

Dynamic Theories of Illocutionary Force

Intention & Acts of Meaning Seminar, Week 11

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Two Stalnaker-related Announcements

- There's a conference on unstructured content at Rutgers this Friday and Saturday (22–23 April) in which Stalnaker's ideas will be prominent. (He is also one of the speakers.) It's called 'The Unstructured Conference'. You should go if you're interested. Info is available at www.rci.rutgers.edu/~pdv12/struc/.
- Also, there will be a talk by Dirk Kinderman at the New York Philosophy of Language Workshop on Monday night at NYU (25 April, 7:40pm, room 302 of 5 Washington Place) on how Stalnaker's model of context can be amended to deal with the problem of logical omniscience. Everyone is welcome. More info at nylanguage-workshop.tumblr.com.

1 Stalnaker and Grice on Common Ground

In 'Assertion', Stalnaker makes several shout-outs to Grice. E.g., in the acknowledgements:

The influence of Paul Grice's ideas about logic and conversation will also be evident. (Stalnaker, 1999, 78, fn)

Later, Stalnaker more explicitly credits Grice with the general strategy embodied in the principles that trigger diagonalization:

The influence of Grice's theory of conversation should be clear from my discussion of the application of these principles. (Stalnaker, 1999, 88, fn)

In §2.2 of *Context*, Stalnaker makes it sound as if his theory is meant to be understood in terms of Grice's broader framework.

In a footnote in 'Assertion', Stalnaker suggests that he got the idea of common ground from Grice (as well as from others):

Paul Grice spoke, in the William James Lectures, of propositions having *common ground status* in a conversation. (Stalnaker, 1999, 84, fn)

And at the end of §2.2 of *Context*, Stalnaker seems to say that something like his picture of common ground follows from some of Grice's views.

The upshot of this for our purposes is that common interest and common knowledge are necessary for the possibility of communication. Only against a relatively rich background of common belief is it possible to get people to recognize the very specific intentions that must be recognized for successful acts of meaning, and only where there are mutually recognized common interests will the recognition of the intentions be effective in changing beliefs. (Stalnaker, 2014, 42)

This is a strong claim, and it's hard to find any argument to support it!

1.1 Grice on "Common-Ground Status"

Grice mentions "common ground" in his work on indicative conditionals. Roughly, he takes the natural-language indicative conditional to be material implication ('if p then q ' is semantically equivalent to ' $\neg p \vee q$ ').

But, he argues that it is normally felicitous to utter ‘if p then q ’ only if neither p nor not- p has “common ground status” in the conversation (Grice, 1989, 65–67, 84). Here’s what he says:

- (5) [...] the negation of the antecedent of a conditional is to be thought of as common ground, as a possibility though not necessarily as a fact, between those who debate the pros and cons of a particular conditional.
- (6) The attribution of such common-ground status might be thought of either as something which has to be “read in” as a non-conventional implicature, or as an element in the lexical meaning of certain conditionals, such as those the expression of which involves words or phrases such as “supposing,” “suppose that,” “if ...then,” and perhaps even “if” itself.
- (7) It is further open to question, should it be necessary to attribute common-ground status, just what constitutes being common ground. There are two possibilities.
- (8) One is that it lies in an understanding by speakers that they are debating the nature of the acceptable alternative to that which is taken as being common ground as a possibility. (“If not so-and-so, then what?”)
- (9) The other possibility would be one which involves the specification of a syntactical rule which would dictate the allocation of scope within a rewritten formulation of the original conditional.
- (10) If the second version is preferred, it will be difficult to avoid the supposition that it is a feature of the lexical meaning of the conditional, even though possibly a feature which rests upon prelexical considerations, and which introduces no new concepts. (Grice, 1989, 84)

Grice discusses “common-ground status” a bit elsewhere. In ‘Presupposition and Implicature’ (dated 1970/1977), he glosses the possession of common-ground status as “to be treated as noncontroversial” (Grice, 1989, 276) and “not to be questioned” (Grice, 1989, 278). In ‘Meaning Revisited’ (dated 1976/1980), he casually drops this in:

Here I am interested not so much in the existence of that distinction [between natural and non-natural meaning], which has now, I think, become pretty boringly common ground (or mutual knowledge), but rather in the relationship between the two notions, the connections rather than the dissimilarities between them. (Grice, 1989, 284)

Safe to say: Grice didn’t have a theory of common ground, and the notion did not play a major role in his theory of conversation!

