

Presupposition and Definite Descriptions

Antony Eagle

antonyeagle.org

Philosophy of Language » Lecture 6

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Semantic Accounts of Presupposition

Defining Entailment

- › We've mentioned **entailment** before, but it's time to get precise about it.
- › Entailment is a relation among **propositions**:
 - Entail *P* entails *Q* just in case, every possible situation in which *P* is also a possible situation in which *Q*. (cf. Elbourne 2011: 65)
If propositions are unstructured (i.e., propositions are intensions/sets of possible world), then *P* entails *Q* iff $P \subseteq Q$.
- › One **sentence** *S* can be said (derivatively) to entail another sentence *S'* just in case the **intension** of *S* (set of possible situations in which it's true) $\llbracket S \rrbracket$ is included in the intension of *S'*, i.e., $\llbracket S \rrbracket \subseteq \llbracket S' \rrbracket$.
- › Consider *Esmeralda is a ewe* and *Esmeralda is a sheep*. Since it is necessarily true that all ewes are sheep, the intension $\llbracket \textit{Esmeralda is a ewe} \rrbracket$ is included in the intension $\llbracket \textit{Esmeralda is a sheep} \rrbracket$. So the proposition that Esmeralda is a ewe entails that proposition that Esmeralda is a sheep. Hence there is an entailment from the first sentence to the second.

Aside: Entailment and Logical Consequence

- › If you've studied logic, you might have come across another idea of entailment, also called **logical consequence**.
- › A sentence T is a logical consequence of S iff under every way of choosing a domain of discourse and then **reinterpreting** the non-logical words in S such that S comes out to express a true proposition, T also comes out to express a true proposition [tarski-1983b, pp. 416–417].
 - › Since we keep the logical words fixed (*all*, *and*, *some*, *not*, etc.), what we capture here is validity **in virtue of logical form (structure)**.
- › This notion differs from entailment. We could interpret *sheep* to mean *dog*, which would show *Esmeralda is a sheep* is not a logical consequence of *Esmeralda is a ewe*: *Esmeralda is a sheep* has been reinterpreted to express the false proposition that Esmeralda is a dog.
- › This reinterpretation strategy allows the meanings of the non-logical words to vary in such a way as to falsify *all ewes are sheep*, even though that sentence expresses a necessary proposition given the **actual** meanings of the words.
 - › However, if T is a logical consequence of S , then S entails T .

Semantic Presupposition

- › Consider
 - (1) John has stopped drinking.
- › Suppose I disagree; I say *No, he hasn't*.
- › Something interesting: both (1) and my denial of it appear to entail that John drank.
- › That is: *John has stopped drinking* can't be true unless *John drank* is true; but nor can it be false unless *John drank* is true.
- › This phenomenon, of a proposition that seems to require the truth of another proposition, regardless of whether the first proposition is true or false, is called **presupposition** (Birner 2013: 146–57).
 - ›› The idea: one proposition tacitly **takes for granted** another.
 - ›› We're attempting, initially, to analyse this as a purely **semantic** phenomenon. We'll look at **pragmatic** treatments of presupposition in **lecture 9**.

Presupposition Triggers

- › In (1) the presupposition that John drank seems to be **triggered** by presence of the aspectual/change-of-state verb *stop*.
- › Lots of other words trigger presuppositions: (Birner 2013: 152–55; Beaver, Geurts, and Denlinger 2024: §1)
 - (2) Lizzie *knows that* ducks lay eggs. (**Factive verb**: presupposes that ducks lay eggs.)
 - (3) It was Sylvester who left the tap running. (**Cleft**: presupposes that someone left the tap running.)
 - (4) Jonquil is crying *again*. (**Iterative**: presupposes that Jonquil cried before.)
 - (5) Antony spoke *rapidly*. (**Manner adverb**: presupposes that Antony spoke.)

