Presupposition without Common Ground

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0. INTRODUCTION

There are two foundational questions to ask about presupposition: What is it? And where does it come from?

The philosophical work which has most influenced linguists' understanding of presupposition is that of Robert Stalnaker (Stalnaker 1973, 1974, 2002). One aspect of Stalnaker's work on presupposition is an attempt to decouple these two questions. Stalnaker does this by providing a characterization of presupposition which allows us to say what all cases of presupposition have in common, while also allowing that the sources of presupposition may be various. The over-arching characterization is framed in terms of constraints imposed by an utterance on the contexts in which it may appropriately be uttered. Contexts, in turn, are characterized in terms of speakers' beliefs about the common ground. What is left open is the reasons why particular utterances would impose particular constraints. Stalnaker 1974 acknowledges that "in some cases, one may just have to write presupposition constraints into the dictionary entry for a particular word." But he also conjectures that "one can explain many presupposition constraints in terms of general conversational rules without building anything about presuppositions into the meanings of particular words or constructions" (212). And indeed, he seems to favor the latter view.

Stalnaker characterizes the constraints on context view as *pragmatic*, in order to distinguish his approach from earlier ones where presupposition was seen as bearing on the truth conditionality of sentences, a semantic property. But within this pragmatic account, he allows that some presuppositions are *conventional* properties of particular words or sentences; while others are the result of conversational inference.

In the current linguistic literature, some version or other of Stalnaker's constraints-on-context approach is typically taken for granted, but within this framework, a distinction is still commonly made between semantic and pragmatic (or speaker) presupposition. Beaver and Zeevat (2004) make the distinction in the following way: Semantic presuppositions are conditions on the meaningfulness of a sentence or utterance: conditions on the expression of a proposition, in a static theory; or conditions on definedness of update, in a dynamic theory. In contrast to the agnosticism of Stalnaker's view, semantic presuppositions are uniformly characterized as constraints on the actual context (typically, but not always, taken to be the common ground).

Pragmatic presuppositions, on the other hand, are beliefs about the context that must be attributed to a speaker. It is standard to assume that semantic presuppositions of sentences become pragmatic presuppositions of speakers, as speakers should believe that contexts satisfy the conditions required to allow their utterances to be meaningful. But there may be additional pragmatic presuppositions which have non-semantic sources. (For an articulation of this position, see e.g. von Fintel 2001.) In these terms, Stalnaker's characterization is a characterization of pragmatic presupposition. The semantic presuppositions identified by linguists constitute sources of pragmatic presupposition.

But whereas Stalnaker remained agnostic about which presuppositions might be rooted in conventional, lexical content, and which are to be explained in terms of conversational inference, linguists who advocate the distinction just sketched between semantic and pragmatic presupposition generally also take this distinction to map directly onto the conventional/inferential distinction. It is presumed that semantic presuppositions are conventional properties of lexical items or constructions; and that all presuppositions which appear to be closely related to particular words or constructions are semantic presuppositions. Thus, all the canonical cases of presupposition are taken to be semantic and conventional: the presuppositions of definites, of factives, of change-of-state predicates, of *too*, *again* and *even* – and so on. Stalnaker's attempt to decouple the characterization of presupposition from the question of how presuppositions arise has thus largely been abandoned.

The goal of this paper is to challenge assumptions of both the current linguistic division of presupposition into semantic and pragmatic; and of Stalnaker's original proposal. The first challenge is to the identification of apparently linguistically triggered presuppositions with conventionally determined constraints (section 1).I will argue that we need an account of presupposition which allows for an inferential source even for many standard cases of presupposition. I will then challenge the implicit assumption that the constraints-on-common-ground view of presupposition is compatible with the full range of sources of presupposition. I will argue that in fact it is not (section 2). I will then offer an alternative pragmatic account of presupposition: pragmatic in Stalnaker's sense. That is, I will offer an alternative to Stalnaker's over-arching account of presupposition, an alternative account of what all presuppositions have in common. This alternative account truly allows for Stalnaker's agnosticism about the sources of presupposition.

1. CONVERSATIONAL PROPERTIES OF PRESUPPOSITION

1.1. The arguments

In an earlier paper (Simons 2001; see also Simons 2006b), I presented evidence that at least some presuppositions are conversationally generated inferences, and not conventional content. By "conversationally generated inference," I mean an inference about intended interpretation which is due in part to general principles governing reasonable, rational conversation, such as those posited by Grice (1967), or the interpretational heuristics posited by Levinson (2000). In generating conversational inferences, an interpreter relies on these principles together with observations about the literal content of the utterance, or of some part of the utterance, or the form in which that content is expressed, and observations about the situation of utterance, the goals of the conversation, and so on.

By "conventional content," I mean idiosyncratic lexical content, content which cannot be inferred but which must be learned for each lexical item. Obviously, "conventional content" should *not* here be understood to be limited to truth conditional content. On many views, presuppositional content is precisely conventional but not truth conditional.

To say that presuppositions are conversational inferences is not to identify them with conversational implicatures (although others have made this identification; see the references below). On Grice's conception, implicatures are part of what a speaker means; that is, they are part of the content with respect to which the speaker has a communicative intention.[1] In other words, if a speaker implicates that *p*, then, roughly, she intends the speaker to come to believe that *p*.

[1] For discussion, see Neale 1992.

In the standard case, though, speakers do not have communicative intentions with respect to the presuppositions of their utterances (although they may). I might say, to excuse myself from a meeting, "I have to take my cat to the vet."The utterance presupposes that I have a cat; but it is not normally part of my communicative intention to get you to believe this. I may recognize that you will come to believe this, as a consequence of my utterance. But I might also recognize that you will come to believe I have a bad cold as a consequence of my utterance, and this does not lead us to conclude that part of my communicative intention is that I have a bad cold. So, presuppositions should on these grounds be distinguished from conversational implicatures.

My argument, then, is that the same sorts of inferential strategies which allow interpreters to identify conversational implicatures can be used to make other kinds of inferences too; and in particular, can be used to derive presuppositions.

Some of the arguments I gave in the earlier work in favor of an inferential view of presupposition turned out to recapitulate arguments already made by others, in particular Atlas (1977, 1979 and elsewhere), Atlas and Levinson (1981), and Boër and Lycan (1976). Levinson (1983) succinctly summarizes the basic arguments in favor of the this view. I begin here by reviewing those arguments, and adding some additional ones.

The first argument is an argument *against* the view that the presuppositions in question are part of conventional, idiosyncratic lexical content. It is an argument *for* a conversational source for the relevant presuppositions to the extent that one considers that this is the most plausible alternative to conventional content. The argument concerns those presuppositions which are associated, not with particular lexical items, but rather with semantically coherent classes of items. For example: all referential expressions give rise to existential presuppositions.[2] That is, the use of a referential expression gives rise to the presupposition that a referent for that expression exists. All change of state predicates are associated with the presupposition that the subject of the predicate was in the necessary start state for the change of state immediately prior to the reference time.[3] Thus, in each of the examples below, the a. sentence presupposes (the content of) the b. sentence.

(1) a. Jane stopped didn't stop coughing at noon.
    b. Jane had been coughing before noon.

(2) a. Kate became a US citizen in March.
    b. Kate was not a US citizen before March.

(3) a. The painting fell off the wall at midnight.
    b. The painting had been on the wall before midnight.

Why is this an argument against conventional specification of these presuppositions? There are several ways to look at it. From the perspective of the explanatoriness of the theory, there is no doubt that if we stipulate each presupposition separately, we would appear to be missing an obvious

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[2] I'm assuming that definite descriptions fall into this class. Whether or not they are actually semantically quantificational, I think it is uncontroversial that they can be *used* to refer; and they are associated with an existential presupposition only when so used.

