

“Conversational Double Bookkeeping”

0. Preliminaries

- We can't just gloss over the acceptance/belief distinction when theorizing about common ground.
- The distinction is central to pragmatic theorizing
- Andy gives us a host of different kinds of phenomena that he argues can be accounted for if we posit that a conversational context tracks this distinction, i.e. conversational participants “double bookkeep”: they track both what is commonly accepted and what is commonly believed
- This gives us a nice explanation of theoretically interesting and difficult phenomena

1. The basic picture

- Conversational participants track (at least) two common grounds: common acceptance (CG_{acc}) and common belief (CG_{bel})
- Some communicative acts update the CG_{acc}, some the CG_{bel}, and some both.
 - The picture of letting it slide cases vs Camp's deep insinuation cases
- **Rutger:** In the usual let-it-slide cases (whether to avoid conflict or to facilitate information transfer) what one lets slide becomes acceptance-CG. But there are many cases where it doesn't seem so clear that it becomes (full-blown) acceptance-CG.
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- Some questions for Andy:
- Why are there two *common grounds* rather than an acceptance-based common ground plus (private, mutual, or common) beliefs?
- What *common ground-y* role does CG_{bel} play?
- What would constitute evidence that we need CG_{bel} rather than mutual or even common beliefs that weren't considered common ground?
 - Common ground serves specific conversational functions
 - If there was continued deep insinuation, i.e. later deep insinuation moves depend for their interpretation/felicity on previous ones
 - If the things it guides depend on it for their interpretation/felicity/sensibility
 - E.g. If one or both participants adopt a tone of voice that makes sense given what is believed rather than accepted, does any of the felicity/interpretation depend on the CG_{bel}?
- How do CG_{acc} and CG_{bel} map onto the official/unofficial distinction and public/private distinctions?

- Another relevant question, though maybe not just for Andy:
- What is acceptance?

Long aside: a deep-ish dive into acceptance

Disclaimer: much of the following discussion (until Stalnaker 2002) relies heavily on Max Kölbel's 2011 paper "Conversational Score, Assertion, and Testimony"

Early Stalnaker on speaker presupposition:

"A speaker presupposes that p in a given moment in a conversation just in case he is disposed to act, in his linguistic behavior, as if he takes the truth of p for granted, and as if he assumes that his audience recognizes that he is doing so." ("Presupposition", Stalnaker 1973: 448)

"Presupposing is thus not a mental attitude like believing, but is rather a linguistic disposition to behave in one's use of language as if one had certain beliefs or were making certain assumptions." ("Pragmatic Presupposition", Stalnaker 1974: 52)

"A proposition is presupposed if the speaker is disposed to act as if he assumes or believes that the proposition is true, and as if he assumes or believes that his audience assumes or believes that it is true as well." ("Assertion", Stalnaker 1978: 84)

Later Stalnaker

Acceptance (*Inquiry* (1984) version):

- He characterizes acceptance as a generic propositional attitude concept. Belief is one instance of acceptance (the most fundamental one). Other acceptance concepts include: presupposition, presumption, postulation, assumption, and supposition. So one might be tempted to think of acceptance disjunctively: it is believing or supposing or assuming or postulating, or...
- In *Context* (2014), he refers to his 1984 discussion of acceptance as "a generic notion of acceptance – a family of belief-like attitudes" (2014:4, fn.7)
- But also from *Inquiry*: "To accept a proposition is to act, in certain respects, as if one believed it." (Sounds like speaker presupposition definitions above)

Stalnaker (1984): "What a person [merely] accepts can be compartmentalized in a way in which what he believes cannot be." (note connection to Andy's comment on difference between acceptance and fragmented belief)

Acceptance (2002, “Common Ground” version):

“To accept a proposition is to treat it as true for some reason. One ignores, at least temporarily, and perhaps in a limited context, the possibility that it is false.”