Names and Presuppositions

- › Actually all those examples presupposed something else: that the names involved **referred**, and that there are such people as Lizzie, etc.

If anything is asserted there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have a reference. If one therefore asserts 'Kepler died in misery', there is a presupposition that the name 'Kepler' designates something. (Frege 1892: 34)

- › For Frege, a presupposition is something like an **assumption** that must be made:

presuppositions concern either the way in which utterances signal assumptions, or, conversely, the way in which utterances depend on assumptions in order to be meaningful. ... Frege's proposal to model presupposition as definedness of reference provides the standard way of defining a semantic presupposition relation which is independent of the speaker. (Beaver 2001: 8)

- ›› The use of 'assumption' here doesn't flag that anyone is making an assumption – for Frege, presupposition is a semantic notion, independent of the beliefs of language users.

Presuppositions as Entailments...

- › If these are the kinds of ways presuppositions can be triggered, how can we identify what is presupposed? Consider one of our examples, and various **entailments**:
 - (6) Lizzie knows that ducks lay eggs.
 - (7) Ducks lay eggs. (Entailed by 6)
 - (8) Lizzie knows something about ducks. (Entailed by 6)
- › The presupposition (7) is amongst the entailments of (6).
 - › Constitutive of factive verbs like *know*, *notice*, *remember*, *witness*, etc.: where *V* is a factive verb, *S Vs that ϕ* entails ϕ .
- › But (8) is also entailed by (6), and is not a presupposition of (6); rather, that is something we can **conclude** from (6).
- › What distinguishes (7) from (8)?

...But Not Every Entailment: Projection

- › The proposal: **presuppositions are those entailments of a proposition that remain entailed by embedding the proposition under various operators:**
 - (9) Lizzie doesn't know that ducks lay eggs.
 - (10) Does Lizzie know that ducks lay eggs?
 - (11) Maybe Lizzie knows that ducks lay eggs.
- › While these all entail (7), they do not entail (8).
- › We say that while presuppositions **project** from the original sentence to the various complex sentences in which it is embedded, regular entailments do not project in that way.

Presupposition and Negation

- › Indeed we began by observing that presupposition projects under negation: that John hasn't stopped drinking entails that John drank, as does that John has stopped drinking.
- › This is the **negation test** for presupposition:
 - ▮ The presupposition is constant under negation, whereas the entailment disappears under negation - which means that constancy under negation can distinguish between entailments and presuppositions. (Birner 2013: 150)
- › Some might elevate this to an analysis, since presupposition under negation is so robust:
Strawsonian Presupposition A proposition P presupposes a proposition Q iff P entails Q and the negation of P also entails Q . (Strawson 1950: 330; van Fraassen 1968: 137; Elbourne 2011: 66; Birner 2013: 149)

A Puzzle About Presupposition, Negation, and Possible Worlds

A Puzzle

- › Suppose that a proposition is a set of possible worlds, and the negation of a proposition P is its complement with respect to the set of **all** possible worlds $\Omega \setminus P$.
- › Suppose we adopt the **foregoing** definition of presupposition.
 - › If P semantically presupposes Q , then $\llbracket P \rrbracket \subseteq \llbracket Q \rrbracket$.
 - › Likewise: if not- P semantically presupposes Q , then $\Omega \setminus \llbracket P \rrbracket \subseteq \llbracket Q \rrbracket$.
- › But this entails that $\llbracket Q \rrbracket = \Omega$!
 - › If P and $\neg P$ both entail Q , then Q is true in every P -possibility, and in every not- P -possibility, so is true in every possibility.
- › If these conceptions of presupposition and propositions are joined, then **all presuppositions are necessary**.

Falsity, Non-Truth, Negation

- › Consider Frege's example, *Kepler died in misery*, and its negation, *Kepler didn't die in misery*.
- › According to Strawson presupposition, these claims both presuppose that there was someone named *Kepler* – a presupposition which is obviously not necessary.
- › We could conclude that the theory of unstructured propositions is incorrect; but the puzzle will recur if we have any theory of propositions – unstructured or otherwise – which endorses this thesis:

Falsity-Negation For any proposition P , P is false iff P is not true iff not- P is true.

