

Unaccommodating presuppositions: A neoGricean view

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1. Introduction.

The concept of accommodation, as it occurs so frequently in current research in semantics and pragmatics and their oh so porous interface, can be said to have originated with David Lewis's classic paper 'Scorekeeping in a language game' (Lewis 1979). At least the term 'accommodation' was introduced by Lewis in this sense at that time. His very first example was accommodation of presuppositions, which he took 'as the prototype' for the concept (Lewis 1979: 358, n. *). The **rule of accommodation for presupposition** given by Lewis (340) is in (1).

- (1) 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 proceeded to give a number of examples similar phenomena – permissibility, salience for denotations of definite descriptions, the point of reference for describing coming and going, vagueness, relative modality, performatives, and planning – pausing in midstream to contrast conversation with baseball. The relevant difference is that in the latter, play is absolutely governed by the scoreboard (plus the rules of the game), while in the former the scoreboard can be adjusted if the play of conversation seems to require it. The 'general scheme' for rules of adjustment – accommodation – is given in (2) (Lewis 1979: 347):

- (2) If at time t something is said that requires component s_n of conversational score to have a value in the range r if what is said to be true, or otherwise acceptable; and if s_n does not have a value in the range r just before t ; and if such-and-such further conditions hold; then at t the score-component s_n takes some value in the range r .

In addition to truth, Lewis mentions two other aspects of conversational acceptability which can spur scoreboard changes: non-triviality and possibility of warranted assertion. He also acknowledges that there may be others (349), but does not identify them.

Nowadays, when one thinks of conversational acceptability, one is inclined to think of Grice (1975). Hence it can strike one as strange (at least it now strikes me as strange) that Lewis does not mention Grice anywhere in this paper. Indeed, the three aspects of conversational acceptability mentioned by Lewis would seem to follow more or less directly from the maxims of conversation suggested by Grice – truth and possibility of warranted assertion, from the rules of Quality, and non-triviality from the first rule of Quantity. Grice's rules also suggest a fourth source of conversational scoreboard adjustment not mentioned by Lewis – namely, relevance.

As noted above, Lewis does acknowledge Stalnaker's classic papers 'Presuppositions' and 'Pragmatic presuppositions' (Stalnaker 1973 and 1974, respectively) in his very first footnote, as

having been the source of his prototypical example of accommodation – namely presupposition accommodation. And Stalnaker 1974 mentions Grice’s work several times in passing, but it certainly does not take center stage. (The same cannot be said about Stalnaker 2002, which is very generous in references to Grice.) In this paper I would like to argue that several of the main points of these important papers of Stalnaker and Lewis could be sharpened and otherwise improved by being embedded in a Gricean framework. In section 2 we will review Stalnaker’s ‘common ground’ view of presuppositions, and see that it requires accommodation in order to be successful in describing the facts. In section 3 we will look at some objections to the common-ground-plus-accommodation view of presupposition, and in section 4 I try to reply to some points which have been put forward in defense of this view. Section 5 promotes a more Gricean alternative to the common ground view of presupposition.

A brief terminological note before we start. For the purposes of this paper I will (continue to) use the term ‘presupposition’ as a cover term for both what were called ‘presuppositions’ by Frege (1892, per Geach & Black), Strawson (1952: 175), and Kiparsky & Kiparsky (1970) (cf. examples (3a-3c), respectively),

- (3) a. *Kepler died in misery* presupposes that the name *Kepler* has a referent.
 b. *The king of France is wise* presupposes that there is a king of France.
 c. *It is significant that he has been found guilty* presupposes that he has been found guilty.

and what were called ‘conventional implicatures’ by Grice (1975) (cf. example (4a); (4b) is from Lewis 1979).

- (4) a. *He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave* conventionally implicates that his being brave is a consequence of his being English.
 b. *Even George Lakoff could win* conventionally implicates that George is not a leading candidate.