[3] A change of state predicate is just a predicate which characterizes a change of state of some entity; the start state is just whatever state has to hold of an entity in order for it to undergo the relevant change of state.

generalization. If every member of this class behaves in the same way, surely there is some way to account for the behavior on the basis of other properties of the class: presumably, the relevant commonality of content. Second there is the question of whether the presupposition has the crucial hallmark of conventionality, that is, that it could have been different. It is conventional that in German, the word *mädchen* ("young girl") is neuter; what shows that it is conventional is that it could obviously have been otherwise, as synonymous expressions in other languages have different gender assignments. Similarly, if it were *merely* conventional that a given change of state predicate bore a particular presupposition, we would expect that there would be change of state predicates that did not have the parallel presupposition; maybe even pairs of items which have the same truth conditional content, but different presuppositional content. (For example, why not one verb which means *stop* and which presupposes that the subject was in the start state, and another that means *stop* and presupposes that the subject was in the end state?[4]) But we don't find this. What we find instead is, first, that truth conditionally synonymous items within these classes in one language share the same presuppositions; and (as far as I am aware), synonymous items in these classes *across languages* also share the same presuppositions.[5] Moreover, it seems very plausible that if we were to invent some change of state predicate, as of course happens, then it would invariably have the standard presupposition associated with these items.

One might suppose that in the case of change of state predicates, the presupposition is conventionally attached, not to individual predicates, but to something like the abstract representation of the change of state event schema which, in some views (see e.g. Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998) is independent of any particular verb, but is part of the lexical entry of any change of state verb. Rappaport Hovav and Levin also posit that such event schemas are universal. If, indeed, the change of state event schema specified a presupposition that the necessary start state holds (at the relevant time), then we would account for the universal association of this presupposition with such predicates.

But what, then, of the case of the existential presupposition associated with referring expressions? To provide a parallel account, we would have to posit some kind of abstract representation or schema which is taken to be part of the lexical entry of every referring expression, to which the presupposition could be conventionally attached. This seems particularly problematic in light of the fact that there is a variety of types of referring expressions, with different underlying semantic properties: proper names do not refer in the same way as deictic pronouns, and these (on at least some accounts) do not refer in the same way as definite descriptions used referentially. To construct a theory in which there is an abstract semantic structure shared by all of these expressions to which the presupposition could be attached seems an unnecessary complication, when we could instead explain the presupposition as arising from the standard use of these expressions to refer.

This concludes the argument against treating (all) presuppositions as conventional content. The second argument is an argument explicitly in favor of the presupposition-as-conversational-inference

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[4] In fact, the way *stop* (like all other change of state predicates) seems to work is this: out of the blue, a presupposition that the relevant individual was in the necessary start state is generated. However, a speaker can also use *stop* presupposing that the relevant individual is currently in the necessary *end* state; in which case what is asserted, or questioned, and so on, is precisely whether the start state held, as in:

(I) I know you don't smoke now. Did you stop smoking?

[5] For a detailed comparison of presuppositions in English and Tamil, see Levinson and Anamalai 1992.

view. The argument consists in the observation that many presuppositions show the standard properties associated with conversationally generated inferences. One of these properties is cancellability, in particular in light of the interpreter's assessment of the speaker's knowledge and conversational goals. I will not review here the full array of facts concerning cancellability. (For this, see Levinson 1983, Simons 2001.) I'll mention just two cases of what we can call "conversational cancellation." The first sort of case has been well documented in the literature, and involves a clash between what the interpreter knows about the speaker's information, and a usual presupposition. So, consider this case:

You and a friend are having dinner in a restaurant, and are speculating about a morose looking man eating alone at a table across the room. In the course of the conversation you offer:

(4) Perhaps his dog died.

In this situation, the usual existential presupposition associated with the definite is suspended in light of your knowledge that the speaker does not know the man, and so could not know whether or not he has (or recently had) a dog. (Consequently, the import of the utterance is along the lines of "Perhaps he had a dog which just died.")

Accounts of presupposition in which all presuppositions are taken to be conventional can certainly deal with such cases.[6] What is relevant here is that the phenomenon is typical of conversationally generated inferences. Consider an analogous case involving scalar implicature:[7] Suppose that in the situation described above, I say: "Maybe he's waiting for a friend." There is no associated (scalar) implicature that it is not the case that he might be waiting for more than one friend. (Compare the case with that in which I tell a waiter, "I'm not going to order yet, I'm waiting for a friend.)

Our second case of presupposition cancellation is somewhat different, and involves a kind of cancellation that has received relatively little attention:

Suppose that a researcher is conducting an experiment into the effects of smoking cessation. She begins a session by reiterating the eligibility requirements for participants. At this point, she is approached by a subject, who says:

(5) I'm sorry, I'm no use for your experiment. I haven't stopped smoking.

In this situation, I don't think that the researcher would necessarily take the speaker to be indicating that she is currently a smoker, but merely to be asserting that she has not undergone the relevant change of state. The presupposition is lacking, I suggest, because in this situation, the utterance is equally relevant whether the speaker is an unrepentant smoker, or has never smoked.

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[6] Typically, using the strategy of local accommodation. For a brief explanation, see Simons (2006a); for details, see Beaver (1997).

[7] There is a certain difficulty in demonstrating the parallel with clear cases of conversational implicature. The "best" cases of conversational implicature involve nonce inferences, so we cannot sensibly talk about cancellation. The compromise is to talk about cases involving some sort of generalized conversational implicature, where we can talk about what is "normally" implicated. The complication is that some readers might be skeptical as to whether cases like these do involve purely conversational inferences.

Here's a parallel example involving scalar implicature: Suppose that we are trying to drum up attendance for an upcoming talk, and are wondering where to advertize it. You say: "Some of Bill's students might be interested." In this situation, you do not implicate that it is not the case that all of Bill's students might be interested. However, it's not necessarily the case that I am certain that you do not know whether or not this is true. (For all I know, you may have in mind a particular student of Bill's who you know will not be interested.) Rather, the implicature is absent because it is irrelevant for our current conversational purposes what proportion of Bill's students might be interested: whether it is all, or only some, we will still want Bill to announce the talk in his class.

The second property of conversational inferences which is shared by presuppositions is what Grice calls *nondetachability*. To say that an inference from an utterance is nondetachable is to say that it is nondetachable from the literal content expressed. To illustrate, consider the discourse below:

(6) A: Do you want to go to the movies?
B: I have some work to do.

B, in responding as she does to A's question, implicates a negative answer to the question. But the implication is in no way dependent on the particular form of her utterance, but only on the fact that she said, in answer to the question, something about having work to do. She could equally have said, "I have work to do," or "I need to get some work done," or "I have to work": all have roughly the same content, and all would have had the same effect. To use Grice's (admittedly less than transparent) terminology, this shows that the inference to the negative answers is *nondetachable* from the content expressed: any other way of expressing (roughly) the same content in that environment would give rise to the same inference.[8]

We have in fact already seen that presuppositional inferences are, in many cases, nondetachable from expressed content, when we observed that, where presuppositions are associated with classes of items, all items in the class which have the same truth conditional content also have the same presupposition. For example, consider:

(7) a. Jane didn't stop/quit/cease laughing.
b. Jane did not discontinue her laughter.
(8) Jane didn't leave/quit/go out of/exit/depart from the house.

Such examples show that at least some presuppositions are triggered by the expression of particular content, rather than being dependent upon the particular forms used to express it. This is what we expect of conversationally generated inferences.