1.2 Common-Ground-Like Notions in Schiffer

Schiffer argues that m-intentions must be spelled out in terms of mutual knowledge, which is one model for Stalnaker’s theory of presupposition and mutual acceptance.¹

Schiffer makes this change in response to a kind of counterexample to Grice’s definition of speaker meaning raised by Strawson and then Schiffer, and that, according to Schiffer, leads to an infinite regress.

First, let’s remember Grice’s three-clause definition:

“ U meant something by uttering x ” is true iff, for some audience A , U uttered x intending

- (1) A to produce a particular response r
- (2) A to think (recognize) that U intends (1)
- (3) A to fulfill (1) on the basis of his fulfillment of (2).

Here’s Neale’s description of the regress problem:

The following type of example is used by Strawson and Schiffer to demonstrate that clauses (1), (2), and (3) do not specify a rich enough intention (or batch of intentions). Suppose A , a friend of mine, is about to buy a house. I think the house is rat-infested, but I don’t want to mention this outright to A so I let rats loose in the house knowing that A is watching me. I know that A does not know that I know that he is watching me do this. I know A will not take the presence of my rats to be natural evidence that the house is rat-infested; but I do know, indeed I intend, that A will take my letting rats loose in the house as grounds for thinking that I intend to induce in him the belief that the house is rat-infested. Conditions (1)-(3) of (II) above are fulfilled. But surely it is not correct to say that by letting rats loose in the house I mean that the house is rat-infested.

The problem is that in this example my intentions are not, as Strawson puts it, wholly overt. One possible remedy involves adding a fourth clause:

- (4) A to recognize that U intends (2).

But as Strawson and Schiffer point out, with enough ingenuity the same sort of counterexample can still be generated, and then we need a fifth clause, then a sixth, and so on. (Neale, 1992, 549–50)

¹Schiffer actually has a funky definition of mutual knowledge, which is something more like mutual justification. He therefore sometimes calls it ‘mutual knowledge*’ instead (Schiffer, 1972, §II.2).

Schiffer's solution was to reframe the definition of speaker meaning in terms of mutual knowledge. He has given many different versions (see, e.g., 1972, 50–8). Here's a comparatively simple one:

S means* that *p* in uttering *x* only if, for some person *A* and relation *R*, *S* utters *x* intending it to be mutual knowledge* between *S* and *A* that xRp and, on the basis of this, that *S* uttered *x* with the intention of activating in *A* the belief that *p*. (Schiffer, 1982, 121)²

Stalnaker explicitly cites Schiffer, along with Grice (and Lewis), as one of the sources of the idea of common ground (Stalnaker, 1999, 84, fn). But there are some big differences between Schiffer's use and Stalnaker's:

- Stalnaker defines assertion as the attempt to change the common ground.
- Even after introducing mutual knowledge, Schiffer defines speech acts as attempts to change the mind (or actions) of some particular addressee.
- For Schiffer, mutual knowledge doesn't figure in the *m*-intended effect, only in what it takes to get that effect recognized.
- In other words: common ground does not play a role in Schiffer's replacement for Grice's clause (1); it only plays a role in Schiffer's replacement for Grice's clause (2).

1.3 Concepts like Mutual Knowledge

Most later Griceans after Schiffer put concepts like mutual knowledge somewhere in their theories of speaker meaning, linguistic convention, and so on. Bach & Harnish go for a weaker notion of mutual belief, for example:

A and *B* mutually believe that *p* if and only if each believes (1) that *p*, (2) that the other believes that *p*, and (3) that the other believes that the first believes that *p*. (1979, 285, n.4)

²Aside from mutual knowledge, two other features of this definition worth explaining: (i) Schiffer adds the asterisk to 'means*' as a reminder that he is giving a stipulative definition. (ii) Schiffer argues that, in order for *S* to mean something, there has to be some feature of one's utterance that one intends *A* to use to recognize what one means. (Thus the role of *R* in his definition. This is originally discussed by Grice in 'Utterer's Meaning and Intentions' as a response to certain kinds of counterexamples (Grice, 1989, 99–105).