Presuppositions and conventional implicatures have in common two distinctive properties: (i) they are propositions which are not the main asserted or at issue content¹ of an utterance and (ii) they are generally outside the scope of negation and other sentence operators – i.e. they remain constant throughout ‘the S family’, in the happy phrasing of Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (1990: 24).² For more discussion, including the difference between these two subcategories, see Abbott to appear.

2. The common ground view of presuppositions.

Stalnaker (1974) set out to accomplish several goals. The main one was to argue for a pragmatic rather than a semantic conception of presuppositions. As he clarified toward the end of the paper, by ‘semantic’ here is meant truth conditional content (rather than conventional meaning),

¹ The useful term ‘at issue’, in this sense, reportedly comes from Bill Ladusaw.

² For a plain, positive, indicative sentence S, the rest of S’s family are obtained by adding negation, questioning, modals, or embedding in the antecedent of a conditional. Thus if S = *The king of France is bald*, the S family would include all the examples in (i).

- (i) a. The king of France is bald.
 b. The king of France is not bald.
 c. Is the king of France bald?
 d. Possibly, the king of France is bald.
 e. If the king of France is bald, he has no use for hair products.

It can be seen that all of these preserve the proposition that there is a king of France.

and ‘pragmatic’ alludes to contexts in which statements are made. Thus the kind of analysis he was arguing against was one in which presuppositions result in a lack of truth value; he acknowledged that, in another sense of ‘semantic’ presuppositions might be found to be semantically encoded – i.e. to be arbitrary or conventional aspects of meaning. In general Stalnaker’s arguments for the pragmatic approach seem strong (we will return to them briefly in section 5 below) and I see no grounds to object. However, a second goal of this paper was to argue for a particular pragmatic view of presuppositions, and this is what I want to take issue with.

Interestingly, the pragmatic view in question shifts subtly from first introduction to later development in the paper. As first described, presuppositions viewed pragmatically are ‘something like the background beliefs of the speaker – propositions whose truth he takes for granted, or seems to take for granted in making his statement’ (Stalnaker 1974: 472). However the more official characterization, which occurs a bit later, is given in (5):

- (5) A proposition *P* is a pragmatic presupposition of a speaker in a given context just in case the speaker assumes or believes that *P*, assumes or believes that his addressee assumes or believes that *P*, and assumes or believes that his addressee recognizes that he is making these assumptions, or has these beliefs. (Stalnaker 1974: 473.)

Stalnaker then suggested a number of ways in which one might give a definition of sentence or statement presuppositions in terms of speaker presupposition, one of which is in (6) (Stalnaker 1974: 473).

- (6) [A] sentence *x* presupposes that *Q* just in case the use of *x* to make a statement is appropriate (or normal, or conversationally acceptable) only in contexts where *Q* is presupposed by the speaker.

However, he maintained that any such conception was most likely not necessary, given the more fundamental nature of speaker presupposition.

Returning now to concept of speaker presupposition in (5), this characterization differs from the original one in two crucial ways. First, beliefs of the **addressee** have been brought into the picture; instead of presuppositions being characterized simply as background beliefs of the speaker, they are now background beliefs that the speaker assumes she shares with the addressee. And secondly, the notion has been generalized to omit reference to the statement made; this conception of presuppositions is only barely linguistic in that reference has been made to a speaker and an addressee. There is no longer any reference to the speech act itself, to propositions taken for granted in making the statement. These revisions in Stalnaker’s conception of pragmatic presuppositions were clearly intended by him. They are maintained in Stalnaker (1978), where the term ‘common ground’ is introduced,³ and defended as recently as Stalnaker (2002).

In footnote 3 of ‘Pragmatic presuppositions’, Stalnaker reports a suggestion from Jerry Sadock that the characterization in (5) should be modified. Instead of saying ‘speaker assumes or believes that the addressee assumes or believes that *P*’, Sadock suggested ‘speaker assumes or believes that the addressee *has no reason to doubt* that *P*’ (Stalnaker 1974;480, n. 3; italics in original). Stalnaker reports Sadock’s motivation for making this suggestion as the example in (7):

³ The term itself was attributed to comments of Grice in his not yet published 1967 William James lectures (Stalnaker 1978: 321, n. 8). Grice 1981 used the term ‘common ground status’ to refer to the status that presuppositions have, but, as will soon see, he did not construe this status as implying common knowledge prior to an utterance.