- › How could this thesis be rejected?
 1. We could reject **bivalence**, in which case P might not be true even if P isn't false (if P has some other truth value, or perhaps lacks a classical truth value).
 2. We could reject the implicit **syntax** offered for negation; perhaps *not* isn't a complementing operator, or at least not with respect to the set of all possible worlds.
 3. We could reject the semantic account of presupposition, and try to explain projection under negation another way – perhaps pragmatically.

Non-Bivalence and Truth-Value Gaps

a semantic view of presupposition ... would seem to require that we abandon the concept of a two-valued logical system ... and accept ... a system with at least one intermediate value of 'neither true nor false'. (Birner 2013: 149)

- › The proposal seems to be that some meaningful sentences can fail to have a truth value (either true or false) when their presuppositions are not met.
 - › Asserting P in the absence of a presupposition is **dumbfounding**; the suggested explanation is that we don't know what to say because it lacks any truth value.
- › This prompts us to query the bivalent equivalence between 'P is false' and 'P is not true' – given **truth-value gaps**, this equivalence fails.
- › This gives rise to an explicitly non-classical definition of presupposition:
Gappy Presupposition P presupposes Q iff whenever Q is not True, P is Neither true nor false. (Beaver 2001: 33; cf. Birner 2013: 149)

Negations

- › What is the right logic of negation on this view? Some options are in tbl. 1.
 - › $\sim P$ is sometimes called ‘choice negation’ (Beaver 2001: 33); $\neg P$ is sometimes called ‘exclusion’ negation (Beaver 2001: 36) or ‘external’ negation (Bar-Asher Siegal 2015: 1053); $!P$ is also sometimes called ‘meta-denial’ negation (Beaver and Krahmer 2001: 153).
- › Note that if negation is understood as \sim or $!$, then Gappy Presupposition is **equivalent** to Strawson presupposition in the presence of truth-value gaps.

Table 1: Possible negations once gaps are on the scene.

P	$\sim P$ (Kleene 1952)	$\neg P$ (Bochvar 1937: 93)	$!P$ (Bochvar 1937: 91)
True	False	False	False
Neither	Neither	True	False
False	True	True	True

Gaps and Presuppositions

- › Bochvar's 'external' negation $\neg P$ is a complementing negation: it is true iff P is not.
- › If natural language negation is understood as \neg , the puzzle arises as before, despite the existence of gaps.
- › But neither 'denial' negation $!P$ (which is true iff P is false), nor 'internal' negation $\sim P$ (which is gappy when P is gappy, otherwise classical) will allow the puzzle to go through.
 - › For $\llbracket P \rrbracket \cup \llbracket \sim P \rrbracket \neq \Omega$, and $\llbracket P \rrbracket \cup \llbracket !P \rrbracket \neq \Omega$ – in both cases, worlds where P has neither truth value aren't included in the union of worlds where P is true and worlds where its negation is true.
- › So these negations can be presupposition-preserving. The idea would be that natural language negation means one of these: choice negation \sim is the orthodox option (Horn and Wansing 2022: §1.5; Beaver, Geurts, and Denlinger 2024: §2).
- › In that case, both *John has stopped smoking* and $\sim(\textit{John has stopped smoking})$ can entail *John smoked* without the latter being trivial.
 - › Note however this is weird for factives: isn't *Antony knows that $2 + 2 = 5$* just **false**, not gappy?

Another Approach: Predicate Negation

- › Consider the following examples

(12) The man is happy.

(13) The man is not happy.

(14) The man is unhappy.