Even Sperber & Wilson, who are extremely critical of the idea of mutual knowledge, adopt the closely related notion, "mutual manifestness", and give it a role to play in their theory (1995). On their view, a proposition is mutually manifest to *A* and *B* iff it is perceptible or inferable from both *A*'s and *B*'s present "cognitive context", and it is also perceptible or inferable to each that it is thus perceptible or inferable to the other. Other seminal discussion of mutual knowledge, common ground, and related notions include Clark and Carlton (1992); Clark and Marshall (1992); Lewis (1975a)

But a problem: Harvey Lederman has recently come up with some persuasive arguments that nobody every has mutual knowledge, mutual belief, etc. (Lederman, 2015).

1.4 Grice on Mutual Knowledge

What did Grice think of mutual knowledge and related notions?³ Grice discusses the issue in 'Meaning Revisited'. Here's a telling passage:

...my general strategy was to look for the kind of regresses which Schiffer and others have claimed to detect concealed beneath the glossy surface of my writings on meaning: infinite and vicious regresses which they propose to cast out, substituting another regressive notion, such as mutual knowledge, instead; raising somewhat the question why their regresses are good regresses and mine are bad ones. (Grice, 1989, 299)

This is followed by Grice's attempt to defuse Schiffer's worries about regress. In the end, he suggests a solution other than Schiffer's.

2 Presupposition and Accommodation

Last time, we talked about three roles played by Stalnakerian contexts:

- **METASEMANTIC:** Context plays a role in fixing the contents of context-sensitive expressions.
- **EPISTEMIC:** The information contained in the context is/should be used by hearers to interpret speakers. (Diagonalization is a special case.)
- **SPEECH-ACT TARGETING:** Context is what we aim to change with our speech acts. E.g., the point of asserting *p* is to add *p* to the common ground.

³According to Schiffer, once upon a time he was alone with Grice in an office in Berkeley and Grice agreed with him.

I left out an important one:

- **PRESUPPOSITION:** Common ground is the body of information that semantically triggered presuppositions must agree with.

2.1 Basic Data about Presupposition

Some examples of presupposition triggers:

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. It was Fido who ate my homework.
<i>presupposition:</i> Someone (or something) ate my homework. | IT-CLEFTS |
| 2. <i>He</i> has been stealing my newspapers
<i>presupposition:</i> Someone has been stealing my newspapers. | FOCAL STRESS |
| 3. Brian knows that Fred is right.
<i>presupposition:</i> Fred is right. | FACTIVES |
| 4. Karim has stopped smoking.
<i>presupposition:</i> Karim used to smoke. | ASPECTUAL VERBS |
| 5. The smartest student in the class will get a B-.
<i>presupposition:</i> There is a smartest student in the class. | DEFINITES |

Some features of presupposition that sets it apart from assertion:

- **TRUTH VALUELESSNESS:** Sentences with false presuppositions strike many people as truth-valueless, or infelicitous, rather than false.⁴
 6. # The eight-foot-tall member of this class is going to fail.
- **PROJECTION:** A speaker typically commits themselves to the presupposed content even if the asserted content is embedded under negation, in the antecedent of a conditional, in an interrogative, etc. E.g., each of these still trigger the presupposition that something ate my homework:
 - 1a. It wasn't Fido who ate my homework.
 - 1b. If it was Fido who ate my homework, then he's sleeping in the dog house.

⁴But note that this isn't always the case. Some utterances with false presuppositions seem straightforwardly false. E.g., 'I just graded the paper of the eight-foot-tall member of the class.' One explanation of this difference has been given by Anders Schoubye, using Roberts' QUD framework (Schoubye, 2009).

1c. Was it Fido who ate my homework?

- **CANCELLATION:** Presuppositions fail to project, in predictable ways, from some kinds of embeddings (sometimes with the help of background assumptions):
 - 1d. If anything ate my homework, then it was Fido who ate my homework.
 - 1e. If it was Fido who ate my homework, then he's a strange dog: my homework was in the cloud.
 - 1f. Either I lost my homework or it was Fido who ate it.
- **NOT-AT-ISSUE:** It's hard to challenge presuppositions directly; one has to derail the conversation to do so.
 - 1g. A: It was Fido who ate my homework.
B: No it wasn't. (presupposition stands)
B: You're wrong. (presupposition stands)
B: Hey wait a minute; I thought Fido was dead!