- (7) A: Are you going to lunch?
B: No, I've got to pick up my sister.

Ordinarily definite NPs like *my sister* are described as presupposing the existence of a denotation. The characterization in (5) would seem to predict that an utterance like (7B) could only occur appropriately when the speaker was assuming that the addressee knew about his sister. However this exchange would be perfectly natural in a context in which B did not assume that A knew about his sister – even one in which A and B have only just met.

It should be noted that Grice had made a similar observation. In a lecture given in Urbana, IL in 1970, but not published until 1981, Grice remarked:

- (8) For instance, it is quite natural to say to somebody, when we are discussing some concert, *My aunt's cousin went to that concert*, when one knows perfectly well that the person one is talking to is very likely not even to know that one had an aunt, let alone that one's aunt had a cousin. So the supposition must not be that it is common knowledge but rather that it is noncontroversial, in the sense that it is something that you would expect the hearer to take from you (if he does not already know). (Grice 1981, 190.)

This is Grice's conception of 'common ground status', and the basic idea is the same as Sadock's – apparently it is not always the case that propositions which are presupposed need to be part of the common ground (in Stalnaker's sense) at the moment of utterance.

Stalnaker was unwilling to adopt Sadock's suggestion for revision of the characterization in (5) (i.e. to replace "addressee assumes or believes that *P*" with "addressee has no reason to doubt that *P*") since he thought it would interfere with some of the explanatory properties of his conception of presupposition. More specifically, he noted:

...one important generalization...is that it is unnecessary, in fact inappropriate, to assert what is presupposed. But consider a routine lecture or briefing by an acknowledged expert. It may be that everything he says is something that the audience has no reason to doubt, but this does not make it inappropriate for him to speak. (Stalnaker 1974:480, n. 3.)

We will return to this issue below in section 4.2.

The remainder of the footnote considered two other options for dealing with (7). One was to deny that there is a presupposition associated with the occurrence of *my sister* in (7), but then we would be left with the problem of explaining when such presuppositions arise and when they don't. The other was to consider it an instance of exploitation, in the sense of Grice 1975 – i.e. exploiting 'the rules governing normal conversation in order to communicate something which is not explicitly said' (Stalnaker 1974: 480, n. 2). B's utterance in (9), below, would be one of the typical examples of exploitation:

- (9) A: James is a very handsome guy!
B: Yes, and his wife is lovely too.

Here B's purpose is to inform A of James's marital status. (9B) in the context imagined has a particular flavor of indirectness which, as Stalnaker acknowledged, is not shown in examples like (7), which are perfectly normal. Thus the problem was left in a somewhat unresolved state.

Enter Lewis and accommodation. We have already reviewed this idea in the introduction above. It is easy to see how examples like those of Sadock and Grice fit into the category created by Lewis. It would seem that the problem has now been solved. However, not everyone agrees that it has been.

3. Objections to common ground + accommodation.

A number of researchers have remained dubious about appeals to accommodation to rescue an approach which, in essence, defines presuppositions as part of the common ground. Gazdar remarks, concerning strategies like accommodation (or others, which view presuppositions which are not part of the common ground as resulting in anomalous or otherwise less than ideal utterances) that ‘they circumvent any possibility of counterexamples and, concomitantly, they render the inclusion of a notion like “appropriacy” in the definition wholly vacuous’ (Gazdar 1979a, 107). His own analysis (Gazdar 1979a, 1979b) constrains presuppositions merely to be consistent with the common ground – they need not reside there prior to the utterance. Similarly Soames remarks: ‘The addition of presuppositions to the conversational context of an utterance...undermines all definitions which make the presence of presupposed propositions in the conversational context prior to an utterance a necessary condition for the appropriateness of the utterance’ (Soames 1982: 461, n. 5). Soames defines ‘utterance presupposition’ as in (10) (Soames 1982: 430, ex. 13).