- › Observe that (14) entails (13), but not *vice versa*.
- › The gappy approach can handle this fact – let *not* in (13) be ‘ \neg ’ (i.e., 13 means *it isn't the case that the man is happy*), while *un-* in (14) means ‘ \sim ’.
- › But quite apart from having to reject the plausible thesis of bivalence, this hypothesis about *un-* seems quite implausible – since ‘ \sim ’ operates at the level of the proposition, not the predicate.
- › If we take it at face value, *un-* is an operator that takes a predicate to its ‘opposite’ – in the case of *unhappy*, the property of not merely lacking happiness but positively possessing traits contributing to sadness.

Ambiguity and Predicate Negation

- › Almost all cases of natural negation occur, not sentence initially, but attached to the main verb phrase – as Katz (1977: 238) put it, in English ‘negative elements do not behave like the connectives ‘and’ and ‘or’ but like adverbs’ (cf. Horn and Wansing 2022: §1.1).
 - › While logic gives us $\neg Fa$, with negation indicating the falsity of Fa , natural language tends to give us *a is not F*.
- › There will thus tend to be a potential ambiguity of attachment, seen in this schematic contrast:
 - (15) *a isn't F* (*The man isn't happy*).
 - (16) *a is not-F* (*The man is not-happy, i.e., unhappy*).
- › This attachment ambiguity allows us to draw a distinction between lacking a property and having its ‘opposite’ property, without needing any failures of bivalence.
 - › Someone can be neutral, neither happy nor unhappy, without needing any non-classical logic, just as long as we understand that the *un-* of *unhappy* isn't a complementing operator, even though sometimes we can use *not* to express it.

Presupposition and Predicate Negation

- › This might give us some handle on some cases of presupposition.
- › Consider factives like (6) (*Lizzie knows that ducks lay eggs*). There is a natural opposite state to knowledge – not merely failing to know, but *not-knowing*, i.e., **being ignorant**:
(17) Lizzie is ignorant of the fact that ducks lay eggs.
- › Clearly (6) and (17) both entail ducks lay eggs: one cannot be ignorant of something untrue. (Though of course one must fail to know it!)
- › This will explain some of our presupposition data, if we make the **assumption** that, sometimes, people understand *doesn't know* as meaning *is ignorant of* – i.e., so that (9) can be used to express (17).
 - › As Horn and Wansing (2022: §1.6) notes, there is a ‘widespread tendency for formal contradictory (wide-scope) negation to be ... strengthened to a contrary’.
- › This assumption will need to be generalised, i.e., in many cases, *a is not-F* will need to be taken to express *a is G*, where *G* is the ‘opposite’ property.
- › This proposal might help with factives (e.g., both *remember P* and *forget P* entail *P*) and with aspect verbs (e.g., both *stop ϕ -ing* and *continue ϕ -ing* entail that there is ϕ -ing going on).

Internal negation

- › The proposal so far is that we often understand *not F* as denoting an ‘opposite’ predicate, even though – strictly speaking – *not* is a complementing negation.
- › An alternative approach would be to understand natural language *not* as (almost) **never** a complementing negation; it almost always expresses a **presupposition-preserving internal negation** (Horn 1985).
 - › The only reliable way to get a complementing negation in natural language is to appeal to the awkward *it is not the case that ...* prefix.
- › All of our example presupposition triggers, it is suggested, have natural negations that involve internal negation:
 - (18) Lizzie *doesn't know (is ignorant) that* ducks lay eggs.
 - (19) It was *not Sylvester* [i.e., it was someone other than Sylvester] who left the tap running.
 - (20) Antony spoke *not-rapidly*.
- › If this is right, the puzzle doesn't arise: the negation involved in the definition of semantic presupposition isn't complementing.
- › A challenge for this view is to predict in a systematic and principled way how this internal negation would work – note it makes no clear prediction about the negation of (4), *Jonquil isn't crying again*.