[8] Nondetachability is claimed to be a property of all conversationally generated inferences *except* those generated by virtue of the maxim of Manner (see Grice 1967). However, even in the case of Manner implicatures, the form of the utterance plays a different role than it does in the case of conventionally conveyed content. In the latter case, a particular piece of content is conveyed by virtue of the use of the lexical item or construction *simpliciter*. In the case of Manner implicatures, the form of the utterance gives rise to the implicature only in comparison with other forms which could have been used to express the same content.

1.2. Dedicated triggers

The arguments adduced so far show only that presuppositions *can* be conversationally derived, and that *certain types* of presupposition are most plausibly accounted for as conversational inferences. The arguments do not show that *all* presuppositions have a conversational source.

There are in fact some words which are natural candidates for analysis as conventional triggers, or markers, of presupposition. These are words whose sole function seems to be to introduce presuppositions. The most well-discussed examples of this in English are *even, again* and *too*,[9] as in:

(9) Even George Bush has acknowledged that global warming is real.
(10) Jane failed her drivers test again.
(11) Jane failed her drivers test too.

However, there is another observation which might give us pause: this presupposition, too, appears to be nondetachable. That is, any expression with the same meaning as *again* or *too* gives rise to the same presupposition, as demonstrated by:[10,11]

(12) a. Jane failed her drivers test for a second time.
b. Jane failed her drivers test once more.

(13) Jane started again / afresh / anew / over.

(14) a. Jane failed her drivers test too.
b. Jane also failed her drivers test.
c. Jane failed her drivers test as well.
d. Jane likewise failed her drivers test.

These facts suggest an important distinction: we have to distinguish between the question of whether the *content* conveyed by the inclusion of, for example, *too* is derived conventionally or conversationally; and the question of whether the presuppositional *status* of that content is due to convention or to conversational facts. It seems indisputable that sentence (10), for example, conveys that Jane failed her drivers test on a previous occasion by virtue of the conventional content of *again*, combining with the conventional content of the rest of the sentence. But it does not follow from this that it is conventionally fixed that this content is presuppositional. It is equally possible that

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[9] Many people would include *only* in this list, on the assumption that, e.g. an utterance of *Only John left* presupposes that John left. I myself am unconvinced that this is a presupposition; and indeed, there is a range of views in the literature.

[10] I don't demonstrate this with *even* because I have not been able to find any synonyms of *even* in English.

[11] It is still somewhat unclear what this presupposition is. Standardly, sentence (10) is said to presuppose that Jane failed her drivers test before, and sentence (11) (with the subject in focus), that someone other than Jane failed their drivers test. But see Kripke (1990) for a different view.

conversational considerations determine that in normal circumstances, that part of the content of the sentence will have presuppositional status.

Once we have this perspective, then the case of the presupposition of *too* becomes potentially not significantly different in kind from the case of the presupposition of, say, *stop*. On this view, in both cases, the content which is presupposed is introduced conventionally. (It is by virtue of the conventional content of *stop* that the sentence *Jane stopped singing* entails that Jane had been singing.) But the presuppositional status of that content is a consequence of conversational considerations: nothing in the meaning of the items tells you that this content must be presupposed.[12]

Abusch 2002 argues against such an approach that there are pairs of lexical items where assertoric and presuppositional content are reversed. (See Abusch 2002). One example which is cited is due to Fillmore 1971: *accuse* vs. *criticize*. But, as Abusch herself points out, even on Fillmore's presentation these two are not symmetrical. (Fillmore says only that "what is presupposed by the use of [criticize] is part of the content of the linguistic act referred to by [accuse].) Abusch offers the pair *be right* and *know* as a truly symmetrical example. But the claim of symmetry relies on a semantic analysis of both *X knows that p* and *X is right that p* as "p is true and X believes p." According to Abusch, *know* presupposes the truth of *p* and asserts the belief relation, while *be right* presupposes the belief relation and asserts the truth of *p*. However, even if the proposed analysis were correct for *know*, it seems incorrect for *be right*, which does not seem to presuppose belief, but only that the claim that *p* has been made. Suppose A is asked where Jane is, and says that she is at home sick, although in fact he has no beliefs at all about where she is. He later discovers that in fact, by coincidence, she was at home sick. He can then say of himself: "I was right that Jane was home sick," without this counting as a pretense that he believed it.

While Abusch is right that, if there were pairs that displayed complete symmetry, this would be a challenge for the kind of pragmatic approach just sketched, it remains to be seen if any such pairs actually exist.

Conclusion so far. I have argued that there is a strong case to be made that presuppositionality – not the specific content of presuppositions, but the fact that a particular piece of content has presuppositional status – is the result of conversational inferences. The question then is: inferences about what? Usually, we think of conversational inferences as inferences about what the speaker intends to communicate, or what the speaker is assuming or thinking which leads her to make the utterance she makes. As Grice's definition of conversational implicature says, the goal of a conversational inference is to identify some proposition *p* such that the assumption that the speaker "is aware that, or thinks that" *p* enables the interpreter to take the speaker as cooperative.

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[12] It would then be an important open question what the nature or status of the content introduced by *too* is. The consensus in the literature – which has supported the idea that the content of *too* is presuppositional by virtue of meaning – is that this content is not truth conditional. If this is right, then the case of *too* is not completely analogous to the case of *stop*, or *know.* The atomic sentence *Jane stopped singing* is generally (perhaps universally) agreed to entail that Jane had been singing prior to the reference time; on the standard view, this entailment is also a presupposition. But, again on the standard view, *Jane sang too* does not entail that someone other than Jane sang: this is taken to be merely a presupposition.

So the content introduced by *too* is special in some way. Maybe it is special in being specifically anaphoric, as suggested by Kripke (1990). Or maybe it has the same status as the content introduced by words like *therefore* and *moreover*. Grice (1967) called the content introduced by these items *conventional implicature*, but there has never been any consensus as to what this is. See Potts (2005) for a recent discussion.

But the standard view on presupposition is that presupposition triggers provide the interpreter not just with information about what the speaker thinks, but with information about what the speaker thinks the *common ground* is like. In the next section, I consider the consequences for this common ground view of the position that presuppositions may have an inferential source.

2. CONVERSATIONALLY GENERATED PRESUPPOSITION, ACCOMMODATION, AND THE COMMON GROUND VIEW

The arguments of the previous section have an obvious consequence for the broader theory of presupposition. Presupposition, whatever it is, must allow for an explanation in terms of conversational reasoning; that is, an account of the presuppositional status of some element of content in terms of conversational reasoning must not be ruled out in principle by claims about what presupposition is.

In this section, I will argue that the standard view on presupposition does in fact rule out such an explanation. According to the standard view, presuppositional content is (roughly) content which is required to be entailed by the common ground relative to which the presupposing sentence is evaluated. Any version of this view requires one to invoke some process of accommodation, to account for cases where the presupposition in question is not in fact part of the common ground. I will argue that accommodation, as construed on the common ground view, requires one to posit a conventional constraint on sentences. Thus, if one entertains the possibility that presuppositional status could be conversationally derived, one is forced to abandon the common ground view.

2.1. The preliminary common ground view: an utterance-time constraint

The simple minded version of the common ground view of presupposition goes like this: The presuppositions of a sentence S are those propositions which are required to be part of the common ground of the conversational participants in order for an utterance of S to be allowable. Let's call this requirement the licensing condition for sentence S. The licensing condition is what others might call the semantic presupposition of S.