2.2 Presupposition and Common Ground

Many semanticists accept a principle of the following kind:

PRESUPPOSITION RULE

Produce an utterance that triggers the presupposition p only if p is already in the common ground.

Presupposition triggers impose a constraint on the context. If this constraint isn't met, then the rest of the speech act is defective in some way (infelicitous, or contentless, or something else). Variations on this idea are now widely assumed.

2.3 Informative Presupposition and Accommodation

But if the presupposition rule holds, then it admits of exceptions, as there are sometimes informative presuppositions. For example, suppose that I utter 6 in a context where it isn't mutually accepted that I have a brother:

6. I have to pick up my brother at the airport.

Unless you have some specific reason to resist the presupposition that I have a brother, you will likely *accommodate* it. That is, you will let it slip into the common ground uncontested—“through the back door”.

So, in some cases, presupposing p can be a perfectly felicitous way of adding p to the common ground. Lewis codifies this idea as follows:

RULE OF ACCOMMODATION FOR PRESUPPOSITION

If at time t something is said that requires presupposition P to be acceptable, and if P is not presupposed just before t , then—*ceteris paribus* and within certain limits—presupposition P comes into existence at t . (Lewis, 1979, 340)

This raises some hard questions that I don’t know of clear answers to:

- Is presupposition a constraint on speech acts, or is it a kind of speech act of its own? Maybe sometimes it’s one, sometimes the other?
- What sort of constraints could presuppositions be, given that violating them is a routine and useful way of communicating?
- Why is it harder to challenge informative presuppositions than to challenge assertions? Why should there be a distinction between at-issue and not-at-issue conversational moves at all?
- Relatedly: why are there semantically-encoded presupposition triggers?

2.3.1 Presupposition and Intentionalism

The idea of presupposition seems like it might be incompatible with intentionalism. After all: take a case of informative presupposition from above:

6 I have to pick up my brother at the airport.

In uttering this, I might inform you that I have a brother, and I do so partly in virtue of the meaning of the sentence I utter. But, intuitively, I needn’t *m-intend* for you to form this belief.

And so it looks like we have found a speech act whose content is not rooted in the speaker’s intentions, and a corresponding dimension of utterance-type meaning that can’t be explicated in terms of what speakers intend to do with the relevant utterance types.

Intentionalists have traditionally been quite skeptical about the existence of presupposition, and have tried to explain away purported examples, either by defending alternative semantic accounts, such as Russellianism about definite descriptions (Neale, 1990), or by mopping up cases using intentionalist-friendly concepts like conventional implicature (Grice, 1989; Wilson, 1975, ch.17).

But:

- The idea that presupposition is not a real phenomenon is, to say the least, a niche opinion.
- Nearly all contemporary semanticists make liberal appeal to presupposition, and their appeals certainly seem to do real explanatory work.
- I don’t know of any attack on presupposition from an intentionalist point of view since the 1970s.
- In the 1970s, work on presupposition was a hot mess.
- It has since matured and views have become standardized. In particular, presupposition and conventional implicature are widely seen as two well-distinguished categories (Potts, 2005, §2.4.3).

So it seems to me that intentionalists need some combination of the following two things:

- An updated demonstration that the old intentionalist objections to presupposition still apply in light of contemporary work on the topic.
- An account of how contemporary ideas about presupposition can be made compatible with an intentionalist framework.

I know of neither of these things, or anybody who’s working on it. This strikes me as one of the most worrying gaps in contemporary intentionalism.

3 Stalnakerian Theories of Speech Acts

Stalnaker’s theory of assertion has three components:

- **CONTEXT AS SHARED REPRESENTATIONS:** Context consists of a body of shared information, represented as either a common ground (a set of propositions) and a context set (a set of worlds).

- **SPEECH ACTS AS PROPOSALS TO CHANGE THE CONTEXT:** A speech act is defined in terms of its *essential effect* on the context—a.k.a. the way in which it *updates* the context. Asserting p is proposing (or intending) to add p to the common ground.
- **SEMANTIC CONTENTS AS RAW MATERIAL FOR SPEECH ACTS:** The semantic content of a declarative sentence (relative to a context) is a proposition. Uttering a declarative sentence is the standard way of asserting its semantic content.

