**Philosophical Insights into Pragmatics**

# Philosophical Analysis

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## Volume 79

# Philosophical Insights into Pragmatics

Edited by
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Piotr Stalmaszczyk
# Philosophical Insights into Pragmatics: Introduction

## 1 Introduction

Contemporary research within philosophy of language and linguistics frequently leads to the pragmaticization of meaning, i.e. shifting the burden of theoretical (but also quite often experimental) analysis from semantics to pragmatics.[1] Ruth Kempson's well-known description of semantics as a "bridge discipline between linguistics and philosophy" (Kempson (1977, p. ix) would have to be modified today and would have to take into consideration pragmatics and – to reapply the metaphor – its considerable bridging potential. Also, identifying philosophy of language with semantics[2] would today require a far-fetched reanalysis of semantics. On the other hand, claims that pragmatics is the appropriate (if not the only) domain for a theory of meaning are abundant.[3]

As a result of these tendencies, the field of pragmatic investigations has considerably broadened its scope and it now encompasses a wide range of topics, thereby strongly interconnecting philosophy of language with linguistics (and other disciplines).[4]

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**1** See, for example, the papers collected in Turner (ed.) (2011), a volume significantly entitled *Making Semantics Pragmatic*, and in Stalmaszczyk (ed.) (2014), with another telling title – *Semantics and Beyond*. See also the papers in Depraetere/Salkie (eds.) (2017), and Capone/Carapezza/Lo Piparo (eds.) (2018) on recent investigations into the semantics/pragmatics interface.
**2** Cf. the following statement in the opening lines of an interdisciplinary reader in semantics: "The part of philosophy known as the philosophy of language, which includes and is sometimes identified with the part known as semantics" (Caton 1971, p. 3).
**3** Cf. for example Woleński (2003: 120) on pragmatics as the proper place for the study of meaning, and Turner's 'Wittgensteinian' postulate to show the "semanticist the way out of semantics" (Turner 2011, p. 14). Turner also comments on truth-conditional semantics as "thoroughly and constitutively pragmatic" (Turner 2011, p. 14, and n. 18). Most recently, Jaszczolt (2018) argues that pragmatics and philosophy "have to occupy the center stage in the study of meaning in pursuit of a new […] paradigm" (Jaszczolt 2018, pp. 155–156).
**4** For a general overview of philosophical perspectives for pragmatics, see Sbisà, Östman and Verschueren (eds.) (2011), and Capone/Lo Piparo/Carapezza (eds.) (2013). For a discussion of philosophical pragmatics as a branch of philosophy of language, see Jaszczolt (2018). For some changes in the scope of pragmatic research, see the contributions to Verschueren/Östman (eds.) (2009), and most recently Depraetere/Salkie (eds.) (2017), especially Part Three ("Exploring New

Papers collected in this volume focus on several more recent topics of research, such as negotiating what is said, analyses of game-playing situations, subsentential speech acts, accommodation in linguistic interaction, expressive meanings and expressive commitments, and also on some well-established concepts (such as presupposition, entailment, implicature, speech acts, different cases of meaning as use) viewed from new perspectives. It is hoped that the discussed topics contribute to the field of philosophical pragmatics, regarded as a branch of philosophy of language (in the sense of Jaszczolt 2018).

## 2 Contents of the volume

Roberta Colonna Dahlman proposes a revision of the semantic notion of presupposition. Presupposition is one of the most debated notions in the linguistic and philosophical literature. Historically, there are two main theoretical approaches to presuppositions. According to the first, the semantic view, presuppositions are semantic implications, that is, truth-conditional relations between propositions and statements. In this sense, presuppositions are considered properties of sentences and a presupposed proposition is a necessary condition for the truth of the presupposing statement. In the second approach, the pragmatic view, presuppositions are not properties of sentences but rather properties of speakers or of linguistic performances given a certain context of utterance. From this view, a presupposed proposition is a condition for the felicitous utterance of the presupposing statement in a given context. Traditionally, it is assumed that semantic presuppositions differ from classical entailments, as presuppositions, unlike classical entailments, project under negation: if we compare a context of entailment to a context of presupposition, we should see that entailments, but not presuppositions, disappear under negation. Following the seminal work of Russell, and against the traditional Strawsonian account of presupposition, Colonna Dahlman argues that presupposition failure does not result in a lack of truth-value, but rather in falsity; hence most standard cases of presuppositions, as discussed in the literature, are classical entailments. Moreover, she claims that all presuppositions that are classical entailments are also pragmatic presuppositions, while not all pragmatic presuppositions are also classical entailments. Colonna Dahlman's claim stands in contrast to Karttunen's well-known analysis of

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Territory"), also Capone/Carapezza/Lo Piparo (eds.) (2018), and the monographs and collections in the John Benjamins series *Pragmatics & Beyond*.

factive verbs and his distinction between true factives (that is, emotive factives) and semifactives (that is, cognitive factives).