The licensing condition entails a further constraint on speakers: a speaker who intends to speak appropriately should utter S only if she *believes* that the presuppositions of S are entailed by the conversational common ground at the time of her utterance. This, we can call the speaker condition or pragmatic presupposition of utterances of S.[13] Consequently, utterances of presupposing sentences provide hearers with evidence as to the speaker's beliefs about the common ground.

Stalnaker (1973, 1974, 2002 and elsewhere) defines presuppositionality directly in terms of constraints on speaker beliefs: for a sentence to have a presupposition is for its appropriate utterance to require the speaker to believe that the presupposition is entailed by the common ground. Stalnaker does not propose a distinct licensing condition to underwrite the felicity condition. As we'll see in section 2.2., this view leads to complications of its own.

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[13] The distinction I am making between the licensing condition, or semantic presupposition, and the speaker condition, or pragmatic presupposition, is parallel to Gauker's (1998) distinction between external and internal norms governing speech.

It should be said immediately that no common ground theorist currently subscribes quite to this view. However, I am not simply setting up a straw man here; this discussion is important for the argument that follows.

The reason that no-one subscribes to exactly this view is that the proposed speaker condition is clearly false. For example, everyone agrees that, whatever presupposition may be, the sentence (or an utterance of the sentence) *I want to call my sister* involves a presupposition that the speaker has a sister. Yet clearly, a speaker can perfectly appropriately utter this sentence knowing full well that her hearer was not aware, prior to her utterance, that she had a sister.

This difficulty was recognized immediately, including by Stalnaker himself. The first attempts to respond to this difficulty introduced initial versions of the idea of accommodation. Stalnaker (1974: 202) writes:

> In [some] cases, a speaker may act as if certain propositions are part of the common ground when he knows that they are not. He may want to communicate a proposition indirectly, and do this by presupposing it in such a way that the auditor will be able to infer that it is presupposed. In such a case, a speaker tells his auditor something in part by pretending that his auditor already knows it.

Although the understanding of accommodation has been refined over the last 30 years, this first formulation embodies the foundational idea: that presuppositions impose requirements on the common ground; but it is enough for these conditions to be satisfied *post hoc*, once the interpreter has realized that the speaker intends them to be.

Now let us dwell for a moment on how this process of accommodation is to work; specifically, on how it is to be *triggered*. The very first stage must be the hearer's recognition that "the speaker is acting as if certain propositions are part of the common ground." What will allow this? There are two possibilities:

1. The sentence uttered carries a conventional constraint that it be uttered only if the common ground entails proposition *p*. The hearer knows this by virtue of her knowledge of the language.
2. The hearer can infer on the basis of general pragmatic principles that this utterance is appropriate only if the common ground entails *p*.

If the sentence were subject to a conventional constraint, then it is clear how accommodation would be triggered. The hearer will assume that the speaker intends to speak appropriately; therefore, in producing her utterance, she is acting as if the required presuppositions were common ground. And one can see why this would plausibly lead the hearer to change her own beliefs to include the presuppositions, with an ultimate change to the common ground.

But if we suppose that the common ground constraint is inferable on general pragmatic grounds, we are led to a contradiction. To see this, let us work through a specific example. Consider an utterance by Ann to Bob of the sentence *I want to call my sister*. Suppose that Bob has only just met Ann. He does not know, prior to her utterance, that she has a sister; and he knows that *she* knows that he does not know it. So, Bob knows that Ann does *not* believe that it is common ground between them that she has a sister. But, it is clear that subsequent to Ann's utterance, Bob will believe that Ann has a sister. This we must assume to be the consequence of some process of accommodation.

Now, we are to imagine that this process is triggered by Bob's recognition that Ann "is acting as if" the proposition that Ann has a sister is part of the common ground. He is supposed to recognize this by recognizing that she has produced an utterance which is appropriate only if this is

the case. But now we want to suppose further that this licensing condition– the purported semantic presupposition – is inferable by the hearer on general conversational principles, and is not due to any conventional content of the sentence uttered.

But this simply cannot be: the sentence clearly *is* appropriate (in the ordinary sense of being conversationally acceptable) in the circumstances described, where it is not common ground that Ann has a sister. So no conversational reasoning could lead to the conclusion that it is not.

Nor could conversational reasoning lead to the conclusion that the sentence is appropriately uttered only if the speaker believes it is common ground that she has a sister. Conversational inference must be driven by the premise that the speaker intends to speak appropriately, and hence should not knowingly violate a condition of appropriateness. So in particular, the conclusion of conversational inference cannot be to attribute to the speaker a belief that she is known not to have. Consequently, no conversational reasoning could lead Bob to the conclusion that Ann's utterance is appropriate only if she believes that it is common ground that she has a sister. As he knows that she does not believe this, the conclusion would be inconsistent with the assumption that she intends to be cooperative.

One might try a different tack. One might argue that the proposed restriction on the use of the sentence is a generalized inference: that hearers (and speakers) know, on general conversational grounds, that an utterance of this sentence would generally be acceptable only if the relevant proposition were entailed by the common ground, or believed by the speaker to be so. The idea would somehow be that the hearer does not have to determine this on the basis of this particular utterance; and therefore can maintain the conclusion even in the face of evidence that it does not apply in this case.

Even if there could be such a generalized inference, it still should not lead to a conclusion that the speaker is "acting as if." Normally, where there is a discrepancy between a generalized inference and the particular circumstances of an utterance, the generalized inference is cancelled. So, for example: There is (according to Grice (1967)) a generalized implicature that a speaker who says "He's bringing a woman" implicates that the woman in question is not the man's wife. Now imagine that Mr. Jones, a member of a gentleman's club, is seen approaching the establishment accompanied by his wife, who is well known to all the observers. One of these observers exclaims in horror: "He's bringing a woman!" Given that the hearers are all aware that the speaker knows that the woman in question is Mrs. Jones, the generalized implicature is simply suspended, and an alternative explanation is found for why the speaker has used the indefinite. (Presumably, that the horror here is not that Jones is bringing his wife, but that he is bringing any woman.)

Conclusion: The preliminary common ground view is sustainable only given some process of accommodation. But accommodation is only possible on the assumption that the common ground constraint is part of the conventional content of the utterance: it cannot be inferred.

2.2 The sophisticated common ground view: a post-utterance time constraint

The sophisticated common ground view is most clearly formulated in accounts of presupposition framed in Heim's (1983) context change semantics.[14] A slightly different version of the view is articulated in Stalnaker (2002).

On Heim's view, sentences are (possibly partial) functions from contexts to contexts. Presuppositions are definedness conditions on these functions: if a sentence S bears presupposition *p*, then S can only be used to update contexts which entail *p* (i.e. S(c) is defined only if c entails *p*). This is the licensing condition, or semantic presupposition, on S.

The licensing condition gives rise to a concomitant speaker condition: a speaker should utter a presupposing sentence S only if she believes that the context *relative to which S will be interpreted* will entail *p*. Crucially, this context need not be the context which exists at the time of utterance; for if the utterance-time context does not in fact entail *p*, *p* may be accommodated.[15] That is, if appropriate conditions hold, *p* may be added to the utterance-time context, and then S can be applied to the context resulting from accommodation.

On the Heim view, accommodation is triggered by the hearer's knowledge of the semantics of S, including the definedness conditions on context update. It is a conventional fact about S that a hearer can use the presupposing sentence to update the existing context only if she first engages in accommodation. This fact about S cannot be inferentially derived.

