

Semantics 1 – More on truth conditions

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Framing the problem

More on truth-conditions

Beyond truth conditions

Framing the problem: the initial question

What is meaning?
(What does “mean” mean?)

- ▶ How can we transform this into an answerable question?

Framing the problem: truth-conditional semantics

- ▶ The question transformed:

How do humans compute truth-conditions of (possibly novel) utterances?

- ▶ Is there more to meaning than truth-conditions?

Compositionality

- ▶ Background: Barbara Partee, 1995, *Lexical semantics and compositionality*
 - ▶ What do these sentences mean? Are they synonymous?
[[half empty]] = [[half full]]?
- (1) The glass is half empty.
 - (2) The glass is half full.

Compositionality

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 - ▶ What do these sentences mean? Are they synonymous?
[[half empty]] = [[half full]]?
- (1) The glass is half empty.
 - (2) The glass is half full.
 - (3) The glass is almost half empty.
 - (4) The glass is almost half full.

Interlude: Lewis' advice

In order to say what a meaning *is*, we may first ask what a meaning *does*, and then find something that does that. (David Lewis, *General Semantics*, 1970)

- ▶ We have been asking what a meaning does (determines conditions under which a sentence is true or false).
- ▶ (We have yet to find something that does that.)

Truth-conditions in context

- ▶ What do the B sentences convey?

(5) A: Do you want to go see a movie?

B: Yes, I do.

B': I have an exam tomorrow.

B'': District 9 is still playing, I think.

Truth-conditions in context

- ▶ What do the B sentences convey?

(6) A: What are you doing this weekend?

B: I haven't ever been to the Walters.

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(6) A: What are you doing this weekend?

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(7) A: How was the movie?

B: The explosions were impressive.

Truth-conditions in context

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(6) A: What are you doing this weekend?
B: I haven't ever been to the Walters.

(7) A: How was the movie?
B: The explosions were impressive.

(8) A: How did Alfonso do in the marathon?
B: He made it to the 14th mile.

Truth-conditions in context

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- ▶ Literal meaning – *entailments* (verb: entails)
- ▶ Inferred meaning – *implicatures* (verb: implicates)

Entailment

- ▶ Definition on board.
- ▶ Entailments are “non-cancelable” or “non-defeasible” – cancellation test on board.

(9) The book is on the desk \vdash The book is in contact with the desk.

(10) Alfonso is tall and blue-eyed \vdash Alfonso is tall.

Implicature

- ▶ Conveyed, but not entailed. (Other criteria?)
- ▶ Cancelable / defeasible.
- ▶ Note: \supset isn't a standard symbol for this.

(11) I have an exam tomorrow \supset I can't go see a movie.

(12) District 9 is still playing \supset Let's go see D. 9.

(13) Alfonso made it to the 14th mile \supset Alfonso didn't make it past the 14th mile.

- ▶ Truth-conditions + context + ? = implicatures.

Implicature

- ▶ Truth-conditions + context + ? = implicatures.
- ▶ Grice's cooperative principle (1975, *Logic and conversation*):

“Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.”

- ▶ A paraphrase: discourse participants assume that their interlocutors are acting/communicating cooperatively, and reason on that basis.

Implicature

- ▶ Further Gricean principles (“maxims”).
- ▶ One important one: Maxim of relevance. (“Be relevant.”)
- ▶ I.e. discourse participants assume their interlocutors are communicating something relevant.
- ▶ Three other maxims, several sub-maxims.
- ▶ We will read Grice in the original later in the semester.

Beyond truth conditions

- ▶ What do these examples convey?

(14) Alfonso believes that it is raining.

(15) Alfonso doesn't believe that it is raining.

(16) Alfonso knows that it is raining.

(17) Alfonso doesn't know that it is raining.

Beyond truth conditions

- ▶ What do these examples convey?

- (18) Alfonso's brother is a mime.
(19) Alfonso has quit smoking.
(20) Alfonso smokes too.
(21) It is Alfonso who smokes.

Presuppositions

- ▶ Are presuppositions entailments? Presuppositional vs. at-issue meaning.
- ▶ How can we characterize presuppositions?
- ▶ Are presuppositions part of truth-conditions?

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- ▶ Are presuppositions entailments? Presuppositional vs. at-issue meaning.
- ▶ How can we characterize presuppositions?
- ▶ Are presuppositions part of truth-conditions?
- ▶ True or false:

(22) The king of France is bald.

Presuppositions

(23) The king of France is bald.

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- ▶ “Neither” – P.F. Strawson. (“the question of whether his statement was true or false simply did not arise, because there was no such person as the King of France.”, 1950, *On referring*)

Presuppositions

(23) The king of France is bald.

- ▶ “True” – pretty implausible.
- ▶ “False” – Bertrand Russell (1957 *Mr. Strawson on Referring*).
- ▶ “Neither” – P.F. Strawson. (“the question of whether his statement was true or false simply did not arise, because there was no such person as the King of France.”, 1950, *On referring*)
- ▶ No direct intuitions on this question – Scott Soames (1976 dissertation).

Distinguishing presuppositions

- ▶ “Hey wait a minute” test (Kai von Fintel):

(24) A: The king of France is bald.

B: Hey wait a minute! France doesn't have a king!

(25) A: The instructor of Semantics I is in his office.

B: # Hey wait a minute! He's right here!

B': That's not true, he's right here!

Distinguishing presuppositions

- ▶ Constancy test: Presuppositions are constant under certain operators, at-issue entailments aren't.
- ▶ Negation, question/imperative formation, placement in the antecedent of a conditional.
- ▶ All of the following entail that there is a king of France:
 - (26) The king of France isn't bald.
 - (27) Is the king of France bald?
 - (28) Get me the king of France on the phone.
 - (29) If the king of France shows up, let me know.

Distinguishing presuppositions

- ▶ None of the following entail that I am in my office – at-issue entailments not constant in these contexts.
 - (30) Kyle isn't in his office.
 - (31) Is Kyle in his office?
 - (32) Kyle, go to your office.
 - (33) If Kyle is in his office, ask him about the homework.