Andrei Moldovan continues with an investigation of two other classical pragmatic notions: entailment and implicature. He is interested in the relation holding between these two notions, and the question he addresses can be formulated in the following way: whether an entailment *q* of the proposition *p* literally expressed by an utterance of a natural language sentence can, at the same time, figure as the content of a conversational implicature (CI) that the utterance carries. In other words, given that both entailments and conversational implicatures are implications of *what is said*, is it possible for the same proposition to be both entailed and conversationally implicated by what is said? Of course, not all entailments are implicatures, and not all implicatures convey contents that are entailed by what is said. The question is whether this is possible, that is, whether a proposition *could* play this double role. A review of the pragmatic literature that discusses implicatures reveals that the question has received different answers. While those who answer the question affirmatively rely on examples of entailments that look very much like typical cases of CIs, those who answer it negatively adduce considerations pertaining to the conceptual difference that needs to be drawn between the two categories of implications. Moldovan considers the various criteria for identifying CIs, and concludes that both cancellability and non-conventionality seem to exclude entailments from the class of propositions that could be conversationally implicated. However, he also argues that, upon closer examination, neither of the two reasons for a negative answer are compelling. Finally, Moldovan concludes that the answer to the initial question should be affirmative.

In the next chapter, Pedro Santos also discusses conversational implicatures (CIs). He observes that attempts at accounting for so-called embedded conversational implicatures come up against the basic problem of making sense of kinds of content that, despite being derived from *bona fide* conversational implicatures, seem to be part of the literal meaning of utterances. The problem resists the conventionalist way out (championed, among others, by Chierchia and Levinson), which construes generalized CIs as not meriting the status of CIs proper, this being a way of dealing with the puzzle. One decisive drawback of this strategy is that particularized CIs, which could not credibly be conventionalized, display the same kind of puzzling embedding behavior as generalized CIs. Santos discusses Mandy Simons' and François Recanati's approaches to the conundrum. Simons assigns to embedded ICs the status of *bona fide* Gricean inferences, building upon the distinction between embedded pragmatic *effects* and embedded pragmatic *computations* and claiming that the puzzle is solved by the realization that only

the latter phenomenon is really problematic and that embedded ICs are to be analysed as cases of the former rather than as cases of the latter. Recanati has qualms about this sort of approach and attempts to account for the phenomenon by dismissing the very notion of an embedded IC as intrinsically incoherent. Recanati purports to do this on the basis of a globality criterion for Gricean inferences which he argues cases of alleged embedded ICs only partially fulfil, so that they count as cases of Gricean inferences *latu sensu* (as, for instance, are cases of what he calls modulation) but surely not as genuine CIs. Santos argues that Recanati's take on the problem cannot be successful, as globality is a faulty criterion as far as distinguishing cases of modulation from CIs proper is concerned.

In philosophy of language and theoretical linguistics there is an intense debate on how utterance meaning is determined. Palle Leth observes that theorists are usually concerned with the semantic component of utterance meaning, i.e. the level of what is said, which cannot be reduced to compositional linguistic meaning, if only because of indexicals. Approaches to this question can broadly be characterized as either intentionalist or anti-intentionalist. Intentionalists take utterance meaning to be determined by the speaker's intention, usually constrained by conformity to linguistic conventions or by the formation of reasonable expectations on being understood. Anti-intentionalists take utterance meaning to be determined by public features available to the hearer, such as linguistic conventions and diverse contextual cues. Leth argues that the presupposition that there is such a thing as the meaning of an utterance is unwarranted. The interpretive interaction between a speaker (S) and a hearer (H) does not support the notion of the correct interpretation of an utterance. What matters to communicative success is simply the convergence between S's intention and H's interpretation. In cases of non-convergence or divergence, which theorists concoct in order to derive intuitions supporting their favoured account of utterance meaning, H basically has two options: H may take an interest in S's intention or H may take an interest in the most reasonable interpretation of the utterance. In the former case, H goes along with whatever meaning S wants her to go along with; in the latter case, H's claim is simply that, irrespective of S's intention, she had the best epistemic reasons to take the utterance the way she did. The former option is H's default option, the latter option is exploited when normative consequences are at stake. Leth stresses that neither of these options has any implications for utterance meaning, and that the notion of correct interpretation is idle in practice and the burden of proof is shifted onto those who posit it as a theoretical entity.

Whereas Leth mentions misunderstanding, confusion, and imagined meaning, Chi-Hé Elder devotes her contribution to miscommunication, and especially to negotiating what is said in the face of miscommunication. She observes that in

post-Gricean pragmatics, communication is said to be successful when a hearer recovers a speaker's intended message. On this assumption, proposals for 'what is said' – the semantic, or propositional meaning of a speaker's utterance – are typically centred around the content the speaker aimed to communicate. However, these proposals don't account for the fact that speakers can be deliberately vague, leaving no clear proposition to be recovered, or that a speaker can accept a hearer's misconstrual even though the speaker didn't intend it. In such cases, identifying 'what is said' is more contentious, even though communication is arguably no less successful. Building on recent interactionist approaches to meaning, Elder offers a proposal for 'what is said' in cases of miscommunication, and she provides some rationale for the situation when the speaker is expected to accept a divergent interpretation of his or her initial intention. When we speak, each of our utterances can potentially communicate multiple propositions whose obviousness ranges from strong to weak. The strong ones are the most plausible candidates for 'what is said', but in case they are not recovered, the result of meaning negotiation between interlocutors is expected to align with the speaker's higher-order speech act.