- (10) An utterance U presupposes P (at t) iff one can reasonably infer from U that the speaker S accepts P and regards it as uncontroversial, either because
- a. S thinks that it is already part of the conversational context at t, or because
 - b. S thinks that the audience is prepared to add it, without objection, to the context against which U is evaluated.

Soames’ definition captures the general ideas of Sadock and Grice for amending the common ground account. (Burton-Roberts also objects to the common ground account (Burton-Roberts 1989: 26); however he argues for a semantic, rather than pragmatic, view of presuppositions.)

Abbott 2000 echoed some of these objections. In that paper I presented examples from five different categories to illustrate my claim that presuppositions are better viewed as propositions which the speaker chooses not to assert – chooses not to present as the at issue content of an utterance – rather than viewing them as part of the common ground. Perhaps the most dramatic of these examples came from Prince 1978:

- (11) The leaders of the militant homophile movement in America generally have been young people. IT WAS THEY WHO FOUGHT BACK DURING A VIOLENT POLICE RAID ON A GREENWICH VILLAGE BAR IN 1969, AN INCIDENT FROM WHICH MANY GAYS DATE THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN CRUSADE FOR HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS. (PG, p. 16) [= Prince 1978: ex. 41b, small caps in original, underlining added; PG = Pennsylvania Gazette]

Note that the entire underlined portion of this example represents presupposed material. (11) is an example of what Prince called ‘informative-presupposition *it*-clefts’, and she characterized this construction in the following way:

not only is the hearer not expected to be thinking about the information in the *that* clause, but s/he is not expected even to KNOW it. In fact the whole point of these sentences is to inform the hearer of that very information. (Prince 1978: 898; small caps in original.)

(In the example in (11) the ‘*that* clause’ is the underlined text.)

The other four categories of constructions where presupposed material is regularly not required to be part of the common ground were (i) definite descriptions, as in (12):

(12) If you're going into the bedroom, would you mind bringing back *the big bag of potato chips that I left on the bed*? [= Birner & Ward 1994: ex. 1b, italics in original]

(ii) reverse *wh*-clefts, as in (13):

(13) ...and this is where they said right let it all go for fellowships studentships and research posts. [= Oberlander & Delin 1996: ex. 31a, italics in original, underlining added]

(iii) embedded announcements, as in (14):

(14) We regret to inform you that your insurance policy is hereby cancelled. [= Abbott 2000: ex. 16, underlining added]

and (iv) non-restrictive relative clauses, as in (15)

(15) Mary, who happens to be the only woman from Alaska on the committee, has been chosen to give the fisheries report this year.

I want to stress that many of these examples are naturally occurring, and all are natural sounding. These bits of discourse are not marked.

In sum, the main problem with the common ground + accommodation view of presupposition is that there are many cases where presuppositions are **not** part of the common ground, and where accommodation would have to be invoked. But without any constraints – a filling out of the *ceteris paribus* clause in Lewis's statement in (1) above, repeated here as (16)

(16) 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*.

– such uses of accommodation seem to nullify any theoretical force behind the claim that presuppositions are part of the common ground. Rather, it just seems to be the case that presuppositions are those propositions which are not being put forward as the at issue content in an utterance – they are being put forward as something you expect your addressee to take from you without question or objection.

More generally, the statement of accommodation in (16) makes it appear as a somewhat magical process – why should language games be different from baseball games in this respect? As such, we are not left with an obvious place to look for constraints, for ways to fill in the *ceteris paribus* clause. In some of the other instances of accommodation presented by Lewis there are unexplained curiosities; for example the arena of permissions tends to function so that the permitted worlds become more and not less, but when we come to vagueness, tighter and tighter standards are the rule. Here, however, in the area of presuppositions, I believe we can have a more well-grounded account of the phenomena that does away with the need for seemingly magical interventions. We will return to this issue in section 5 below.