Cancellability and Semantic Presupposition

Cancellability

- › A closely related puzzle for entailment-based accounts of presupposition comes from cases like these:
 - (21) John hasn't stopped drinking; in fact he never started!
 - (22) Antony didn't speak rapidly; in fact, he didn't speak at all.
- › In these cases we conjoin a negated sentence with the denial of its presupposition. The problem: the presupposition is supposed to be an entailment of the negation too, so this should be a flat out contradiction like
 - (23) #John hasn't *stopped* drinking; in fact he has stopped drinking!
- › How can we successfully utter claims like (21), which (according to the semantic account of presupposition) should express contradictions?

Metalinguistic negation

- › The examples (21) and (22) are defective without a **prior** assertion of the sentence which ends up being negated.
- › This **discourse constraint** suggests that, while on the surface we are negating the asserted sentence, the addendum (and stress/focus, indicated by underlining) show that we are really **targetting** the presupposition (Birner 2013: §5.4; Beaver, Geurts, and Denlinger 2024: §3).

Horn (1985) characterizes cases such as [these] as instances of **metalinguistic negation**, in which, rather than negating the primary assertion (as with garden-variety negation), the speaker uses negation to object to virtually any aspect of the utterance at all, including for example the pronunciation of individual words (*I didn't eat the toMAHto, I ate the toMAYto*) or, in this case, the presupposition. For this reason, metalinguistic negation require an appropriate prior utterance.... (Birner 2013: 158)

Metalinguistic Negation and Complementation

- › This metalinguistic negation isn't a complementing operator (Horn 1985: 132–33):
 - (24) John didn't manage to solve SOME of the problems – he managed to solve ALL of them.
 - (25) The glass isn't half FULL – it's half EMPTY.

Note in the last case that the semantic content of what is asserted is **equivalent** to what is cancelled.

- › So the explanation of cases like (21) and (22) is that something other than the content is rejected; so their content can be perfectly consistent.
 - › (21) just says that John never was a drunk – despite its first clause seeming superficially similar to *John hasn't stopped drinking* which entails John has been a drunk.

Cancellability again

- › In fact, a presupposition is **only** cancellable when the sentence with the presupposition is embedded under some operator like negation (Beaver, Geurts, and Denlinger 2024: §3).

Witness:

(26) #Lizzie knows ducks lay eggs; in fact they don't!

(27) #Lizzie knows ducks lay eggs; in fact she doesn't know anything about ducks!

- › The attempt to cancel the presupposition in (26) strikes us as just as bad – **self-contradictory**, in fact – as attempting to cancel a direct entailment in (27). The upshot is depicted in tbl. 2.

Table 2: Entailments distinguished from presuppositions

	Mere Entailments	Presuppositions
Project from embeddings	no	yes
Cancellable when embedded	n/a	yes
Cancellable when unembedded	no	no

Metalinguistic Negation and Pragmatics

- › Horn's proposal is that most natural language negation is the presupposition-preserving internal negation, and cases of cancellation are all handled by metalinguistic negation.
- › Metalinguistic negation can involve rejection of a presupposition, but it is a general 'means for objecting to a previous utterance on any grounds whatever, including ... the way it was pronounced' (Horn 1985: 134).
- › This means that metalinguistic negation isn't really susceptible to a single semantic analysis at all – as Horn notes, 'my approach ... takes a wide array of uses of natural language negation to be NON-truth-functional, and indeed entirely non-semantic' (1985: 137).
- › But once we start developing theories of linguistic pragmatics more fully in **lecture 9**, it will be tempting to handle all facets of presupposition pragmatically, not just cancellability.

Definite Descriptions

The

- › One idiosyncratic feature of the discussion above was my deliberate avoidance of perhaps the most prominent and widely discussed presupposition trigger: **definite descriptions** like

(28) The King of France is bald.

This appears to presuppose *there is a king of France* – that is also entailed by *the King of France isn't bald*, so meets our criteria for Strawsonian presupposition.