In the next contribution, Brian Ball investigates the relation between playing games and linguistic activity. He tentatively defines games as abstract objects individuated by their rules, thought of as essential to them, and offers an account according to which game-playing situations may be regarded as involving *agents* standing in the *playing* relation to abstract *games* having their rules essentially. Ball inquires whether linguistic activity can be so regarded as well. Timothy Williamson has argued that it can, and that assertion in particular should be thought of as a move in such a game, governed by the rule *assert only what you know*; but Ishani Maitra argues against the possibility of such an analysis. Ball defends the Williamsonian proposal by rejecting accounts of rule-following that would allow the argument to go through. Arguably, playing a game does require that agents follow its rules; but agents do, in the relevant (weaker) sense, follow a strong rule of assertion. To follow a rule one must have some tacit knowledge of it, and Ball suggests that rule-following so construed is involved in the playing of language games. Even if this account of rule-following should prove to be incorrect, it is nevertheless the case that flagrant rule-violations are compatible with game-play.

Joanna Odrowąż-Sypniewska takes a look at another aspect of language games, namely *making moves* through subsentential speech acts. The most commonly given examples of subsentential speech acts are expressions such as "Nice dress", "From Spain", "Where?", etc., uttered in circumstances in which speakers uttering them are regarded as making moves in different language games (such

as stating, asking, promising, etc.). The argument from connectivity is one of the most important arguments for the claim that such utterances – contrary to appearances – are in fact ellipses, i.e. sentential speech acts. The argument uses examples from inflectional languages, such as Polish or German, in which allegedly subsentential speech acts appear in cases other than the nominative. Those who think that they are just fragments of longer unpronounced sentences have no problem in explaining where the case comes from, but the answer is more problematic for those who think that such utterances are truly subsentential. Odrowąż-Sypniewska argues that this argument is by no means conclusive and that defenders of subsentential speech acts need not be worried by connectivity effects. She suggests a situated contextualist account of subsentential speech acts, which is based on Recanati's moderate relativism. Recanati's relativism presupposes two principles: duality and distribution. In the case of subsentential speech acts we have to postulate a two-staged principle of distribution: it's not only the case that the determinants of truth-value distribute over content and circumstance, but also that the content itself is distributed over the locutionary 'what is said' and the situation of the utterance. Odrowąż-Sypniewska argues – *pace* Recanati and following Perry – that, at least in the case of subsentential speech acts, we have to postulate unarticulated constituents in explicit contents as well as in the situations of evaluation. The explanation of connectivity effects appeals to Perry's idea of the utterance completing the thought whose other constituents are already in the situation. The speakers use cases other than the nominative in order to simplify the process of enrichment for the hearers. The cases make it easier to determine which completion of the articulated content is the intended one. Odrowąż-Sypniewska concludes that the contextualist account is able to withstand the objection from connectivity and can be regarded as a view that explains how it is that subsentential expressions can be used to make a move in a language game.

Maciej Witek concentrates on the process of accommodation in linguistic interaction. Accommodation is a process whereby the context of an utterance is adjusted or repaired in order to maintain the default assumption that the utterance constitutes an appropriate conversational move of a certain type. It involves a kind of redressive action on the part of the audience and, depending on what the appropriateness of a speech act requires, results in providing missing contextual elements such as referents for anaphoric expressions, presuppositions, suppositions, deontic facts, pragmatically enriched contents, etc. It remains to be determined, however, what is the source of the contextual requirements whose recognition motivates and guides the accommodating context-change. Witek addresses this particular question – which expresses the so-called *triggering* or *constitution*

*problem* – and suggests that it can be adequately answered by a speech act-based model, the central idea of which is that the requirements in question are structural components of patterns, scripts, or procedures for the performance of speech acts. He also argues that the proposed framework can be used to explain a wide range of accommodating phenomena and can shed some new light on the constitution of accommodation-triggering requirements.

Leopold Hess devotes his paper to expressive meanings and expressive commitments. Expressives, i.e. words such as *damn* or *bastard*, seem to convey a specific kind of content, different from, or on top of, "regular" descriptive meaning. Following the seminal work of Chris Potts the meaning of expressives is often conceptualized in a two-dimensional semantic framework, in which descriptive and expressive contents are separated as a result of special rules of semantic composition. This approach is successful in accounting for some interesting semantic properties of expressives and has also been extended to other classes of expressions, such as racial slurs or honorifics. However, it does not offer any actual insight into the nature of expressive meaning (the two-dimensional formalism operates on dummy values, independently of what they may stand in for). Hess offers an alternative, pragmatic, account of expressives, based on the observations that 1) expressive meanings seem directly to involve the speakers (their states, emotions or attitudes) rather than just abstract (e.g. truth-conditional) contents, and that 2) the utterers of expressives are responsible for the choice of loaded, often taboo vocabulary. The presented account is developed in a commitment-based scorekeeping model of discourse (inspired by Lewis and Brandom), in which hearers interpret speakers' utterances by attributing commitments to them. Besides assertoric commitments (and potentially other kinds), expressive commitments can be distinguished. These are commitments to the appropriateness or applicability of a given expression, which also can be attributed to speakers based on their utterances (separately from assertoric commitments).