4. Possible defenses of common ground + accommodation.

4.1. *Stalnaker 2002*. Stalnaker 2002, which contains a formal analysis of the notion of common ground in terms of common belief, also defends Stalnaker's common ground view of presupposition and the invocation of accommodation to handle troublesome examples like (5). I have to confess that the sections of the paper that are devoted to this project (sections 3 and 4) are among the most difficult and puzzling that I have ever read, so that what I say here by way of response may be totally off base. Nevertheless, I plunge on. There are two aspects of Stalnaker's defense that are particularly puzzling. The first is what seems like an adjustment in

the whole conception of common ground, and the second concerns the extent to which purely pragmatic considerations can explain everything that needs to be explained. Let us look at each of these in turn.

Stalnaker's example involves Alice, who says (17) to Bob:

(17) I can't come to the meeting – I have to pick up my sister at the airport.

In connection with this example, Stalnaker seems to want to extend the notion of the common ground of an utterance to include information contained in the utterance itself which may not have been commonly believed by the interlocutors prior to the utterance. First, in a footnote shortly after the introduction of the example he remarks:

Exactly when must Alice have the relevant beliefs [about the common ground]...in order to be speaking appropriately? (Since her beliefs about what Bob believes will be changing as she speaks.) The relevant time is a (perhaps some what idealized) point after the utterance event has taken place, but before it has been accepted or rejected. (Stalnaker 2002: 709, n. 14.)

Somewhat later, in explicitly considering a situation in which Bob does not know, prior to the utterance, that Alice has a sister, he asks "Was it in this case *reasonable* for her [Alice] to make this presupposition – to believe that it would be common belief that she had a sister?" (Stalnaker 2002: 710, italics in original). Skipping over details, the answer is, yes.

I have argued that, in general, if it is common belief that the addressee can come to know from the manifest utterance event both that the speaker is presupposing that ϕ , and that ϕ is true, that will suffice to make ϕ common belief, and so a presupposition of the addressee as well as the speaker. (Stalnaker 2002: 710.)

I think everyone would be in agreement with what Stalnaker says about the beliefs of Alice and Bob as the conversation unfolds in this case. The thing that puzzles me is the hint that the concept of the common ground for an utterance is being extended to include propositions contained in the utterance itself which were not common beliefs prior to the utterance. That would seem to remove the intuitive appeal of the common ground analysis of presuppositions, while also making the divide between presuppositions and asserted content extremely slender. It would also seem to remove the need to invoke accommodation for any cases of presuppositions which manifestly convey new information to the addressee, as in examples (11) – (15) above. However it seems that Stalnaker **does** regard the example of Alice and Bob's conversation, where Bob first learns about the sister from the utterance, as a case of accommodation: 'Notice that the kind of accommodation, or informative presupposition illustrated by Alice's reference to her sister...' (Stalnaker 2002: 710). So I am somewhat at a loss as to how to interpret things here.

My second puzzlement is the extent to which it is hinted that general pragmatic principles can explain everything that needs to be explained – that (possibly) we don't even need a conception of presupposition at all! Concerning good old Alice and Bob and Alice's sister waiting at the airport, Stalnaker suggests:

Suppose we assume that the semantics tells us exactly this about the sentence 'I have to pick up my sister at the airport': it is true if and only if the speaker has a sister whom he or she has to pick up at the airport, and false otherwise. (Stalnaker 2002: 713f.)

He then asks rhetorically: 'Are there facts about the use of the sentence that cannot be explained by this semantic hypothesis, together with general conversational rules?' (Stalnaker 2002: 714). His conclusion seems to be that there are not.

- (18) If we assume, as is obviously reasonable, that it is common belief, prior to Alice's statement, that she knows whether or not she has a sister, and common belief that she is being honest, then the fact that she says something that entails that she had a sister is enough to account for it becoming shared information that she does, even if the statement itself is rejected. (Stalnaker 2002: 714f.)