In pursuit of pragmatic theories of other speech acts (and of semantic theories for the sentences used to perform them), others have proposed extensions of this framework.

3.1 Lewis on Conversational Score

- Lewis (1979) was the first to suggest a generalization of Stalnaker’s model of context.
- Instead of a single dimension of information, he suggests that the context is a multidimensional representation that he compares to a baseball scoreboard.
- Speech acts (moves in a language game) aim to change the score in various ways, but they also depend in various ways on the score as it is when they are performed.

With any stage in a well-run conversation, or other process of linguistic interaction, there are associated many things analogous to the components of a baseball score. I shall therefore speak of them collectively as the score of that conversation at that stage...What play is correct depends on the score. Sentences depend for their truth value, or for their acceptability in other respects, on the components of conversational score at the stage of conversation when they are uttered...Score evolves in a more-or-less rule-governed way. There are rules that specify the kinematics of score...(Lewis, 1979, 344–45)

An influential example is Lewis’s permissibility game (1979, §2; for a longer treatment, see 1975b.):

- In addition to the common ground, the context contains a “permissibility sphere”, which represents the actions that are permissible for SLAVE.
- The permissibility sphere can be represented as a set of worlds—the ones that are compatible with the states of affairs that SLAVE is permitted to realize with their actions.

- When MASTER utters an imperative, like ‘Get me a drink’, the effect is to change the boundary of the permissibility sphere: it now contains only worlds in which SLAVE gets MASTER a drink.
- Lewis also attempts to use this to explain both “descriptive” and “performative” uses of deontic modals:
 - When SLAVE says ‘I must get MASTER a drink’, the utterance is true in a context iff the proposition that SLAVE gets MASTER a drink is true in all of the worlds in the permissibility sphere.
 - When SLAVE says ‘I may get MASTER a drink’, the utterance is true in a context iff the proposition that SLAVE gets MASTER a drink is true in at least some of the worlds in the permissibility sphere.
 - When MASTER says to SLAVE ‘you must get me a drink’, the permissibility sphere accommodates to make it true that SLAVE gets MASTER a drink in all worlds of the permissibility sphere. This explains why imperatives and performative uses of deontic modals seem to function so similarly.⁵

Obviously, this is very idealized, in that it holds static facts about authority and conversational power that have to be conversationally negotiated in real life. But many contemporary accounts of imperatives and deontic modals are heavily influenced by Lewis’s picture.

3.2 Roberts on Questions

Roberts constructs an account of interrogatives and questions that mirrors Stalnaker’s account of declaratives and assertions:

- **THE CONTEXT INCLUDES QUESTIONS:** In addition to the context set, the context includes an ordered “stack” of questions. Intuitively, these questions represent issues that the interlocutors are trying to resolve.
 - A question is modeled as a set of propositions—intuitively, the set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive answers to the question.

⁵Many contemporary theories of imperatives also play on this similarity. For example, Magdalena Kaufmann (2012) argues that imperatives are just a special kind of deontic modal that can only be used performatively. Her view is currently the most influential semantic treatment of modals, aside perhaps from Portner’s.

- * E.g., The question whether Stephen will fly to England tomorrow is the set of two propositions: the proposition that he will, and the proposition that he won't.
- * E.g., The question who of will win the Republican nomination is the set of propositions of the form *that x will win*, where *x* is someone who could win.
- The topmost question is the *question under discussion* (QUD).
- Each question in the stack is a sub-question of the one further down, relative to the information in the common ground. Q_1 is a subquestion of Q_2 iff every answer to Q_2 is also an answer to Q_1 .
 - * For example: the question whether the tallest student will get an A is a sub-question of the question of who will get an A. (Any answer to the latter entails an answer to the former.)
 - * And, relative to the background assumption that Jim is in the class, the question whether Jim will get an A is a sub-question of the question of who will get an A. (Any answer to the latter also answers the former, if we assume that Jim is in the class.)
- SPEECH ACTS AS PROPOSALS TO CHANGE THE CONTEXT: Asserting p is still proposing (or intending) to add p to the common ground. Asking a question is proposing that it be the new QUD. Intuitively: asking a question is proposing a new topic of discussion—in normal cases, a sub-topic of the old topic.
 - Like Stalnaker, Roberts assumes that the goal of conversation is to jointly find out what the world is like, and that this is accomplished by adding information to the context by asserting propositions.
 - Following Carlson (1982), Roberts thinks of questions as parts of strategies of inquiry. They partition the context set in ways that reveal possible assertions to us.
 - Questions are “set-up moves” and assertions are “payoff moves”.
- SEMANTIC CONTENTS AS RAW MATERIAL FOR SPEECH ACTS: The semantic content of an interrogative sentence (relative to a context) is a question (a set of propositions). So the standard way to ask a question is to utter an unembedded interrogative.
 - The idea that an interrogative's content is a set of propositions (or something that determines a set of propositions) is independently motivated by theories of embedded questions.