Pedro Abreu aims to assess Donald Davidson's arguments against the sufficiency and necessity of conventions for successful linguistic communication. Davidson goes beyond the common contention that the basic conventional layer of meaning, one that is secured by interlocutors' shared competence in their common language, must often be supplemented in rich and inventive ways. First, he maintains that linguistic understanding is never exclusively a matter of mere decoding, but *always* an interpretative task that demands constant additional attention to the indeterminately various cues and clues available. More radically still, Davidson denies that linguistic conventions are even needed. In particular, he argues against the fairly consensual thesis there is some essential element of

conventionality in literal meaning. This still represents a very distinctive contribution to the persistent and tumultuous discussion over the relative natures and limits of semantics and pragmatics. Abreu maintains that Davidson is only partially right in his claims and develops an argument supporting the thesis that genuine pursuit of linguistic understanding can never take the form of uncritical conformity to a fixed norm. Finally, Abreu considers in some detail Davidson's argument from radical interpretation and concludes that it fails.

In the final contribution, Tadeusz Ciecierski tackles one of the classical problems of philosophy of language (and philosophy in general): the relation between knowledge and belief. Ciecierski defends the orthodox view that knowledge entails belief. He distinguishes two ways in which one can deny the knowledge-belief entailment claim (compatibilism and incompatibilism). Compatibilism is the claim that the co-occurrence of knowledge and belief is a purely contingent matter, while incompatibilism states that co-occurrence is impossible. Next, Ciecierski presents intuitive arguments against both kinds of denials, and discusses some possible objections against the presented arguments. Finally, he concludes that there are reasons to think that the traditional picture is correct; it seems, therefore, that we should remain sceptical about the philosophical prospects of compatibilism and incompatibilism.

The chapters in this volume fully justify the title of the collection – *Philosophical Insights into Pragmatics*. It would also be possible to reverse the wording, and envisage a volume on *pragmatic insights into philosophy*, which remains a viable project for the future.

# Acknowledgments

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Roberta Colonna Dahlman
# Presuppositions, again

**Abstract:** *Presupposition* is surely one of the most debated notions in the linguistic and philosophical literature. Historically, there are two main theoretical approaches to presuppositions. According to the first one, the semantic view, presuppositions are semantic implications, that is, truth-conditional relations between propositions and statements. In this sense, presuppositions are considered properties of sentences and a presupposed proposition is a necessary condition for the truth of the presupposing statement. In the second approach, the pragmatic view, presuppositions are not properties of sentences but rather properties of speakers or of linguistic performances given a certain context of utterance. From this view, a presupposed proposition is a condition for the felicitous utterance of the presupposing statement in a given context.

Traditionally, it is assumed that semantic presuppositions differ from classical entailments, as presuppositions, unlike classical entailments, project under negation: if we compare a context of entailment to a context of presupposition, we should see that entailments, but not presuppositions, disappear under negation. This presentation aims to propose a revision of the semantic notion of presupposition. I argue that most standard cases of presuppositions are classical entailments. Moreover, I claim that all presuppositions that are classical entailments are also pragmatic presuppositions, while not all pragmatic presuppositions are also classical entailments. I contend that factive verbs offer a paradigmatic example of this distinction, as the factivity related to *know* is semantic, hence a classical entailment, whereas the factivity related to *regret* is merely pragmatic. This claim stands in contrast to Karttunen's (1971) well-known analysis of factive verbs and his distinction between *true factives* (that is, emotive factives) and *semifactives* (that is, cognitive factives).

**Keywords:** presupposition, classical entailment, constancy under negation, projection, factivity, *know*, *regret*

## 1 Introduction

This paper aims to propose a revision of the semantic notion of presupposition. Following Russell (1905), and against the traditional Strawsonian account of presupposition, I argue that presupposition failure does not result in a lack of truth-

value, but rather in falsity, and hence that most standard cases of presuppositions, as discussed in the literature, are classical entailments. Moreover, I claim that all presuppositions that are classical entailments are also pragmatic presuppositions, while not all pragmatic presuppositions are also classical entailments. I contend that factive verbs offer a paradigmatic example of this distinction, as the factivity related to *know* is semantic, that is, a classical entailment, whereas the factivity related to *regret* is a merely pragmatic phenomenon. This claim stands in contrast to Karttunen's (1971) well-known analysis of factive verbs and his distinction between *true factives* and *semifactives*.

