

Accommodation – the proviso problem

Suppose we know nothing, what will we accommodate when hearing the following?

(1) If John arrived late, his daughter was sick.

We would probably add (2) to the CG.

(2) John has a daughter.

But, why? After all, we've learned that the presupposition of (1) is (3).

(3) If John arrived late, he has a daughter.

Beaver (2001) and von Stechow (2006) [henceforth BvS]: this is not necessarily a problem.

Basic idea, when H hears S's utterance of (1), H must take (3) to be part of CG. If (2) is part of CG, so is (3). Hence assuming that (2) is part of CG is a way to satisfy the presuppositional requirements of (1).

But why (2) rather than the minimal (3). BvS: If the belief in (3) is forced upon us, it would be more reasonable to believe in (2) than not to.

- (4) a. If the problem was difficult, it wasn't John who solved it.
Acc: someone solved the problem
b. If the problem was discussed in class, it wasn't John who solved it.
Acc: if the problem was discussed in class, someone solved it.

Geurts:

- (5) Mary knows that if the problem was difficult, it wasn't John who solved it.
Acc: if the problem was difficult, someone solved it.
- (6) a. If the problem was easy, it wasn't John who solved it.
Acc: someone solved the problem
b. If the problem was easy, it wasn't John who solved it.
Acc: someone solved the problem

Beaver (2006) [Comments on von Stechow (2006)]

- a. Bart Geurts' strongest argument against conditional presuppositions depends on a reasonable (though unstated) requirement on the relation between these two theories: if two sentences presuppose exactly the same propositions, we should expect the accommodation theory to predict the same contextual adjustments.
- b. Accordingly, Geurts found a recipe for creating pairs of sentences that apparently have the same presuppositions, but lead to different accommodation.

- c. I am suggesting that Geurts' recipe creates pairs of sentences with slightly different presuppositions. S2, i.e. "X factive-verb if A then P," presupposes relevance of A to P, but this is not presupposed by S1 "if A then B_p."

Raj Singh:

- (7) a. If the problem was difficult, it wasn't John who solved it.
Hey wait a minute, I didn't know that someone solved the problem.
- b. The president's daughter is coming to town.
Hey wait a minute, I didn't know that the president had a daughter.
#Hey wait a minute, I didn't know that the president had a white daughter.