INTRODUCTION

Observation
• Standard presuppositions sometimes don’t project when there is Contrastive Focus (CF) on the trigger (see, e.g., Simons et al. 2016 on factive verbs):

(1) a. John doesn’t know that Mary is pregnant.
   → Mary is pregnant.
   b. John doesn’t [know]$_t$ that Mary is pregnant, he only [thinks]$_t$ that she is.
   → Mary is pregnant.

• Schlenker (2016) argues that co-speech gestures trigger assertion-dependent presuppositions (cosuppositions) of the form if p, g, where p is the verbal expression the gesture co-occurs with and g is the content of the gesture (2a). Such cosuppositions sometimes don’t project under CF either (observation due to Rob Fasternak (p.c.)), in particular, when the CF-ed gesture-word clusters have identical verbal content and differ in gestural content only (2b).

(2) a. None of these ten soldiers [killed]$_{SHOOT}$ themselves.
   → For each of these ten soldiers, if he was to kill himself, he would shoot himself.
   b. None of these ten soldiers [killed]$_{SHOOT}$, himself, each of them [killed]$_{STAB}$ themselves.
   → For each of these ten soldiers, if he was to kill himself, he would shoot himself.

Question
• Non-projection in (1b) and (2b) can be derived via local accommodation.

MORE DATA

Standard triggers
• Non-projection obtains under CF for:
  - know vs. think: same assertive content, different presuppositional content (1b);
  - start vs. stop: different assertive content, contradictory presuppositional content (4a).
• Non-projection doesn’t obtain for:
  - stop vs. take a break from: different assertive content, same presuppositional content (4b);
  - stop vs. hate: different assertive content, non-contradictory presuppositional content (4c).

(4) a. If John [stopped]$_t$ smoking, I’ll give you $10, but if he [started]$_t$ smoking, I won’t.
   → John used to smoke.
   b. If John [stopped]$_t$ smoking, I’ll give you $10, but if he’s just [taking a break]$_t$ from smoking, I won’t.
   → John used to smoke.
   c. Although John didn’t [stop]$_t$ smoking, he began to [hate]$_t$ smoking.
   → John used to smoke.

• Even ‘strong’ triggers can exhibit the relevant contrast:

(5) a. If John [regrets]$_t$: cheating on his wife, I’ll remain friends with him, but if he [takes pride]$_t$ in it, I won’t.
   → John cheated on his wife.
   b. Context: a psychotherapy group whose participants all either regret cheating on their wives or (i) lie / (ii) claim that they cheated.
   Does John [regret]$_t$: cheating on his wife or does he [(i) lie / (ii) claim]$_t$: that he cheated on his wife?
   → John cheated on his wife.

Co-speech gestures
• Same verbal content: cosuppositions don’t project (2b), (6a).
• Contrastive verbal content: cosuppositions project (6b).

(6) a. If you bring me a [beer]$_{SMALL}$, I’ll finish it, but if you bring me a [beer]$_{LARGE}$, I’ll have to share it.
   → If you bring me a beer, it will be small/large.
   b. If you bring me a [beer]$_{LARGE}$, I’ll finish it, but if you bring me a [cocktail]$_{SMALL}$, I’ll have to share it.
   → If you bring me a beer, it will be large; if you bring me a cocktail, it will be small.

APPLYING AAP

Standard triggers
• Contradictory presuppositional content (stop vs. start): the same common ground can’t entail both p and not p, thus, both presuppositions have to be treated as part of the assertion.
• Same assertive content, different presuppositional content (know vs. think):
  - Think that p gives rise to an anti-factive inference, typically attributed to some version of Maximize Presupposition (e.g., Sauerland 2008), but it’s unclear how it would apply here (if at all).
  - I propose that CF is interpreted exhaustively with respect to the salient alternatives: if p is the presuppositional content, and p$'$ is the assertive one, p$'$ and not pp$'$ (= p$'$ and p and not p$'$) is a contradiction. Thus, p should be treated as part of the assertion (p$'$ and not p$'$) is not a contradiction and entails not p$'$.

Co-speech gestures
• Both explanations above can apply to examples like (2b) and (6a):
  - The assertive (verbal) content of the alternatives is the same; pp$'$ and not pp$'$ is a contradiction, p and p$'$ and not (q and p$'$) isn’t.
  - The inferences triggered by the gestures are mutually exclusive and cannot be entailed by the same common ground.
  - Examples with contrastive gestures triggering non-mutually-exclusive inferences are hard to construct, and I leave exploration of them for future research.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION

• Potential alternative principle:
  (7) Contrast cannot be due to non-at-issue content.
• Possibly relevant: non-restrictive relative clauses and post-speech gestures (also analyzed as supplements in Schlenker 2016):

(8) a. I like beer that is alcoholic, and I like beer that is foamy.
   b. #I like beer, which (by the way) is alcoholic, and I like beer, which (by the way) is foamy.
(9) a. Some soldiers [killed]$_{SHOOT}$ themselves, and some soldiers [killed]$_{STAB}$ themselves.
   b. #Some soldiers killed themselves — SHOOT, and some soldiers killed themselves — STAB.
• AAP doesn’t derive (8b), but (7) doesn’t derive (4a).

SELECTED REFERENCES


PROPOSAL

• I argue that CF doesn’t automatically cause non-projection, rather presupposition behavior under CF depends on the nature of the relevant alternatives. I propose the following principle:

(3) Alternative Assertability Principle (AAP)
All relevant Focus alternatives should be assertible with respect to the same common ground.

• Consequence: if a presupposition of an alternative hinders assertibility of some other alternative, it can’t project and should be treated as part of the assertion, hence local accommodation.