# 2 Presupposition

Presupposition is surely one of the most debated notions in the linguistic and philosophical literature.[1] Typical contexts of presupposition are the following:

Definite descriptions:
(1) The King of France is bald.
   *presupposes:* 'There is a (unique)[2] King of France.'
Clefts:
(2) It was John who wrote a letter to Mary.
   *presupposes:* 'Someone wrote a letter to Mary.'
Change of state verbs:
(3) John stopped running (at time $t_1$).
   *presupposes:* '(Before $t_1$) John was running.'
Factives:
(4) John knows that Mary lives in Sweden.
   *presupposes:* 'Mary lives in Sweden.'

It is commonly assumed that presuppositions are not classical entailments, as presuppositions, unlike classical entailments, survive negation (*constancy under negation*). If we compare a context of entailment to a context of presupposition, we should see that entailments, but not presuppositions, disappear under negation:

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**1** For an overview of different theories on presupposition, see Dinsmore (1981), Levinson (1983), Soames (1989), Huang (2007), Beaver and Geurts (2013), Simons (2013).
**2** Note that, in this study, I am not considering the implication of uniqueness.

(5) a. Beatrix killed Bill.
   *entails:* 'Bill is dead.'
   b. Beatrix did not kill Bill.
   *does not entail:* 'Bill is dead.'
(6) a. The King of France is bald.
   *presupposes:* 'There is a King of France.'
   b. The King of France is not bald.
   *presupposes:* 'There is a King of France.'

The sentence in (5a) entails the proposition 'Bill is dead', whereas its negative counterpart in (5b) does not. On the other hand, it is assumed that the sentence in (6a) implies an existential presupposition ('There is a King of France'), and that its negative counterpart in (6b) also does. *Projection* is the term used to denote this typical property of presuppositions, that is, the capacity to survive under negation.[3]

Moreover, it is assumed that presuppositions project under other entailment-cancelling operators, namely questions, conditionals and modality operators, as shown in (7)–(9):

(7) a. Is the King of France bald?
   *presupposes:* 'There is a King of France.'
   b. Did Beatrix kill Bill?
   *does not entail:* 'Bill is dead.'
(8) a. If the King of France is bald, we will need to buy him a hat.
   *presupposes:* 'There is a King of France.'
   b. If Beatrix killed Bill, we will need to make arrangements for his funeral.
   *does not entail:* 'Bill is dead.'
(9) a. Maybe the King of France is bald.
   *presupposes:* 'There is a King of France.'
   b. Maybe Beatrix killed Bill.
   *does not entail:* 'Bill is dead.'

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**3** The "projection problem" for presuppositions was originally formulated by Langendoen and Savin (1971) as the question of "how the presupposition and assertion of a complex sentence are related to the presuppositions and assertions of the clauses it contains" (p. 55). The projection principle was stated as follows: "presuppositions of a subordinate clause [...] stand as presuppositions of the complex sentence in which they occur" (Langendoen & Savin 1971, p. 57). In other words, according to this principle, a complement clause should inherit all the presuppositions of the complex sentence in which it occurs (so-called *cumulative hypothesis*).

Chierchia and McDonnell-Ginet (1990, p. 24) argue that whenever S presupposes P, there is an entire family of sentences related to S (so-called *S family*), namely its negative variant, its interrogative variant, its epistemic modal variant, and the conditional with S as its antecedent, which also *tend* to presuppose P.[4]

Historically, there are two main theoretical approaches to presuppositions. According to the first one, the semantic view, presuppositions are semantic implications, that is, truth-conditional relations between propositions and statements. In this sense, presuppositions are considered properties of sentences or statements (that is, uses of sentences).[5] In the second approach, the pragmatic view, presuppositions are not properties of sentences but rather properties of speakers or of linguistic performances given a certain context of utterance. From the semantic view, a presupposed proposition is a necessary condition for the truth of the presupposing statement; while from the pragmatic view, a presupposed proposition is a condition for the felicitous utterance of the presupposing statement in a given context, a "felicity condition of statementhood", as Ken Turner (1992, p. 369) puts it.

The currently dominant notion of presupposition is a pragmatic notion. In the following sections, I show why the pragmatic view turned out to be the most convincing account, and then I put forward arguments in favour of a semantic notion in terms of classical entailment. I argue that most standard cases of presupposition, besides being pragmatic implications, are classical entailments, and that to overlook this hypothesis results in a disregard of crucial distinctions.

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**4** Crucially, we will see that presupposition projection is not a logical necessity, but depends on the context of utterance. In most cases, the context of utterance is such that presuppositions project in embedded entailment-cancelling environments. However, it can be the case that projection does not prevail. In his well-known study on *holes*, *plugs* and *filters*, Karttunen (1973) proved that the projection principle is too strong: in his line of reasoning, some presuppositions project (because they are embedded under *holes*), while for others the mechanism of projection is necessarily blocked (because they are embedded under *plugs*) or is contextually – "under certain conditions" – blocked (because they are embedded under *filters*). In most recent works (see references in section 9), it has been argued that projection tests address information structure level and are a diagnostic for the discourse status of implications rather than for presuppositionality.