- › To deal more satisfactorily with this case, we'll turn now to the semantics of definite descriptions.
- › A large literature on this (Neale 1993; Elbourne 2013; Ludlow 2023).

Definite Descriptions and Proper Names

(29) Jonquil is asleep.

(30) The kid is asleep.

- › These look like they share **grammatical form**. They begin with (what looks like a) **referring expression** – a proper name in the case of (29), a **definite description** in the case of (30) – and **predicate** something of the thing referred to.
- › Both **entail** this:
 - (31) There exists someone who is asleep.
- › Since (29) entails (31) via the principle *if a is F then something is F*, it is natural to think that (30) makes use of a parallel principle.

Two Theories of Descriptions

- › The crucial question regarding whether (29) and (30) are semantically alike has turned out to be this: **is (30) like (29) in presupposing that its leading NP refers?**
 - Presuppositional Theory** Definite descriptions like *the F* **presuppose** that there is a unique *F* which is the referent of *the F*; descriptive NPs are in that respect like proper names. (Strawson 1950)
 - Russellianism** Definite descriptions like *the F* **entail** – but do not presuppose – there is a unique *F* which is the referent of *the F*; descriptive NPs have a different kind of semantics than proper names. (Typically, quantificational.)
- › Note both theories hold that the referent of *the F*, if there is one, is an *F* – in that way descriptions are held to be very different from Millian proper names. (Though **see below.**)

Puzzles for the Presupposition Theory

(32) The King of France does not exist.

- › The presuppositional theory says that *The King of France* is a referring expression that is presupposed to have a referent in the simple subject-predicate sentence (32). Accordingly, this follows:

(33) There exists someone who does not exist.

- › Despite (32) seeming true, it has a false consequence (33), and so must be false.
 - ›› Some say (33) isn't false after all, distinguishing the 'particular quantifier' from the existential (Priest 2008: §13.5).
- › The **evidence** – from grammar and from logical role – suggests that definite descriptions are referring expressions. But then (32) must be **false**, contrary to appearances. **Can we explain the evidence adequately without making false predictions?**

Russell's Analysis of Definite Descriptions

- › Russell (Russell 1905: 481–82) offers this **analysis** of *The F is G*:
 - ▮ There is at least one F , and at most one F , and every F is G . (Neale 1993: 21)
- › Accordingly, (29) and (30) have quite different formalisations:
 - (34) a is asleep.
 - (35) There exists a unique kid and every kid is asleep.
 - › Formally, (35) looks like this: $\exists x(Kx \wedge \forall y(Ky \leftrightarrow x = y) \wedge Fx)$.
We may write: [The x : Kid x] Asleep x .
- › Note that (35) does entail (31) (*There exists someone who is asleep*), so we do explain that supposed piece of evidence for the presuppositional theory.

Evidence for Russell's Analysis: False Definites

- › The presuppositional theory says that sentences headed by definites which fail to refer should exhibit the **symptoms of presupposition failure** – they should be neither true nor false, or should strike us as impossible to evaluate, or something like that.
- › But consider these examples (similar to some due to Neale (1993)):
 - (36) My mother is dating the present king of France.
 - (37) The present King of France cleans my bathroom.
- › Those don't strike us as hard to evaluate; they are false, not gappy.
- › But these judgments are sensitive:
 - (38) The present King of France cleans his throneroom.

We are inclined to find (38) hard to evaluate. The contrast with (37), it is argued, is that (37) conflicts with known fact (e.g., that I clean my bathroom), while (38) does not. The explanation for the judgment of falsehood then isn't the Russellian truth conditions, but something like a **fall back strategy** (von Stechow 2004: 295): 'if we know a sentence cannot be true even if its referring phrases had referred, then we are inclined to think it false'.