Conclusion: The sophisticated common ground view, as articulated in CCS, *requires* presuppositions to be understood as conventional, lexically encoded, constraints on contexts. It does not leave room for conversationally derived presuppositional constraints.[16]

I want now to turn to Stalnaker's formulation of the sophisticated common ground view. What distinguishes this view from the CCS view is that the *primary* constraint imposed by presuppositional sentences is taken to be a constraint on the *speaker's* presuppositions, i.e. on her beliefs about the common ground. This might seem more compatible with the assumption of a conversational source for presuppositions. But in fact, it is not.

Consider again our test case: an utterance by Ann to Bob of the sentence:

(15) I want to call my sister.

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[14] Advocates of a Context Change account of presupposition along these lines do not necessarily identify the context with the common ground. Heim 1983 writes (fn.4): "My files [the precursor to contexts in her theory] are closely related ... to Stalnaker's 'common grounds'." But by 1992, she says merely that contexts are "identified with states of information" (p.185). Similar shifts, or agnostic positions, can be seen in the work of other authors. However, I think that the standard conception of contexts for presupposition, at least within linguistics, identifies them with the conversational common ground.

[15] The context for interpretation will be distinct from the utterance context also in cases of complex sentences, as embedded clauses typically involve update of local contexts. These cases, although crucial to the working of the theory as a whole, are not relevant for the argument being developed here.

[16] For those who are convinced of the adequacy of the context change view, this will constitute an argument against the conversational derivation of presuppositions. But if my arguments have this effect, at the very least, the competing positions will be drawn a little more clearly.

In the scenario we are considering, Ann (of course) believes, prior to the utterance, that she has a sister; but she also believes that Bob does not believe (or disbelieve) that she has a sister. So, prior to the utterance, Ann does not believe that it is common ground that she has a sister. Now we construct the reasoning whereby it becomes common belief that Ann has a sister – Stalnaker's version of accommodation.

On the preliminary common ground view, we took accommodation to be driven by an assumption that utterance of the sentence indicates the speaker's belief that it is common ground that she has a sister. But on the sophisticated common ground view, we no longer take the utterance to be indicative of this belief. In trying to articulate a revision, Stalnaker (2002: fn.14) writes:

> The timing of the relevant beliefs [about the common ground] is a delicate matter. Exactly when must Alice have the relevant beliefs ... in order to be speaking appropriately?... The relevant time is a (perhaps somewhat idealized) point after the utterance event has taken place, but before it has been accepted or rejected.

On this formulation, the appropriateness of the utterance is determined by beliefs the speaker has *after* making her utterance. If, though, we want to characterize appropriateness in the more usual way, in terms of beliefs that the speaker has at the time of utterance, we can say this: that the utterance is appropriate only if the speaker believes (at the time of utterance) that it will be common ground at the relevant post-utterance point that she has a sister.[17]

This speaker condition is identical to that which follows from the licensing conditions posited on the Context Change Semantics view. But in contrast to the CCS view, Stalnaker avoids committing to any specific licensing condition to underlie the speaker condition. On his view, there may be a variety of reasons why sentences would be subject to this speaker condition. One possibility is, indeed, that the sentence may carry a conventional, semantic presupposition. But Stalnaker suggests that "one can explain many presupposition constraints in terms of general conversational rules without building anything about presuppositions into the meanings of particular words or constructions" (1974: 212).

Let us posit for the sake of argument that the existence presupposition of the definite *my sister* is such a non-conventional constraint. Thus, we are to imagine that the appropriateness condition involving beliefs about the post-utterance common ground can be attached to the sentence by virtue of conversational reasoning only. In other words: We must posit that the hearer is able to recognize that the speaker has said something which is appropriate only if she (the speaker) has a particular belief about the projected common ground. Notice that this is different from the claim that the hearer will recognize that the speaker simply *expects* it to be common ground after her utterance that she has a sister. (This would not differentiate presupposition from assertion.) The speaker does have this expectation; but according to the story, this expectation is supposed to be justified by the fact that it is only if she has the expectation that her utterance is licensed. But this licensing condition is to be inferred by the hearer, not associated by convention with the sentence uttered.

I would like to be able to offer here a conclusive argument that no such conversational inference is possible. I don't have one. But it seems to me that the account has become exquisitely complex, to say the least. This doesn't entail that it is incorrect – but perhaps once seen in its full complexity, the apparent intuitive appeal will be lessened. To give an account of conversationally generated presupposition on the common ground view, we must now construct some conversational reasoning

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[17] This is how von Fintel (2000) characterizes the speaker beliefs indicated by production of a presupposing utterance.

that has as its primary conclusion that utterance of S is appropriate only if the speaker has the belief that some proposition *p* will be common ground immediately after the utterance. But why should *future* common ground determine the conversational appropriateness of an utterance? What grounds could a speaker have for such a belief except that the utterance she has made constitutes evidence of her utterance-time belief that *p*?

Stalnaker's proposal seems coherent only if it is presumed, as in Heim's picture, that the speaker's beliefs about the projected common ground are based on knowledge of the conventional presuppositional properties of the sentence uttered, consisting of constraints imposed on the actual common ground. The proposal thus makes no allowance for conversationally derived presuppositional properties of utterances.

3 PRESUPPOSITION WITHOUT COMMON GROUND

3.1. An alternative view of presupposition

3.1.1. Preliminaries

In this section, I will propose an alternative view of what presupposition is, of what it means to say that a sentence, speaker, or utterance presupposes something. The proposal allows us to account for the basic properties of presupposition, while allowing for presupposition to have a variety of sources, including conversational inference.

I take the fundamental properties of presupposition to be these: On the one hand, presuppositions of sentences/utterances constitute a constraint of some kind on their use by a speaker. On the other hand, presuppositions constitute information for the hearer, but this information is conveyed in a way different from either assertion or standard cases of implicature. It is conveyed by virtue of the constraint imposed on the speaker.

The most general constraint to which speakers are subject is the requirement to be cooperative, in the sense of Grice 1967. Grice spelled out the Cooperative Principle in the four well-known maxims, and in much of the literature following this original work, there has been a tendency to take these maxims, or variants of them, as exhausting the requirements of cooperativity.[18] I want here to think about cooperativity in the broadest possible sense: being cooperative is doing whatever is required for conversation to be successful.

While it is the job of speakers to speak cooperatively, it is the job of interpreters to interpret speakers cooperatively: that is, to find an interpretation for utterances which renders the speaker cooperative. Let us call this job "making sense" of an utterance. The intent to make sense of an utterance is at the heart of the calculation of implicatures, in Grice's formulation. A crucial step in this calculation is the hearer's assumption that the speaker intends to speak cooperatively.

But in the course of assigning a cooperative interpretation to an utterance, additional assumptions may be required. In particular, an interpreter may need to attribute to a speaker certain

[18] Thomason (1990: fn.20), recalling that the proposal in Grice 1967 was offered as a rather preliminary outline and with some tentativeness about details, writes: "On the whole, I believe that linguists and computer scientists have taken the details of Grice's theory more seriously than they perhaps should have."

assumptions in the absence of which the utterance cannot be assigned a cooperative interpretation. Let's consider an example which demonstrates this:[19]

(16) Ann: Are we going to have a picnic?
Bob: It's raining.

This seems a straightforward example of a Relevance implicature: Bob has failed to give a directly relevant yes or no answer to Ann's yes/no question. The assumption that Bob intends to be relevant leads Ann to assume that his utterance can be interpreted as an answer. So, by some process of inference, she concludes that by telling her that it is raining, he means to convey that they should not have a picnic.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Simons 2004), this description of the implicature is not complete. There is an additional inference which Ann must make in order to grasp Bob's communicative intention. In order to derive the implicature, Ann must also be able to recognize that Bob is assuming a particular relationship between picnics and rain: namely, that one does not picnic in the rain. It is *only* if Ann can identify this assumption that she can calculate the intended conversational implicature. As illustration, imagine that you were to overhear the following conversation:

(17) Ann: Are we going to have a picnic?
Bob: There's a pear tree in my garden.