The main problem with this conclusion is that it seems to run the risk of failing to distinguish presupposition from assertion altogether. The fact that the reference in this case is to a sister, and we assume people are in a particularly good position to know who their siblings are, is a bit of a red herring. As we have seen above with examples (11)-(15), there are many other cases in which new information is presented as presupposed where the information in question is not of this intimate type. Furthermore, the fact is that we **generally** assume that people know what they are talking about, and that they are being honest. That's Grice's rule of Quality, after all. So the antecedent of a conditional claim parallel to the one Stalnaker makes in (18) would in general be satisfied by asserted as well as presupposed material.

What's missing here is the association between presuppositions and grammatical structure. The truth conditions mentioned by Stalnaker – the speaker has a sister whom he or she has to pick up at the airport – would apply to (19) as well as to the second clause in (17).

- (19) I have a sister whom I have to pick up at the airport.

But someone who refused to accept (19) would **not** be willing to acquire the belief that the speaker of (19) has a sister. Of course as noted above, we naturally assume speakers know more than addressees about their (the speakers') own relatives, so it is somewhat difficult to imagine someone refusing to accept (19). Let us consider a slightly different example, to get rid of that red herring. Compare (20a) and (20b):

- (20) a. The date Mary gave up smoking was May 13.
b. On May 13, Mary gave up smoking.

Although as always we make the default assumption that Quality is in effect, the information put forward in the sentences in (20) is not of the type that the speaker would automatically be assumed to be better informed about. We can see more clearly a difference between the two, even though both have the same truth conditions. Rejecting (20a) means rejecting a certain date for an event, but implicitly accepting that the event occurred. Rejecting (20b) does not involve that acceptance.

4.2. The defense in Stalnaker 1974. Let us return briefly to Stalnaker's original discussion of the Sadock example. He was hesitant to revise the common ground characterization of presuppositions in the direction suggested by Sadock – that is, to replace 'addressee assumes or believes that *P*' with 'addressee has no reason to doubt that *P*'. This hesitation was because it would prevent Stalnaker from capturing the generalization that 'it is unnecessary, in fact inappropriate to assert what is presupposed' (Stalnaker 1974: 480, n. 3), given that it is not unnecessary, much less inappropriate, to assert what your addressee has no reason to doubt. But is it unnecessary or even inappropriate to assert what is part of the common ground, something that you believe that, or are behaving as though you believed that, you and your addressee believe to be a shared belief? It seems that we can prefix utterances with any of the formulae in (21)

- (21) a. We all know/are aware that...
b. It goes without saying that...
c. I don't/hardly need to remind you that...

- d. As I said before...
- e. As we all agreed earlier...

without sounding too strange. Of course sometimes we may be exploiting these formulae in contexts where they do not literally apply – for politeness' sake, or for some other reason. But there are also instances in which we use them to prefix assertions which we intend to serve as reminders, or to bring some common ground proposition to the forefront of our addressee's consciousness. So it seems that there is no absolute prohibition against asserting something that you take to be part of the common ground.

When, then, is it inappropriate to assert a presupposition? The examples in (22) illustrate some instances.

- (22) a. # The king of France is bald, and there is a king.
 b. # It was Mary who solved the problem – somebody finally solved it!
 c. # I like ice cream too, and Bill does. [Understood in a context where no one else's fondness for ice cream has been alluded to.]
 d. #Mary has stopped smoking – she used to smoke.

Note that in each of these examples, the presupposition which is being also asserted is marked grammatically – it is part of a definite description in (22a), the extraposed clause of an *it*-cleft in (22b), signaled by the word *too* in (22c), and incorporated in the lexical semantics of the change of state verb *stop* in (22d). I want to suggest tentatively that the ban on presupposition assertion is a ban on asserting the contents of a proposition which is marked grammatically as being presupposed. If this turns out to be the case, it would be problematic for the common ground view sketched in (5), repeated here as (23).

- (23) A proposition *P* is a pragmatic presupposition of a speaker in a given context just in case the speaker assumes or believes that *P*, assumes or believes that his addressee assumes or believes that *P*, and assumes or believes that his addressee recognizes that he is making these assumptions, or has these beliefs. (Stalnaker 1974: 473.)