Evidence for Russell's Analysis: Scope

- › There is evidence that favours Russell's theory over the presuppositional alternative. Consider
 - (39) The Prime Minister has always been Australian.
- › This sentence is **ambiguous**. But if *the Prime Minister* is a referring expression – just like a proper name – *PM*, the logical form of the sentence is just *Always (PM is Australian)*, and this is **not** ambiguous.
- › On Russell's view, however, the logical form is more complex, and there is room for ambiguity in whether *always* takes wide or narrow scope:
 - (40) [The *x*: Prime Minister *x*] always Australian *x*.
 - (41) Always ([The *x*: Prime Minister *x*] Australian *x*).
- › Russell's theory allows the different scope of the *always* to generate ambiguity in the sentence; since the sentence **is** ambiguous, that is evidence for Russell's theory.
 - › Note though that if we offer a **predicate-modifier** account of *always* (i.e., treat it as an adverb, similar to **how we treated internal negation**), there is the prospect of the same scope distinction: *The PM is a permanent-Australian* vs *Always (the PM is Australian)*.

Evidence for Russell's Analysis: Descriptions as predicates

- › Even according to Strawson, not every use of a description is referential.

(42) Madonna is the greatest French chef.

In (42), the underlined description occurs as a predicate in the sentence, used to predicate something (false) of Washington. Even if there is no greatest French chef, (42) is false.

- › This is straightforwardly handled on a Russellian account, which gives quantificational truth conditions for all description-involving sentences, roughly:

(43) [The x : greatest French chef x] Madonna = x .

- › Things are a bit more complex though; Russell says that all definite descriptions occur in argument position, so he takes (42) to involve the *is* of identity – not predication!
- › This makes it challenging for Russellians to handle cases like this, where *is* must be predicative:

(44) He is tall, handsome, and the love of my life. (Graff 2001: 10)

Our Puzzle Resolved

- › Return to our puzzle case (32).
- › On Russell's formalisation, this is ambiguous over the scope of 'not' – whether it is internal or external:
 - (45) [The x : King of France x] x fails to exist.
 - (46) Not ([The x : King of France x] x exists).
- › This dissolves our puzzle.
 - › There is a true reading of (32), namely (46); but it does not entail (33).
 - › There is another reading (45) which does entail (33); it is false, since (33) is false.

Entailment or Presupposition?

- › Recall (28) (*The King of France is bald*).
- › Russell predicts that this is false: it entails the existence of a King of France, and there isn't one.
- › But what about:
 - (47) The King of France isn't bald.
- › That seems also to entail the existence of a King of France (the internal negation *isn't bald* looks equivalent to *is hirsute*)
- › And Russell can explain this too, since (47) has two readings, and does have a (false) narrow scope reading in (48):
 - (48) [The x : King of France x] x isn't bald.
 - (49) Not the case that: [The x : King of France x] x is bald.
- › For Russell, the existence of a King of France is a presupposition of one reading of (47), but a mere entailment of the other.
 - ›› Russell's account thus gives perhaps the best example of **the distinction we drew above** between an internal presupposition-preserving negation in (48), and an external, complementing negation in (49).

Attributive and Referential Uses of Descriptions

Attributive and Referential

- › A distinction:

A speaker who uses a definite description **attributively** in an assertion states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. A speaker who uses a definite description **referentially** in an assertion, on the other hand, uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing. (Donnellan 1966: 285, my italics)

- › Both Strawson and Russell give theories according to which *the F* is **always attributive** – it cannot truly apply to a non-F. But is this right?