However certain you might be that Bob intends to speak cooperatively and relevantly, you will be able to understand his utterance as relevant only if you can identify some connection between picnics and the pear tree in his garden.

So, a more complete description of the derivation of the implicature in (1) would go as follows:

(18) (I) Content of B's utterance does not directly answer question.
(ii) But I presume B intends to be relevant.
(iii) Suppose B assumes that one doesn't picnic in the rain.
(iv) Then B's response would imply that we are not having a picnic, which answers the question.
Conclusion:
Assume: B assumes one does not picnic in the rain.
Conclude: B intends to communicate that we are not picnicking.

Bob's utterance is comprehensible as a cooperative contribution to the discourse only when the relevant background assumption is attributed to him. Consequently, the utterance serves, among other things, to let Ann know that Bob is making this assumption. It would not normally be part of Bob's communicative intention to convey that one does not picnic in the rain, and for this reason, Grice himself would not call this an implicature.[20] But clearly, the inferential process which allows this assumption to be identified makes use of the same machinery which generates true implicatures.

Other authors have noted that conversational inferences are sometimes about background

[19] I use the same example in Simons 2004.

[20] This reservation noted by Zoltan Gendler Szabo, p.c.

assumptions of the speaker. Thomason (1990) makes a distinction between background implicatures and foreground implicatures. On his view, background implicatures arise where the hearer identifies a proposition which needs to be part of the current conversational record in order for the current utterance to be appropriate. As Thomason takes presuppositions to involve constraints on the conversational record, his notion of background implicatures includes at least all the standard cases of presupposition accommodation. And indeed, the only examples Thomason gives of background implicatures involve standard presupposition triggers (*regret* and *know*).[21]

Thomason's notion of background implicatures, which invokes something like a presumed common ground, differs from my understanding of a required background assumption. My idea is closer to Sperber and Wilson's (1986) notion of an implicated assumption: a proposition which the hearer adds to the context relative to which she interprets an utterance, in order to derive what Sperber and Wilson call a maximally relevant interpretation. For Sperber and Wilson, the context is simply the set of propositions which the interpreter uses as premises in inferences involving the literal content of the utterance. Sperber and Wilson's notion of a maximally relevant interpretation corresponds to my notion of an utterance which is maximally cooperative.[22] In example (2) above, the background assumption I suggest must be attributed to the speaker would count as an implicated assumption in Sperber and Wilson's framework.

As noted earlier, the required background assumption of example (2) is distinct from the standard kind of implicature in that it is not part of the speaker's communicative intention to convey this proposition. On the other hand, a little investigation shows that the required background assumption does have typical properties of presupposition. To show this, we will work through four central properties of presupposition, and show that the conversationally generated inference to the required background assumption displays each of them.

Required background assumptions, like presuppositions, must be non-controversial; a controversial background implicature may induce a "presupposition denial" response.

It has been clearly established in the presupposition literature that a presupposition may be either old or new information; but if it is new information, then, if the conversation is to proceed entirely smoothly, it should be uncontroversial: information which the interpreter will accept *as* information, and will not be inclined to challenge.

The same is true of background assumptions. In the case of our picnic example, the proposition that one does not picnic in the rain might be something already established between Ann and Bob; or it might be introduced in this discourse. Ann might well be willing to go along with this assumption. But it's also imaginable that she would respond to Bob's utterance by saying:

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[21] On the other hand, Thomason offers a conversational/inferential account of the background implicature associated with *know*, at least as it occurs in cases where *know* is negated. So he does not seem to presume that background implicatures are triggered by a hearer's recognition of a *conventional* constraint on the conversational record.

I suspect that Thomason would posit that other cases unrelated to standard presupposition triggers might involve constraints on the conversational record, and thus could induce background implicatures. However, he does not discuss this.

[22] In Simons 2004, I sketched an account of presupposition in a Relevance Theoretic framework, according to which the presuppositions of a sentence S are those propositions which a hearer must accept in order to assign S a relevant interpretation. The current account is a revision of that earlier one.

(19) We can have a picnic in the rain!

which denies, not the content of the assertion, but the background assumption.

Background assumptions, like presuppositions, have the appearance of being taken for granted (i.e. treated as non-controversial, common ground information) by the speaker.

This is demonstrated by the example. It seems likely that the reason the background assumption seems to be taken for granted is that the speaker intends the interpreter to rely on it in deriving the foreground implicature; in Sperber and Wilson's terms, it is an implicated premise in a reasoning process which the speaker expects the interpreter to follow. A person who presents a proposition as a premise in an argument is in some sense taking it for granted.

Background assumptions, like presuppositions, usually have the status of background information, and are not the main point of an utterance. In some cases, though, they can be.

It would not normally be part of the communicative intention of a speaker uttering U to communicate the presuppositions of U; these are just part of the required background. Similarly, as noted, a speaker's background implicatures are not normally part of what she intends to convey. In both cases, the speaker's utterance of U provides evidence that the speaker assumes the presupposition or background implicature.

But there are cases where it is part of the speaker's communicative intention to convey the presuppositions or background implicatures of her utterance. Such cases tend to have an "exploitative" feel. Here is one standard example of this, involving presupposition:

(20) Camilla: The new guy is very attractive.
Duane: His wife will be glad to hear that you think so.

I don't think this requires further comment. Here is a parallel example involving a background implicature:

(21) Ann: Did George get in to a good school?
Bob: His father is a very rich man.

The foreground implicature of Bob's utterance is that George got in to a good school; this is derivable only given the identification of the background assumption that a place at a good school can be bought. And one can imagine conversational circumstances in which Bob would have a communicative intention with respect to this proposition.

Background implicatures, like presuppositions, survive embedding under entailment cancelling operators.

This is the most surprising and perhaps the most significant of the observations, and requires some demonstration. Recall our basic picnic example, repeated here:

(22) Ann: Are we going to have a picnic?
Bob: It's raining.

Now, suppose that Bob had instead said:

(23) Bob: It isn't raining.

The foreground implicature would in this case be different: Bob implicates something along the lines of "There's nothing to prevent us from having a picnic." To arrive at this implicature, though, Ann must still identify the same background implicature relating picnics and rain: that one does not picnic in the rain (or perhaps that one can picnic iff it is not raining).

Similarly, Bob might have responded with any of the following:

(24) a. It might rain.
b. Is it raining?
c. If it rains, we could have lunch at the café.

In each case, in order for Ann to understand the relevance of the utterance, she needs to identify the same background assumption, simply because in each case, Bob has responded to her question about a picnic by "saying something about" rain.

Now, it does seem rather odd in this case to talk about the implicatures "surviving embedding." But the other way of characterizing basic projection behavior is to say that presuppositions are shared by what Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (1990/2000) call a *family* of sentences, involving exactly the set of forms we have considered here. This characterization does seem perfectly appropriate to the case at hand.[23]

So, let us conclude that this background assumption indeed has the status of a presupposition. First consequence: this demonstrates that there are presuppositions which are derived by conversational inference. There can be no question that this presupposition is in no way part of the conventional content of the sentence whose utterance produces it. Now, in light of the conclusion of the previous section, that a conversationally derived informative presupposition could not be a constraint on the common ground, we are compelled to an alternative view.

