*(N1) *Definites*

It's **not** true that [the pizzeria in the Vatican is closed].

**P:** There is a pizzeria in the Vatican

**A:** It is not closed.

(N2) *Quantifiers*

Sue hasn't [every unicorn in the Catskills].

**P:** There are unicorns in the Catskills.

**A:** Sue hasn't photographed every one of them.

(N3) *Factives*

Fred doesn't [regret that he cheated on the exam].

**P:** Fred cheated on the exam.

**A:** He doesn't regret it.

(N4) *Aspectual verbs*

John hasn't [stopped beating his wife].

**P:** John used to beat his wife.

**A:** He hasn't stopped doing that.

(N5) *Iterative adverbs*

\* Tom didn't cry, too. (polarity item)

(N6) *It-Clefts*

It's **not** true that [it was in July that Ann left for France].

**P:** Ann left for France.

**A:** Ann didn't do that in July.

(N7) *Wh-Clefts*

It's **not** true that [what Tom took a picture of was a unicorn].

**P:** Tom took a picture of something.

**A:** It was not a unicorn.

(N8) *Destressing*

John didn't [introduce Sue to BILL].

**P:** John introduced Sue to somebody.

**A:** It wasn't Bill.

- *Modal*

(M1) *Definites*

It's **possible** that [the pizzeria in the Vatican is closed].

**P:** There is a pizzeria in the Vatican

**A:** It's possible that it's closed.

(M2) *Quantifiers*

Sue **may** [have photographed every unicorn in the Catskills].

**P:** There are unicorns in the Catskills.

**A:** Sue may have photographed every one of them.

(M3) *Factives*

It's **possible** that [Fred regrets that he cheated on the exam].

**P:** Fred cheated on the exam.

**A:** It's possible that he regrets it.

(M4) *Aspectual verbs*

John **may** [have stopped beating his wife].

**P:** John used to beat his wife.

**A:** He may have stopped doing that.

(M5) *Iterative adverbs*

It's **possible** that [Tom cried, too]

**P:** Somebody other than Tom cried.

**A:** It's possible that Tom cried.

(M6) *It-Clefts*

It's **possible** that [it was in July that Ann left for France].

**P:** Ann left for France.

**A:** It's possible that Ann did that in July.

(M7) *Wh-Clefts*

It's **possible** that [what Tom took a picture of was a unicorn].

**P:** Tom took a picture of something.

**A:** It's possible that it was a unicorn.

(M8) *Destressing*

It's **possible** that [John introduced Sue to BILL].

**P:** John introduced Sue to somebody.

**A:** It's possible that it was Bill.

- *Conditional Antecedent*

(C1) *Definites*

**If** [the pizzeria in the Vatican is closed], we'll go to that Chinese place.

**P:** There is a pizzeria in the Vatican

**A:** If it's closed, we'll go to that Chinese place.

(C2) *Quantifiers*

**If** [Sue has photographed every unicorn in the Catskills], she has accomplished something remarkable.

**P:** There are unicorns in the Catskills.

**A:** If Sue has photographed every one of them, she has accomplished something remarkable.

(C3) *Factives*

**If** [Fred regrets that he cheated on the exam], he's not such a bad fellow.

**P:** Fred cheated on the exam.

**A:** If he regrets it, he's not such a bad fellow.

(C4) *Aspectual verbs*

**If** [John has stopped beating his wife], she may decide to stay with him.

**P:** John used to beat his wife.

**A:** If he has stopped doing that, she may decide to stay with him.

(C5) *Iterative adverbs*

**If** [Tom cried, too], then that movie must really have been something.

**P:** Somebody other than Tom cried.

**A:** If Tom cried, then that movie must really have been something.

(C6) *It-Clefts*

If [it was in July that Ann left for France], then she's probably back by now.

**P:** Ann left for France.

**A:** If she did that in July, then she's probably back by now.

(C7) *Wh-Clefts*

If [what Tom took a picture of was a unicorn], then I am a giraffe.

**P:** Tom took a picture of something.

**A:** If it was a unicorn, then I am a giraffe.

(C8) *Destressing*

If [John introduced Sue to BILL], then Ann was jealous.

**P:** John introduced Sue to somebody.

**A:** If it was Bill, then Ann was jealous.

## 3. APPARENT DEFEASIBILITY DUE TO CONTEXT CHANGE

Suppose uttering  $\phi$  presupposes **P** -- in symbols,  $\phi\{\mathbf{P}\}$ . Contexts such as the following appear to defeat **P**:

- If **P** then  $\phi\{\mathbf{P}\}$
- It is possible that **P** and  $\phi\{\mathbf{P}\}$

(D3) *Factives*

• If **Fred cheated on the exam**, then (I'm sure) [he regrets that he cheated on the exam].

• It is possible that **Fred cheated on the exam** and that [he regrets that he cheated on the exam].

(D6) *It-Clefts*

• If **Ann left for France** then (I'm sure) [it was in July that she left for France].

• It is possible that **Ann left for France** and that [it was in July that she left for France].

## 4. ACCOMMODATION:

[...] it's not as easy as you might think to say something that will be unacceptable for lack of required presuppositions. Say something that requires a missing presupposition, and straightaway that presupposition springs into existence, making what you said acceptable after all. (Lewis 1979: 339)

(A1) *Arriving late at a faculty meeting*

✓ I'm sorry I'm late. My car broke down.  
**P:** I came by car.

# I'm sorry I'm late. My chariot broke down.  
**P:** I came in a chariot.

Geurts 1999:12–13

(A2) We regret that [children cannot accompany their parents to commencement exercises].

**P:** Children cannot accompany their parents to commencement exercises.

(A3) John works at the pizzeria in the Vatican.

**P:** There is a pizzeria in the Vatican.

## REFERENCES

- Beaver, D. (2001) *Presupposition and Assertion in Dynamic Semantics*. CSLI Publications, Stanford.  
Geurts, B. (1999) *Presuppositions and Pronouns*. Elsevier, Amsterdam.  
Lewis, D. (1979) 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game'. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8:339–359.