Donnellan's examples

suppose that Jones has been charged with Smith's murder and has been placed on trial. Imagine that there is a discussion of Jones's odd behavior at his trial. We might sum up our impression of his behavior by saying, "Smith's murderer is insane." If someone asks to whom we are referring, by using this description, the answer here is "Jones." This, I shall say, is a referential use of the definite description....

the same difference in use can be formulated for uses of language other than assertions. Suppose one is at a party and, seeing an interesting-looking person holding a martini glass, one asks, "Who is the man drinking a martini?" If it should turn out that there is only water in the glass, one has nevertheless asked a question about a particular person, a question that it is possible for someone to answer. (Donnellan 1966: 285-86)

Communication and Speaker's Reference

- › In the case of *Smith's murderer* (i.e., *the murderer of Smith*) and *the man drinking a martini*, the fact that there is no martini, or that Jones is in fact innocent (though he seems guilty), means that what the speaker **intends** their utterance to be about is not what Russell/Strawson claim the sentence is **literally** about.
- › Both speaker and hearer come to think about the same entity in response to a referential use of a definite description. Let's call this thing, the intended and shared referent, **speaker's reference**.
- › Since speaker's reference is part of what was intended to be **communicated**, and part of what was in fact communicated, it must be part of what the sentence **means**.
- › But it's not, on Russell's theory.

Presupposition Failure

- › It's also true in both of Donnellan's cases that the **presupposition** of the sentence, according to both Russell and truth-value gap theories like Strawson's (Strawson 1950), fails. Consider
 - (50) The man drinking a martini is a local coffee roaster.
- › According to Russell and Strawson, this entails/presupposes that there is a man drinking a martini; accordingly, the utterance should be **defective** – false or gappy.
- › But, says Donnellan, an utterance of (50) in the right circumstances needn't be defective at all.
- › We may perfectly well **interpret** what a speaker says in uttering (50) as true, and come to believe something true about **a particular man** in response to an utterance of (50).

Charitable Interpretation

- › The Russellian (Strawsonian) has a ready response:

All this shows is that strictly false (gappy) sentences aren't an obstacle to communication, if the circumstances are right. For communication is about what people believe. Suppose I know the martini glass contains water; if you say (50), I'll think 'That's wrong, but if you believed that it was a martini, that would explain why you said it: so I think you're talking about the person drinking water from a martini glass'. You **believe the presupposition** of the utterance, and that's what enables me to understand it, and get a truth from it, even though it's false and I know it's false. I apply a **principle of charity** in the interpretation of your utterance, which enables successful communication.

- › This is a **pragmatic** explanation: what you said is false, but communication proceeds by another route.

Speaker's Referent

- › Kripke introduces the idea of 'speaker's referent', as distinct from semantic referent:

The speaker's referent ... is determined by a general theory of speech acts, applicable to all languages: it is the object to which the speaker wishes to refer, and which he believes fulfills the Russellian conditions for being the semantic referent. ... in asserting the sentence he does, the speaker means that the speaker's referent (the teetotaler) satisfied the predicate (is happy). (Kripke 1977: 266)

- › In these terms, **speaker meaning** is what speakers intend, and cooperative charitable hearers take up from what they hear – semantic meaning is the strict and literal content of what was said.
- › That these can come apart is key to understanding Donnellan's cases within the standard assumption that *the F* denotes an F, but once more we will need to wait until we turn to pragmatics in **lecture 9** to understand it more fully.

Donnellan's response

Suppose the throne is occupied by a man I firmly believe to be not the king, but a usurper. Imagine also that his followers as firmly believe that he is the king. Suppose I wish to see this man. I might say to his minions, "Is the king in his countinghouse?" I succeed in referring to the man I wish to refer to without myself believing that he fits the description. It is not even necessary, moreover, to suppose that his followers believe him to be the king. If they are cynical about the whole thing, know he is not the king, I may still succeed in referring to the man I wish to refer to. Similarly, neither I nor the people I speak to may suppose that anyone is the king and, finally, each party may know that the other does not so suppose and yet the reference may go through. (Donnellan 1966: 290-91)

- › Not clear how this response is incompatible with broadly Kripkean response.
 - ›› In particular, it's not just charity about false belief – but also about politeness, pretence, etc. (e.g, if politeness or political sensitivity requires that we refer to him as the king, then even if none of us have the false belief, the content of the politeness norm will still contribute to pragmatic determination of speaker reference.)

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