3.1.2. The proposal

The proposal has in its essence already been spelled out. We have seen that the background assumption in this case is a proposition which the interpreter must take the speaker to *accept* in order to make sense of the utterance. The notion of acceptance I have in mind is that introduced by Stalnaker (1984), who characterizes acceptance as:

> a category of propositional attitudes and methodological stances toward a proposition, a category that includes belief, but also some attitudes (presumption, assumption, acceptance for the purposes of argument or an inquiry) that contrast with belief and with each other. To accept a proposition is to treat it as true for some reason.

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[23] It must be added that standard cases of presupposition also show typical patterns of cancellation (or non-projection): for example, if the antecedent of a conditional entails the usual presupposition of its consequent, then this presupposition is suppressed. These facts just don't seem replicable with background implicatures; I take it that this has something to do with their particular conversational role.

I propose that the case of background assumptions discussed above provides the model for presupposition generally: the presuppositions of an utterance U are those propositions which a hearer must take the speaker to accept in order to make sense of U; that is, to assign to U a fully cooperative interpretation.

This definition is not yet adequate to distinguish presupposition from assertions and implicatures; for of course, a cooperative speaker must accept the content of these speech acts too. Presuppositions are distinguished, as noted already, in not constituting part of the speaker's communicative intention. I utilize this in formulating the final definition:

Definition 1: Utterance presupposition
p is a presupposition of an utterance U iff:

(I) It is not part of the speaker's primary communicative intention to convey *p* and
(ii) the interpreter of U must take the speaker of U to accept *p* in order to make sense of U.

Some readers will already have observed that the first clause of this definition seems to run into difficulties with cases such as (5)-(6) above. We return to this in on p.8 below.

On the proposed view, it is utterances rather than speakers or sentences which are the primary bearers of presupposition. But derivative notions of speaker presupposition and sentence presupposition can be defined.

Definition 2: Speaker presupposition
A speaker S presupposes a proposition *p* in uttering U iff S intends U to have an interpretation which is fully cooperative only given her acceptance of *p*.

Note that this definition of speaker presupposition is utterance-relative. We can of course talk about what a speaker presupposes in a more general sense, as the propositions that a speaker accepts, or even that she believes to be common ground. But the utterance-relative notion is the one which is relevant to the phenomenon whereby hearers gain information about their interlocutors' acceptances in a systematic fashion.

Definition 3: Sentence presupposition
A sentence S presupposes *p* iff *p* is standardly a presupposition of cooperative utterances of U.

This definition is hedged by "standardly" to allow for the fact that very few so-called presuppositional sentences are invariably so. I find myself uncertain that this definition is terribly helpful, as I have no idea how we should define "standardly." So, like Stalnaker, I am disinclined to commit to any definition of sentence presupposition. However, something along the lines of Definition 3 might allow us to say why, for instance, we want to say that in example (7) above, Bob's *utterance* presupposes that one doesn't picnic in the rain, even though the sentence uttered does not.

The proposal made here is close in spirit to Stalnaker's original discussions of presupposition, in taking presupposition to spring from the basic cooperative nature of linguistic interactions. I differ from Stalnaker in moving away from the idea that cooperation involves active attempts to coordinate a common ground. Cooperativity is also central to Thomason's (1990) discussion of accommodation. He proposes that accommodation (in all its forms) is driven by a principle which requires interpreters "to eliminate obstacles to the detected plans of your interlocutor." On my view, presupposition accommodation does not involve eliminating obstacles. But it does involve recognizing the speaker's

plan, in particular, their plan to perform a speech act with a certain content, and possibly certain implicatures; and then applying a version of the Principle of Charity, taking them to accept whatever they must accept in order for that plan to be reasonable, rational and cooperative.

The first clause of the definition, which requires presuppositions to be excluded from the speaker's primary communicative intention, is reminiscent of a previous alternative to the common ground view, offered by Abbott 2000. Abbott proposes that presuppositions are propositions conveyed by an utterance but not asserted, where "what is asserted is what is presented as the main point of the utterance" (1431).[24] Her formulation, though, includes more than mine. Consider, for example, the case of non-restrictive relative clauses, as in the italicized clause below:

(25) With hardly any desktop footprint, iMac conceals all its working parts behind the gorgeous widescreen display, *which comes in both 17- and 20-inch sizes*.

On Abbott's view, the content of the relative clause is non-main point, and therefore presuppositional. However, it is plausible to say that the speaker/writer of (10) asserts (i.e. has a primary communicative intention to convey) both the content of the main clause and of the relative clause. Hence, on my account, the relative clause does not count as presupposed.

In addition, being non-main point is the sole defining characteristic of presuppositions on Abbott's account. In contrast, on my account, presuppositions are characterized principally in terms of how they come to be conveyed. Indeed, Abbott's treatment provides no account of why presuppositions are conveyed at all. Consider, for example, the sentence:

(26) Jane didn't leave the house.

On standard views, this sentence is taken *not* to entail that Jane was in the house.[25] So, there is no reason for this proposition – let's call it *JH* – to be conveyed by an utterance of the sentence. On the common ground view, an utterance of (11) conveys *JH* because (11) can only be evaluated relative to a common ground which entails *JH*. On my view, an utterance of (11) conveys *JH* because such an utterance would be fully cooperative only if the speaker accepted *JH*. But on Abbott's view, the account of presupposition does not itself provide any account of why *JH* should be conveyed; it tells us only that it will count as a presupposition if it is conveyed but is not main point. So Abbott's account requires an independent account of how *JH* comes to be conveyed by an utterance of (11).

3.2. Explaining presuppositional properties

One thing we want our account of presupposition to do is to allow for straightforward explanations of the central properties of the phenomenon. In this section, I sketch such explanations.[26]

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[24] See Simons (2006b) for an alternative view which insists on a distinction between what is asserted and main point content.

[25] See Atlas 1977 for alternative view.

[26] This section reiterates many of the observations and claims of Simons 2004.

Speaker commitment and hearer accommodation

Speakers are committed to acceptance of the presuppositions of their utterances. On the current account, the reason for this is definitional: presuppositions are propositions which a cooperative speaker *must* accept. The production of the utterance indeed counts as a commitment to acceptance of the required presuppositions: there is no other way for the interpreter to make sense of it.

Standardly, other discourse participants also come to accept the presuppositions of the utterances of others, even if they did not do so prior to the utterance. This is the process of accommodation. On my view, accommodation is the result of a general tendency of discourse participants to act cooperatively and to attempt to coordinate their beliefs (or acceptances).[27] If your utterance indicates that you accept *p*, and I am willing to do the same, then I will. And if you are aware that your utterance indicates this acceptance, then you can assume that following your utterance, I will share it. So, indeed, the presuppositions of a speaker's utterances may come to be mutually accepted – to be common ground, in Stalnaker's sense; but not by virtue of any initial common ground constraint.

Notice that this is essentially how Stalnaker understands accommodation too. In section 2 above, I reviewed Stalnaker's (2002) step-by-step account of how informative presuppositions result in a change in the common ground. On this account, the interpreter first observes that the speaker believes some proposition *p* to be common ground; and from this, infers that the speaker herself believes (or accepts) *p*. Given that the interpreter takes the speaker to be an authority with respect to *p*, the interpreter takes on the same belief. So, for Stalnaker, accommodation is a matter of discourse participants coordinating their first order beliefs; second order beliefs about the common ground are a consequence of this first order coordination.

Backgrounding

The proposed characterization of presuppositions explains the intuition that presuppositions are "backgrounded," or "non-main-point." They are by definition *not* part of the speaker's communicative intention, but they are required prior acceptances of the speaker.

Sometimes, though, presuppositions do have main point status, as in example (5) above. And in such cases, the speaker clearly intends to convey the content of the presupposition to the addressee. So this seems to undermine the proffered definition.