**5** On the distinction between statements and sentences, see Strawson (1952, p. 174 ff.). See also Hintikka (1962, p. 6): "[..] a statement is the act of uttering, writing, or otherwise expressing a declarative sentence. A sentence is the form of words which is uttered or written when a statement is made."

# 3 The semantic view

The notion of presupposition was introduced into linguistic theory and philosophy of language by the logician and philosopher Gottlob Frege (1892, Eng. translation 1948). In *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (1892, Eng. translation 1948), Frege wrote:

> [..] when we say "the moon", we do not intend to speak of our conception of the moon, nor are we satisfied with the sense alone, but we *presuppose* a referent.
>
> (Frege 1948, p. 214, emphasis mine)

And further on:

> If anything is asserted there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have referents. If one therefore asserts "Kepler died in misery," there is a presupposition that the name "Kepler" designates something; but it does not follow that the sense of the sentence "Kepler died in misery" contains the thought that the name "Kepler" designates something. [..] That the name "Kepler" designates something is just as much a presupposition for the assertion Kepler died in misery as for the contrary assertion.
>
> (Frege 1948, pp. 221–222)

In a similar vein, Peter F. Strawson (1950, 1952, p. 175 ff.) defined presupposition as a relation of *truth dependence* between statements, that is, uses of sentences. This view shifted to the definition of *semantic presupposition* as the relation between statements that can be true or false, hence can express *propositions*: if the presupposing proposition is true, then the presupposed proposition *must* also *be true* (i); if the presupposed proposition is false, then the presupposing proposition is *neither true nor false* (ii).

(10) The Strawsonian notion of semantic presupposition
S presupposes P iff:
(i) if S then it *must* be the case that P (= P is a truth condition of S);
(ii) if ¬P then S has *no truth-value* (that is, S is neither true nor false).

According to this notion, if S presupposes P, then in case of presupposition failure (¬P), S is *neither true nor false*, meaning that S cannot be used to make an assertion that is either true or false. As Strawson writes, the question whether S is true or false does not arise (Strawson 1950, p. 330, see also Geach 1950, p. 85). This is the point on which Strawson famously criticized Russell's theory of denoting phrases. According to Bertrand Russell (1905), a sentence such as "The present King of France is bald" is simply false, as there is no King of France; while,

in Strawson's line of reasoning, the same sentence has no truth-value – it is neither true nor false.[6]

As a next step, Bas van Fraassen (1968, p. 137), following the Frege-Strawsonian view, defined presupposition in purely semantic terms:

> The explicit characterization of *presupposes* is therefore given by
> 1. *A* presupposes *B* if and only if *A* is neither true nor false unless *B* is true.
> This is equivalent to
> 2. *A* presupposes *B* if and only if
> (a) if *A* is true then *B* is true,
> (b) if *A* is false then *B* is true.

Along the same line, Keenan (1971, p. 45) defined a *logical presupposition* as follows:

> A sentence S logically presupposes a sentence S' just in case S logically implies S' and the negation of S, ~S, also logically implies S'. In other words, the truth of S' is a necessary condition on the truth or falsity of S.

Eventually, the semantic notion of presupposition was represented in the following terms:

(11)  The traditional semantic notion of presupposition
      S presupposes P iff:
      (i)  if S then P (= P is a truth condition of S);
      (ii)  if ¬S then P (= P is a truth condition of ¬S).

The assumption of *constancy under negation* stems from this semantic notion as grounded in the Frege-Strawsonian account of presupposition. The claim was

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**6** On the truth-value gap theory, see also Quine (1960), Austin (1962). Later, Strawson (1964) claimed that whether S is false or truth-value lacking is a matter of *topicality*: if presupposition failure affects the topic of the statement (what the statement is about, as in "The King of France is bald"), then S is neither true nor false; while, otherwise, if presupposition failure does not affect the topic of the statement, but merely affects what purports to be information about its topic (as in "The exhibition was visited by the King of France", which answers the question "Who visited the exhibition?"), then S can be said to be false, as the statement is misinformative about its topic (see also Strawson 1954, p. 226). In this sense, see also Reinhart (1981, pp. 69–70), Erteschik-Shir (1997, p. 16). For an alternative view, see von Fintel (2004), who claims that "All the sentences referring to the present king of France should equally fail to assign a truth-value to our world" (p. 326). In defense of Strawson's discourse-based account of presupposition failure, and against von Fintel's analysis, see, more recently, Bezuidenhout (2016).

that in order to assign a truth-value (true/false) to S, P must be true. Therefore, the conclusion that S *entails* P, and ¬S *entails* P. Both the statement "The King of France is bald" and its negative counterpart "The King of France is not bald" *must* imply that "There exists a King of France." In this sense, presuppositions were assumed necessarily to project under negation.

