Dissatisfaction Theory
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1 Aims

• Sharpen some well-known problems for Satisfaction Theory (‘ST’).
• Sketch a new theory of presupposition which solves those problems.

2 Subject Matter

Semantic presupposition (‘SP’) identified by enriched family of sentences test. We do not assume e.g. that SPs are truth-value gaps or constraints on input contexts (‘presupposition’ is an unfortunately loaded name).

3 Satisfaction Theory

Two planks:

(1) Stalnaker’s Bridge: An assertion of p, can only update c if $c \models r$.

(2) ST Projection: p can only update c if all its constituents have their SPs locally entailed. p SPs r iff $c \models r$ for all c which p can update.

4 Conditionals

ST’s predictions about SPs under connectives and attitude predicates are widely recognized not to match observed speaker presuppositions.

First, ST predicts

(3) If p then q, r

$\rightsquigarrow_{ST} p \supset r$

But speakers are often felt to presuppose r, not just $p \supset r$:

(4) If Theo hates sonnets, so does his wife.

$\rightsquigarrow_{ST} \text{Theo hates sonnets} \supset \text{Theo has a wife.}$

$\rightsquigarrow_{OBS} \text{Theo has a wife.}$

Response: ST is right about semantic presupposition, but interlocutors often, for pragmatic reasons, take the speaker to presuppose the unconditional.
Problem: conditional SPs get strengthened even when there is strong pragmatic pressure not to do so. Consider:

(5)  
   a. How’s Jo’s health?
   b. ??I don’t know; he has diabetes or MS, I don’t know which. But if he restricts his sugar intake at dinner tonight, then his diabetes is under control.
   \[ \sim_{ST} \text{Jo restricts his sugar intake} \supset \text{Jo has diabetes.} \]
   \[ \sim_{OBS} \text{Jo has diabetes.} \]

Thus the incoherence of (5-b).

But if conditionals had conditional SPs which are optionally strengthened through pragmatic reasoning, that strengthening should be blocked here.

By a principle of charitable interpretation.

Upshot: ST plus pragmatic strengthening is \textit{prima facie} inadequate.

5 Attitudes

Second, ST predicts

(6) \[ S \left[ \text{believes/wants} \right] p_r \]
   \[ \sim_{ST} S \text{ believes } r. \]

But speakers are often felt to presuppose \( r \) as well:

(7) Jo believes that his uncle will visit soon.
   \[ \sim_{ST} \text{Jo believes he has an uncle.} \]
   \[ \sim_{OBS} \text{Jo has an uncle.} \]

Response: pragmatic strengthening again. We tend to defer to a belief if it is \textit{presupposed} (rather than asserted) that someone holds it.

Again, this approach predicts that if we create pragmatic pressure against this kind of deference, the inference will disappear. But it doesn’t:

(8) Bernhard has many mistaken beliefs about Bugandan politics. He thinks that Buganda’s king has stopped attending parliament!
   \[ \sim_{ST} \text{Bernhard thinks Buganda has a king who used to attend parliament.} \]
   \[ \sim_{OBS} \text{Buganda has a king who used to attend parliament.} \]

(9) ??I don’t know whether the vase was broken. But Lucy thinks that it was Susie who broke it.
   \[ \sim_{ST} \text{Lucy thinks someone broke the vase.} \]
   \[ \sim_{OBS} \text{Someone broke the vase.} \]

Again: ST plus pragmatic strengthening is \textit{prima facie} inadequate.

Generalization: ST makes correct predictions when no accommodation is needed, but excessively weak predictions in other cases.
6 Dissatisfaction Theory

Dissatisfaction Theory (‘DT’) replaces ST’s two planks as follows:

(10) Side Entailments: SPs are side entailments.

As side entailments, SPs are hard to target with propositional anaphors and shouldn’t answer a QUD; they impose their content rather than propose it.

(11) DT Projection: The SP of an atomic sentence filters past a node iff it isn’t locally entailed at that node.

An obvious resemblance to ST Projection. But while satisfaction theory sees SPs as constraints that must be locally satisfied, dissatisfaction theory sees SPs as contents that are always passed up unless locally satisfied.

Roughly: We match the predictions of ST about when a sentence SPs nothing; but make stronger predictions in other cases.

7 Conditionals

(12) If p then q r.

DT predicts (12) SPs r unless p contextually entails r; then it SPs nothing.

We thus accommodate intuitions that drive ST, since we predict no SPs for

(13) If p, q p.

(14) If Theo has a wife, then his wife likes sonnets.

But we also accommodate the intuitions elicited above: e.g. that

(15) If Theo hates sonnets, so does his wife.

\( \sim_{DT} \) Theo has a wife.

- Side Entailments is crucial here: if we stuck with Stalnaker’s Bridge, speakers would still be predicted to have a choice between conditional and unconditional accommodation, and the Proviso Problem would re-appear.

- What of cases which seem to confirm ST’s conditional predictions?

(16) If France is a monarchy, then its king is tall.

\( \sim_{ST} \) France is a monarchy \( \supset \) France has a king.

\( \sim_{DT} \) France has a king.

Question 1: When is a conditional inference of this kind available?

Hypothesis: iff the inference is a default of some kind.

Question 2: How does DT predict this kind of conditional inference?
Hypothesis: if the predicted SP of DT would yield infelicity of some kind, the interlocutors will cast around for a default which would rescue the assertion.

They will accommodate the default and evaluate the utterance against the updated context, to avoid the infelicity.

Upshot: a speaker will sometimes be felt to presuppose a default conditional as a way of rescuing her assertion (not as an SP).

8 Attitudes

DT predicts

(17) S [believes/wants] \textcolor{red}{p_r}.

SPs \textcolor{red}{r} unless \textcolor{red}{r} is entailed by S’s [belief/desire]-worlds as viewed in \textcolor{red}{c}. So:

(18) Jo [believes/wants] that his uncle will visit.

$\leadsto_{DT}$ Jo has an uncle.

$\leadsto_{ST}$ Jo believes he has an uncle.

DT also captures intuitions behind ST: both predict no SPs for (19)-(21):

(19) S believes r, and S [believes/wants] \textcolor{red}{p_r}.

(20) Jo believes he has an uncle, and believes that his uncle will visit.

(21) Jo believes he has an uncle, and he wants his uncle to visit.

And we improve on the predictions of ST for want-want sequences:

(22) S wants r and S wants \textcolor{red}{p_r}.

$\leadsto_{DT}$ $\emptyset$

$\leadsto_{ST}$ S wants r $\supset$ S believes r.

(23) Sue wants it to have rained, and wants it to have stopped raining.

$\leadsto_{DT}$ $\emptyset$

$\leadsto_{ST}$ Sue wants it to have rained $\supset$ Sue believes it rained.

References