In example (5), and all other cases where a presupposition has main point status, the speaker is being intentionally indirect, and is exploiting the presuppositional requirements of the utterance.[28] Note that I am distinguishing here between main point presuppositions, and ordinary cases of informative presupposition. If I tell you "I have to take my dog to the vet," I may be aware that as a result of this utterance you will come to believe that I have a dog. However, this is an unavoidable by-product of my utterance. My communicative interest is merely to tell you that I have to go somewhere. So, I don't consider this sort of case to involve indirection.

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[27] I use the term "acceptances" to refer to accepted propositions. To quote Austin: "This is rather an ugly word, and a new word, but there seems to be no word already in existence to do the job." (Austin 1970, of the word "performative".)

[28] Some readers might wonder about the case of embedded announcements, such as "We regret that we cannot accommodate pets." It is standard to say that (utterances of) such sentences presuppose the content of the complement, although this is clearly the main point. But see Simons forthcoming for an argument that the complement of embedded announcements is not presupposed.

The special feature of exploitative cases like (5) is that the *ostensible* main point of the utterance is distinct from its *actual* or *intended* main point. The main point of Duane's utterance in (5) *could be* the asserted content, for this content constitutes a perfectly reasonable response to the previous remark. But presumably, in the circumstances envisaged, Duane is aware that the presupposition that the guy has a wife will be the fact of greatest current interest to Camilla; and Camilla, in her turn, will probably recognize that Duane knows this. Hence, the utterance will come to be recognized as intended to inform Camilla that the guy has a wife.

The case might be thought of as similar to one in which, say, I tell someone "Your phone is ringing" with the intention that they answer their phone. For such cases, Grice (1989: 221) distinguishes between the primary (communicative) intention of an utterer and the secondary intention. Similarly, I would suggest that when a speaker produces an utterance with the specific intention of communicating what is presupposed, this intention must be viewed as a secondary intention. This is why the definition above refers to the speaker's *primary* communicative intention.

Noncontroversiality

Under the proposed thesis, presuppositions are not required to have common ground status. However, the thesis provides a straightforward explanation of why there would be a tendency on the part of speakers to produce utterances whose presuppositions are in fact shared information, or are at least highly non-controversial. Speakers are presumed to intend to be cooperative (in the broadest sense), and by definition presuppositions are propositions they must be presumed to accept in order for their utterance to be cooperative. Hence, speakers commit to acceptance of the presuppositions of their utterances. If they know these presuppositions to be controversial, then they can expect challenges on propositions which do not (in the usual case) form part of their communicative intention. In other words, speakers know that if their utterances have controversial presuppositions, their conversational goals are likely to get side-tracked.

Moreover, speakers want their utterances to be recognized as cooperative, as "making sense." The easier it is for their addressees to identify the required presuppositions, the easier it will be for them to make sense of the utterance. And presumably, it is easier to identify as a required presupposition a familiar proposition, already known to be true, than an unfamiliar one.

Defeasibilty

Another well known property of presuppositions is that they are often (although not always) defeasible. There are three fairly familiar sorts of situations in which this occurs.

- When presuppositions are explicitly denied
  Example: The King of France isn't bald — there *is* no King of France!
- When a (normally) presupposing clause is embedded in certain linguistic environments.
  Example: Either there is no king of France, or the king of France is bald.
- When the normal presupposition of a clause or sentence is incompatible with conversational implicatures or other contextual assumptions.
  Example: [Context: speaker and hearer both know that speaker does not know Maud's whereabouts, but knows that Harold is looking for her.]
  If Harold discovers that Maud is in New York, he'll be furious.

All of these types of cancellation are compatible with the view of presuppositions as required acceptances of the speaker. The basic idea in each case would be that the cooperativity of the utterance as a whole is incompatible with the potential presupposition. In the first case, the explicit denial makes clear that speaker does not accept that there is a king of France. In the second case, the addressee cannot attribute to the speaker acceptance of the proposition that there is a king of France. If the speaker did accept this proposition, then she could not accept the content of the first disjunct; and it is infelicitous (by virtue of general conditions of cooperativity) to utter a disjunction any disjunct of which is already being treated as not true. In the third case, extra-linguistic factors – the addressee's knowledge about the speaker's background knowledge and about the goals of the discourse – again disallow attribution to her of acceptance of the proposition that Maud is in New York. As the utterance has an acceptable interpretation in the absence of this commitment on the part of the speaker, this interpretation is adopted.

Finally, consider the additional type of cancellation discussed in section 1. We considered a case where a researcher is conducting a study on the effects of quitting smoking. A potential subject says to her: "I'm sorry, I'm no use to you for this study. I haven't stopped smoking." As I pointed out above, in these circumstances the utterance is neutral as to whether the speaker has never smoked or is an unrepentant smoker. The presupposition is lacking, I suggest, because in this situation, the utterance is equally cooperative whichever is the case.

Variety of strength of presuppositions

Many authors, probably beginning with Stalnaker (1974:205), have observed that presuppositionality seems to come in different degrees. As Stalnaker observes:

> Sometimes no sense at all can be made of a statement unless one assumes that the speaker is making a certain presupposition. In other cases, it is mildly suggested by a speech act that the speaker is taking a certain assumption for granted, but the suggestion is easily defeated by countervailing evidence.

Stalnaker claims for his pragmatic account the advantage that it predicts such variation. The pragmatic account suggested here has the same advantage. For there are different degrees of failures of cooperativity. The worse the consequences of the failure to be fully cooperative, the stronger will be the assumption on the part of the interpreter that the speaker accepts whatever proposition is required to avoid that failure.

Projection

The great accomplishment of accounts of presupposition in dynamic semantics has been to provide an account and successful model of the projection behavior of presupposition. At the core of these models is the presumption that presuppositions attach (conventionally) to atomic clauses; thus subordinate clauses can impose the same presuppositional requirements as independent ones.

The approach proposed here, though, characterizes presupposition in terms of requirements of whole utterances; so it is undoubtedly a challenge to account for the fact that the presuppositions of atomic sentences are shared, in many cases, by complex sentences which embed them. However, the picnic example in section 3.1. above shows that even when we are dealing with a presupposition clearly generated via conversational inference, this sharing of a presupposition by a family of sentences does occur.

I believe that the explanatory solution to the projection problem lies in this suggestion by Stalnaker (1974, p.205):

> The propositions that P and that Q may be related to each other, and to common beliefs and intentions, in such a way that it is hard to think of a reason that anyone would raise the question whether P, or care about its answer, unless he already believed that Q.[29]

We can in many cases see a subordinate clause as "raising a question." If we think of raising a question as something like making a particular proposition available for discussion, all of the following are ways of raising the question of whether Jane has left.

(27) Jane has left Pittsburgh.
(28) Jane has not left Pittsburgh.
(29) Has Jane left Pittsburgh?
(30) If Jane has left Pittsburgh, she will call me later.
(31) Jane might have left Pittsburgh.
(32) Bill hopes that Jane has left Pittsburgh.

It is plausible that it is reasonable (and therefore conversationally cooperative) for a speaker to raise this question only if she believes (accepts) that Jane had previously been in Pittsburgh. And so this would provide an explanation of the fact that all of these sentences share that presupposition.[30] Of course, this approach can be evaluated only in light of a fully explicit account of particular cases.

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[29] It is worth noting that Stalnaker himself here writes of the condition on appropriate utterance being the speaker's belief that *p*, not the speaker's belief that *p* is common ground.

[30] For further discussion along these lines, see Simons 2001.

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