In this light, *Modus Tollens* was not assumed to apply to presuppositions, as shown by condition (iii) in (12):

(12) The traditional semantic notion of presupposition (II)
S presupposes P iff:
(i) if S then P (= P is a truth condition of S);
(ii) if ¬S then P (= P is a truth condition of ¬S);
(iii) if ¬P then ●S (that is, S is neither true nor false).[7]

That *Modus Tollens* does not apply to presuppositions means that presuppositions must be considered as being clearly distinguished from classical entailments.

# 4 The pragmatic view

The failure of the traditional semantic notion of presupposition, where both S and ¬S necessarily imply P, was largely demonstrated by several scholars who showed how presuppositions may vanish under negation and other entailment-cancelling operators, such as questions, conditionals and possibility operators, rather than being constant.[8] Therefore, since the 1970s, presuppositions have received a pragmatic account in linguistic theory and have been treated as phenomena mainly related to the felicity conditions of the utterance (Karttunen 1970, 1971, 1973, 1974) or to the speaker's subjectivity (Stalnaker 1972, 1973, 1974, 1999,

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**7** The symbol ● stands for "neither true nor false".
**8** See, for instance, Karttunen (1971), who pointed out how some factive presuppositions may vanish, instead of being constant, in some environments, despite the assumption that "Whatever a sentence with a factive predicate presupposes, *the presupposition ought to remain* no matter whether the main sentence is a negative assertion, an interrogative sentence, or the antecedent of a conditional construction" (Karttunen 1971, pp. 62–63, emphasis mine). Note that it is quite remarkable that these scholars, while criticizing the semantic notion of presupposition, seemed to accept the premise established by this very notion, namely that *presuppositions should be constant under negation*.

2002), and not to the truth-conditional content of the uttered sentence. The traditional semantic notion of presupposition, founded on the idea that presuppositions are truth conditions for statements, was replaced by a pragmatic notion grounded on the idea that presuppositions are conditions on the context of utterance – they must be met in the context of utterance in order for a sentence to be appropriately uttered.

The pragmatic notion of presupposition currently dominant in the linguistic literature is credited to Robert Stalnaker (1972, 1973, 1974, 1999, 2002). According to Stalnaker, presupposition should be defined as a relation *between speakers and propositions*. As Stalnaker puts it, it is speakers who presuppose, not sentences or propositions:

> The notion I will discuss is a *pragmatic* notion, as opposed to a purely *semantic* one. This means that the presupposition relation cannot be explained solely in terms of the meaning or content of sentences, but must be explained partly in terms of facts about users of sentences: their beliefs, intentions and expectations. [...] [T]he basic presupposition relation is not between propositions or sentences, but between a person and a proposition.
>
> (Stalnaker 1973, p. 447)

Regarding the Stalnakerian view, a crucial point needs to be clarified. According to this view, the term 'presupposition' is used ambiguously to denote two different things. On the one hand, Stalnaker defines presupposition as a *propositional attitude*, *a mental state of the speaker*: "According to the *pragmatic* conception, presupposition is a propositional attitude, not a semantic relation" (Stalnaker 1972, p. 387). Presuppositions, as Stalnaker says, constitute the background of knowledge or beliefs (the so-called *common ground*) against which statements and requests are made, questions are asked, and proclamations and commands are issued (Stalnaker 1973, p. 448). Moreover, he explicitly underlines that presupposing is not a mental attitude like believing, but rather "a *linguistic disposition* – a disposition to behave in one's use of language *as if* one had certain beliefs, or were making certain assumptions" (Stalnaker 1974: 202, emphasis mine, 1999):[9]

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**9** Stalnaker defines this disposition in terms of *acceptance*: "To accept a proposition is to treat it as true for some reason" (Stalnaker 2002, p. 716). The Stalnakerian notion of acceptance was introduced in Stalnaker (1973): "[...] it is clear that presupposition is a propositional attitude. More specifically, it is an attitude of accepting something to be true" (p. 450). For more on this notion, see also Stalnaker (1984).

(13) The Stalnakerian notion of pragmatic presupposition as relation between speakers and propositions
S presupposes P iff:
The speaker of S, in uttering S, assumes or acts *as if* she assumes that P is true and that the truth of P is part of the *common ground* of information shared with her interlocutor(s).

According to this view, as I understand it, presupposition is the speaker's act of taking the truth of a proposition as part of the conversational common ground at the time of her utterance.[10] This act may or may not be justified by the speaker's own belief depending on whether the speaker herself believes that the presupposed proposition be entailed by the common ground or not – in this latter case, she is just acting *as if* the presupposed proposition were part of the common ground.

On the other hand, Stalnaker uses the term presupposition to indicate *the proposition whose truth is taken for granted*: "A person's presuppositions are the propositions whose truth he takes for granted, often unconsciously, in a conversation, an inquiry, or a deliberation" (Stalnaker 1973, p. 447). In this sense, presuppositions are those *propositions* that constitute the *common ground* of information shared by speakers and hearers, they are *the background of information against which assertions and other speech acts are made*:

(14) The Stalnakerian notion of pragmatic presupposition as backgrounded information
S presupposes P iff:
In uttering S, P is not asserted but backgrounded information, as it already belongs to the common ground shared by speakers and hearers.