As noted before, this characterization does not make reference to any speech act, so it is not clear how, if my conjecture turns out to be correct, we could separate out those instances in which propositions from the common ground may be asserted from those which may not.

5. Arguments in favor of a more Gricean view.

In Abbott 2000 I argued that we can give a better account of presuppositional phenomena by giving up the common ground + accommodation view. The approach I was urging requires us to recognize that any sentence will typically be used to express a number of different propositions – we must join Kent Bach in throwing off the 'insidious assumption' to the contrary (i.e. that sentences express only one proposition each (Bach 1999: 350; see also Horn 2002)). We should put our new recognition together with Grice's observation that it should be considered to be an additional rule of conversation that one package one's utterance so as to facilitate an appropriate reply, including rejection.

I would be inclined to suggest that we add to the maxims of Manner...some maxim which would be, as it should be, vague: 'Frame whatever you say in the form most suitable for any reply that would be regarded as appropriate'; or, 'Facilitate in your form of expression the appropriate reply.' It is very clear that one of the appropriate replies to something that you have asserted is the denial of what you say. (Grice 1981: 189.)

Given that our utterance will express many propositions, it must be the case that, ideally, one of them will present itself for rejection while the others remain intact. Those others are what we call presuppositions (or conventional implicatures). And in place of a magical rule of accommodation, we have instead the principle that one should not presuppose that which needs to be asserted – i.e. that which should be presented as ready for potential denial by one's addressee. Grammar gives us devices for carrying out this project in a natural way. Sentences other than conjunctions or disjunctions have a main clause with a single tense bearing element; this is the locus of negation, questioning, modalization, etc. Additional propositions can easily be packaged into noun phrases or complement clauses, and thus (typically) escape the effects of such sentence operators.

In my earlier paper I argued that this picture has all of the advantages which Stalnaker (1974) outlined for a pragmatic view of presupposition, with none of the disadvantages of the appearance of arbitrariness or vacuity. More specifically Stalnaker mentioned four advantages of a pragmatic account of presupposition. First, presupposition is independent of entailment, which allows us to hold that a given utterance can both entail and presuppose the same proposition. (On the semantic view, presupposition is inconsistent with classical entailment, since classical entailment supports *modus tollens*.) Secondly, presuppositions vary in strength, depending on their 'trigger' (the sponsoring word or construction; see Abbott to appear for discussion of this phenomenon). This is difficult to account for on the semantic/truth conditional approach. Third, we can account for the variability of presupposition for a given sentence, depending on utterance context, as illustrated by Langendoen's example in (24)

(24) My cousin isn't a boy anymore. [= Langendoen 1971: ex. 12]

In most contexts (24) would probably be used to assert that the speaker's cousin has grown up, presupposing that the cousin is male; however it is also possible to use (24) to assert that one's cousin has had a sex change operation, presupposing that the cousin is young. And finally, Stalnaker argued that we may be able to explain, in some instances, why some constructions or lexical items have the presuppositions they do. The example Stalnaker used to illustrate this last advantage was the case of *know*, which ordinarily triggers a presupposition that its complement clause is true. He argued that in asserting *x does not know that p*, if *p* were not taken as given, then the point of the utterance would be unclear. (The reasoning here is similar to that suggested in the quote from Grice above concerning his new manner maxim.) In all of these cases, the advantages accruing to a pragmatic account of presupposition do not depend on its being the specific one offered by Stalnaker. The 'nonassertion' account being promoted here does just as well.

6. Concluding remarks.

This paper has had the fairly constrained goal of trying to argue for one pragmatic view of presupposition over a widely accepted competitor – the 'common ground' view, supplemented with accommodation. I have recapitulated some of the reasons one might have for feeling uneasy about this use of accommodation, and tried to argue that we can do just as well or better without it, as long as we modify slightly the way in which we characterize pragmatic presuppositions. There are many remaining puzzles associated with the phenomena of

presupposition and conventional implicature (some of which are discussed in Abbott to appear), so I certainly do not want to be taken as implying that that was not the case. ⁴

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