- For example, ‘Professor X knows who is passing the class’ has a question as its compliment clause, and is true iff Professor X knows at least one answer to the question (Groenendijk and Stokhof, 1984; Hamblin, 1958, 1973)
- (This is the ‘mention-some’ reading. There is also a mention-all reading, on which the sentence is true iff Prof. X knows all of the true answers to the question.)

3.3 Portner on Directives

- CONTEXT INCLUDES A TO-DO LIST: In addition to the common ground and the QUD, the context also includes a To-Do List (TDL). Intuitively, the TDL can be thought of as a record of interlocutors’ practical commitments.
 - Portner models the TDL as a function that assigns each participant in the conversation a set of actions. So each participant has their own (section of the) TDL.
 - Each action on a participant's TDL can be represented as a property that only they can have. For example, my TDL currently contains the property of being Dan and finishing teaching the class. (formally: $\lambda x : x = \text{Dan} \ \& \ x \text{ finishes teaching the class}$).
- SPEECH ACTS AS PROPOSALS TO CHANGE THE CONTEXT: A directive speech, act, according to Portner, is a proposal to add a new action to the addressee's TDL.
 - E.g., if I direct Stephen to pass me the chalk, I add the property of passing me the chalk to his TDL.
- SEMANTIC CONTENTS AS RAW MATERIAL FOR SPEECH ACTS: The semantic content of an imperative is a property of the kind that goes on TDLs.
 - Elsewhere, Portner and coauthors argue that this idea is independently motivated by cross-linguistic data about the syntax and semantics of imperatives (Portner, 2007; Zanuttini et al., 2012).

3.4 The Semantic/Pragmatic Picture

Together, the proposals of Stalnaker, Roberts, and Portner add up to an elegantly symmetrical semantics and pragmatics:

- There are three clause-types that are universal to all known human languages: declarative, interrogative, and imperative.
- Clauses of each of these types have distinctive kinds of semantic content.
 - Declaratives express propositions.
 - Interrogatives express questions (sets of propositions, or something similar).
 - Imperatives express actions (properties of addressees).
- There are three dimensions of the context that *just happen* to house objects corresponding to the semantic contents of the three types of clauses.
 - The Common Ground contains propositions.
 - The Question Stack contains questions.
 - The To-Do List contains actions.
- To perform a speech act is to propose an addition to one of the three dimensions of context.
 - To assert p is to propose adding p to the CG.
 - To ask q is to propose q as the new QUD.
 - To direct A to ψ is to propose adding ψ to A's TDL.
- It's obvious why uttering a clause of a given type would be a good way to perform a speech act of the corresponding type, given the connection between each clause type and its corresponding dimension of context.

3.5 Dynamic Pragmatics vs. Dynamic Pragmatics

The picture just sketched is a *dynamic-pragmatic* theory of conversation. On this view, semantic values are just contents of different kinds. Interlocutors have to infer, on pragmatic grounds, what sort of change to the context is being proposed. Semantics deals only with contents; pragmatics deals with context changes.

But the picture is one step away from a version of *dynamic semantics*, on which the sort of change being proposed to the context is written into the meaning of a sentence. Meanings aren't contents; they're 'context-change potentials'.

Here's Frank Veltman's well-known statement of the idea:

The slogan 'You know the meaning of a sentence if you know the conditions under which it is true' is replaced by this one: 'You know the meaning of a sentence if you know the change it brings about in the information state of anyone who accepts the news conveyed by it'. 'Thus, meaning becomes a dynamic notion: the meaning of a sentence is an operation on information states. (Veltman, 1996, 221)

Our reading for next week is a paper by Sarah Murray & Will Starr in which they adopt a picture that is a lot like Portner's, except with more bells and whistles and with a dynamic-semantic treatment instead of a dynamic-pragmatic one.