This definition is based on a distinction made on the level of *information structure*: the distinction between presupposition as backgrounded information and assertion as foregrounded information (see Hooper 1975). In this sense, what is asserted in an utterance is the answer to some *question under discussion* (cf. Simons *et al.* 2010), while the presupposed content of an utterance is not at stake or open for discussion, but rather taken for granted.

One of the advantages offered by the pragmatic notion of presupposition is that this framework allows us to distinguish between the level of sentence meaning and

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**10** For arguments against Stalnaker's *common ground* theory of presupposition, see Abbott (2000, 2008, 2016), Simons (2001, 2005, 2006), and Gauker (2008, 2016).

the utterance level. In this view, it is possible to see that some presuppositions, in fact, most standard cases of presupposition, are also entailments (for this sense, see Stalnaker 1974, 1999, Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet 1990, Heim 1992, Seuren 2006, Abrusán 2011, Abbott 2016). As Stalnaker (1999, p. 54) puts it: "[…] if presupposition is defined independently of truth-conditions, then one can separate the question of entailment relations from the question of presupposition". This possibility was excluded by the traditional semantic view, because presuppositions, unlike entailments, were considered necessarily constant under negation. According to the semantic notion, if S presupposes P, then both S and ¬S entail P, meaning that P is a truth-condition both of S and ¬S. According to the pragmatic notion, if a speaker, by uttering S, presupposes P, then it is the case (i) that S *entails* P (which means that ¬S does not entail P), and it is possible (ii) that ¬S *presupposes* P. In this framework, presuppositions, unlike entailments, *tend* to project in embedded environments (that is, sentences embedded under negation, questions, conditionals, and modality operators), but they do not always project, as sometimes they are *cancelled*.[11] In this view, it is assumed that the relation between S and P and the relation between ¬S and P are different kinds of implications, an entailment in the former case, and a cancellable pragmatic implication in the latter. As Marina Sbisà (1999, p. 331) puts it,

> The relationship of the presupposition to the utterance of the positive sentence appears not to be identical to its relationship to the utterance of the negative sentence, since in the latter case the presupposition is cancelable.

Most recent work on presuppositions aims at drawing a line of distinction between presuppositions that are also conventionally entailed content and presuppositions that are not entailed content (for an overview of these current theories, see Djärv *et al.* 2016). All these accounts, however, seem to agree on the view that presuppositions cannot be classical entailments. This view was recently expressed by Barbara Abbott, who writes (Abbott 2016, p. 10):

> The presupposed propositions in (1) and (2) are also entailed by their presupposing sentences; if the king of France is wise is true, then there must be a king of France.

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**11** Being merely pragmatic implications, presuppositions are assumed to be cancellable. On the notion of potential (or putative) presupposition and the so-called "cancellation analysis" of presuppositions, see Gazdar (1979b, p. 64 ff.), Huang (2007, p. 81), Levinson (1983, p. 186 ff.), Soames (1989, p. 573 ff.). Other terms have been used to denote the same phenomenon of presupposition cancellation/cancellability: for instance, Abrusán (2016) and Macagno and Capone (2016) use the term "suspension", and Abbott (2016) uses the term "neutralizability".

Then, in footnote 1 (Abbott 2016, p. 10, emphasis mine), she clarifies that

> If presupposition failure results in lack of a truth value for the presupposing sentence (as believed by many people, in addition to Frege and Strawson), then the relation between that sentence and its presuppositions *can't be classical entailment*, since modus tollens would no longer hold in this case. I will continue to use the terms "entail" and "entailment", assuming this proviso.

The aim of this paper is to argue against this view, and to propose that most standard cases of presupposition, if considered on a semantic level of analysis, *are* classical entailments.[12]

# 5 What was wrong with the traditional semantic view

We have seen that the failure of the semantic notion of presupposition, where both S and ¬S necessarily imply P, was largely demonstrated by several scholars, who showed how presuppositions may vanish under negation and other entailment-cancelling operators, such as questions, conditionals, and possibility operators, rather than being constant. This behaviour could have been seen as evidence against the alleged distinction between presuppositions and entailments, but instead the option of a pragmatic notion of presupposition was preferred. The line of reasoning was the following:

(15) The argument against the semantic view
(i) According to the semantic notion, presuppositions are implications that are clearly distinguished from classical entailments, as the former, but not the latter, are constant under negation (and other entailment-cancelling operators).
(ii) It is not the case that presuppositions are always constant under negation (and other entailment-cancelling operators).
(iii) Therefore, the semantic notion of presupposition does not hold, and a pragmatic notion is preferable.

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**12** In this sense, see also the analysis presented by Stanosz (1991, p. 98 ff., Swedish translation from Polish by Semantix Språkcentrum AB). I am indebted to Tadeusz Ciecierski, who brought Barbara Stanosz's work to my attention.