

Scope Islands and How to Escape

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Abstract

- I want to present a possibly ‘geometrical’, analysis for a formal problem in the interpretation of natural language
- it is a rather abstract problem, but I hope to introduce it by means of some quite simple and informal examples
- I would like to delve more deeply into the issue by means of two specific examples, worked out fully formally elsewhere
- the dynamics of presupposition along the lines suggested by Stalnaker
- the treatment of information structure along the lines of Karttunen and Peters, and van der Sandt and Geurts
- it will be seen that by distributing aspects of interpretation over various dimensions we receive a brand-new perspective on apparent scope island violations.

Some Recent Players and Old Questions

- some from the ‘dark side’ and some ‘naive’ ones
 - ▶ Robyn Carston, Francois Recanati, Daniel Sperber, Deirdre Wilson
 - ▶ Kent Bach, Graham Katz, Jason Stanley, Zoltan Szabo
- some old questions
 - ▶ is a general distinction between semantics and pragmatics tenable
 - ▶ can we say enough about meaning in terms of truth-conditions
 - ▶ how pervasive is the context of use in interpretation
 - ▶ (when) are we multiplying meanings beyond necessity

Some Challenges Alluded Too

- (1) **Smith's murderer** is insane.
- (2) **Jones** is raking the leaves.
- (3) *A*: **Her husband** is nice to her.
- (4) *B*: He is nice to her, but he is not **her husband**.
- (5) Anke, Laura, and Petra went to the **bank**.
- (6) Every professor introduced every student to **his** class.
- (7) The next 20 years **the president** will be a democrat.
- (8) The next 20 years **he** will be a republican.

The Use of Indexing

(14) He whistles. $\rightsquigarrow^?$ He_i whistles.

- underspecification leaves us with no interpretation
- disjunction yields the bank/bank/bank problem

(15) Bill outran Will. Everyone saw him. $\neq$

(16) Everyone saw at least Bill or Will.

- so we accommodate an infinite number of interpretations
- each one of which is pragmatically determined

One- or More Dimensional Interpretation

- distinguish assertoric, presuppositional and other aspects of interpretation (Karttunen and Peters)

(19) Pedro hired a donkey.

- presupposes a guy p named ‘Pedro’
- introduces a donkey d
- asserts that p hired d

- a ‘binding problem’?

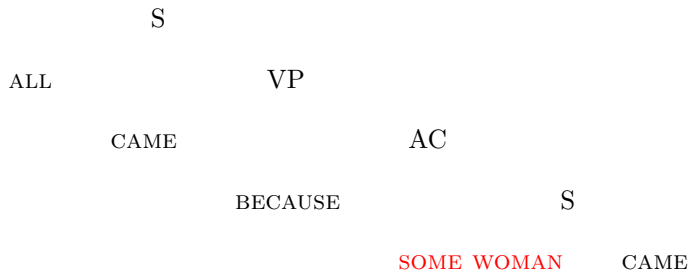
(20) Someone managed to succeed George V on the throne of England.

- a case of coreference (like in DRT, DPL, etc.)

A Flexible Treatment of Presupposition Resolution

(21) Everyone moved to Stuttgart because a woman lived there.

- ... because Stuttgart is not 100% male?
 - ... because Dorit Abusch lived there?
- » ...because everyone's beloved one lived there.



Island Constraints

- no violations; it is the pragmatic contribution of an indefinite, not its assertoric force, which is insensitive to the constraint // “presuppositions can swim”
- the assertoric contribution is a witness $f(d)$ figuring right there at the logical level where the indefinite occurs
- that there are pragmatic effects associated with the use of indefinites is orthogonal to their semantics
- thus, indefinites behave like other noun phrases:
 - ▶ proper names, pronouns, definites, . . . , and
 - ▶ **generalized quantifiers as well**

(22) If a boy goes to a party because he thinks **most girls** in his class come too, he is disappointed, of course, when **they** don't show up.

So Far so Good? Not Yet!

(23) Everyone visited a student in Stuttgart because a professor told him to do so.

- two of at least four interpretations
 1. everyone visited an arbitrary student because a specific professor told him to do so
 2. everyone visited a specific student because an arbitrary professor told him to visit that student
- no likely interpretation is one according to which some subjects satisfy one of these conditions and all the others the other
- we can exclude this by indicating the pragmatic mode of composition on the level of logical form

Conclusion

- bottom-line
 - ▶ semantics is clean, elegant and perspicuous, or so we hope
 - ▶ pragmatics is dirty and intriguing
- but semantics has become pragmatically infected in the meantime
- with underspecification or in DRT resolution takes place in a global fashion, postponing interpretation/evaluation to a later stage
- alternative: let logical form locally determine how pragmatic aspects of interpretation (pragmatic bits of information) are dealt with
- but indeed this invites those from the dark side right to our sacred place