Acceptance (2014 *Context* version):

“The basic propositional attitude that is the basis for the iterative definitions of common ground and speaker presupposition is not given a formal analysis, but is to be understood as something like ‘acceptance for the purposes of the conversation’. (2014:4)

In the 2011 Kölbel paper I relied on above, Kölbel argues for a social and conventional notion of acceptance. He thinks that part of Stalnaker’s difficulty in defining speaker presupposition is that it can’t be defined in terms of an independently identifiable mental state like belief and so we should “define speaker presupposition in such a way that it is conceptually tied to certain rules and conventions. Thus a *social* or *conventional* notion of acceptance, rather than a psychological one, seems to be needed”. (Kölbel 2011, 60)

Stalnaker (2014) responds to this saying: “I agree with Kölbel that common ground, and speaker presupposition, are social and public attitudes, but I want to explain the social, public character of the attitude in terms of the iterative structure, as in common knowledge and belief. I also want to concede that one can perhaps not identify the individual attitude that is iterated independently of the role of the public attitude. We have said that common ground is something like mutual *acceptance*, in some sense. Acceptance generally, as I use the term, is acceptance for some purpose or other, and in this case the relevant purposes are social and public.” (38-9)

“Common ground, in a formal model of this kind, will have the structure of common knowledge and belief, with an accessibility relation defined in terms of the transitive closure of the accessibility relations for a notion of *acceptance for the purposes of the conversation*. The notion of acceptance is modeled on the notion of belief, and I will assume that the relevant kind of acceptance has the same formal properties as belief, and so that the formal properties of common ground will be the same as those of common belief. That is, I assume that one has access to what one accepts, which means that one accepts that one accepts that ϕ when one accepts it, and accepts that one does not when one does not. And while acceptance in this sense may diverge from belief in ways we will discuss, I will assume that belief (and common belief) are the default settings for acceptance for the purpose of the conversation (and for common ground). That is, I assume that divergences between what is believed, and mutually believed, and what is accepted, or commonly accepted need to be explained. The common ground is what is *presumed* to be common knowledge, and normally one presumes that something is common knowledge when one believes that it is. But in some cases, it may serve the purposes of the conversation to engage in some mutually recognized pretense, or to carry on a conversation within the scope of some mutually recognized supposition. One principle that

plays a critical role in the explanation for some of the ways in which common ground may diverge from common belief is what I will call a *norm of agreement* for common ground, a norm that is grounded in Grice's cooperative principle. In the next section, I will look at the role of this norm in the way that contexts evolve.

I have said that one may *accept* things, in the relevant sense, that one does not believe in cases where it facilitates the conversation to do so, which means that something may be part of the common ground even when it is not mutually believed. But as I have learned from the work of Elisabeth Camp, it is also important to allow for a divergence between belief and acceptance in the other direction. It might be that something is mutually believed, but not part of the common ground because one or another of the parties to the conversation is not prepared to acknowledge that it is mutually believed, and so not prepared to draw on this information in the conversation. Just as there can be a pretense that one has certain information that one does not have, so there can be a pretense that one lacks certain information that one does have." (p.45-46)

- Norm of agreement: Conversations are cooperative activities, and so whereas we don't have the impetus to make our beliefs common in general, we have the impetus in a conversation to make sure our beliefs/acceptances line up for the purposes of the conversation (and bring them into alignment when they don't line up)
 - Acceptance for the purposes of conversation as an accommodation strategy
 - Acceptance as an anticipatory pretense strategy – treating something as common ground even if we're not quite sure our interlocutors have updated yet (or even if we are sure they haven't, as in informative presupposition)

Kristin: Acceptance / belief distinctions: *I like this distinction... I'm curious if Jonathon Cohen's view of this distinction (1992) is relevant for anyone: "According to Cohen, belief is a disposition, which is involuntary, graded, and truth-directed; to believe that p is to be disposed to feel it true that p when you consider the matter. Acceptance, on the other hand, is a policy, which can be actively adopted in response to pragmatic considerations. To accept p is to decide to treat it as true — to take it as a premise in one's conscious reasoning and decision-making" (Frankish 2012, p. 8).*