4 Independent Motivations for QUDs and TDLs

Stalnaker's idea of common ground is influential in part because he offers independent motivations for it. He thinks we need to posit common ground to play roles in metasemantics, interpretation (including diagonalization), etc. And it looks like assertion reliably changes the context in ways that has consequences for how it plays these roles.

Roberts and Portner attempt to find some roles for their neighborhoods of context to play as well. Without going into technical details, here are some of those roles:

- Roberts argues that a speech act is felicitous only if it is relevant, and whether a speech act is relevant can be computed by its relation to the current QUD.
 - An *assertion* is relevant only if its content is a contextually relevant partial answer to the QUD.
 - * In any given context, the set of contextually relevant partial answers to the QUD is the set of propositions that, together with the information in the CG, contradicts at least one answer to the QUD that was previously compatible with the CG.
 - * The QUD is fully answered by an assertion iff the assertion's content, together with the CG, entails an answer to the QUD.
 - A *question* is relevant only if its content is a contextually relevant sub-question of the current QUD.
 - * Intuitively, this is because we can make progress on 'who is in the class' by first answering the question 'Is John in the class?' (as long as it is compatible with the CG that John is in the class).

- Roberts argues that it is felicitous to utter a sentence with prosodic focus only if the focused element corresponds to a wh-element in the QUD. For example:

1. a. Who is in the class?
- b. *John* is in the class.
- c. # John is in the *class*.

Prosodic focus thus triggers two kinds of presuppositional constraints on context: (a) that someone or other has the property being ascribed to the stressed element, and (b) that our current conversational goal is to find out which one.

- Portner argues that the state of the TDL affects which actions will be seen as rational by the participants in the conversation:
 - If B’s To-Do List contains $\lambda x : x = B . x \text{ goes outside}$ and “it is in the Common Ground that a certain door leads outside”, then B “will be judged rational in a straightforward way” if he heads for the door, whereas, “his actions might be judged irrational” if “he sits down in a chair and closes his eyes” (Portner, 2004, 242).
- Portner argues that the To-Do List plays a role in determining the contextual parameters relative to which deontic modals’ semantic values are determined (Portner, 2007).
 - In the context just described, for example, it will be natural to evaluate an utterance of ‘B should leave through the door’ as true, because the To-Do List and Common Ground have the effect of ranking worlds in which B goes for the door highly in the ordering source relative to which the semantic value of ‘should’ is fixed.

this is a particularly strong type of commitment, one which persists until the goal is satisfied or shown to be unsatisfiable. The accepted question becomes the immediate topic of discussion, which I will also call the *immediate question under discussion*, often abbreviated as the *question under discussion*. (Roberts, 2012, 5)

On the present view, it is the common ground, not the speaker, that’s ‘informed,’ and it is mutual-belief behavior, and not knowledge, that’s sought. This permits a generalization over rhetorical questions, quiz questions, etc., which are problems for more solipsistic views of information in discourse. (Roberts, 2012, 6, fn.7).

We may think of the Common Ground and To-Do List as being the public, or interactional, counterparts of the individual agent’s beliefs and desires. That is, as far as the participants in an interaction go, an agent’s actions will be judged rational to the extent that, if undertaken in any world compatible with the Common Ground, they would tend to make this world maximally highly ranked according to that agent’s To-Do List. (Portner, 2004, 242)

Okay, but this doesn’t really answer the question.

Moreover, a worry: what if our best explanation of the QUD and/or the TDL grounds them in what interlocutors mutually accept? Wouldn’t that mean that the QUD and the TDL are reducible to the Common Ground? And wouldn’t that mean that questions and directives are reducible to assertions?

5 An Open Question about QUDs and TDLs

Question 1: what is it about the psychological states of the interlocutors that fixes the state of the QUD and the TDL, at a given moment? Stalnaker has a whole theory about this when it comes to Common Ground. But Roberts and Portner give us a lot less to go on:

If a question is accepted by the interlocutors, this commits them to a common goal, finding the answer; like the commitment to a goal in Planning Theory,

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