



# Not accommodating what you already know

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# Presuppositions

- Approximately, prior conditions for assertions to have a truth-value
  - *The King of France is (not) bald*: existential presupposition
- Also “triggered” by expressions such as *stop, continue, still, again, regret, know...*
  - *Jane knows that [p]*
  - *Jane doesn't know that [p]*
  - *John stopped [X]-ing*
  - *John didn't stop [X]-ing*

# Projection

- Presuppositions canonically project from under the scope of negation (up to the discourse level)
- This makes sense with respect to the informal definition just now:
  - If you need a proposition to hold in order for assertion A to have a truth-value, you also need it to hold in order for not-A to have a truth-value
  - *The King of France is (not) bald* requires KoF to exist
- Distinguishes presuppositions from, e.g., implicature
  - “Some” +> “not all”; “some...not” +> “not none”

# Accommodation

- Presuppositions can be common ground at the time of utterance, but don't have to be
  - *John quit smoking*
  - *A friend of mine recently quit smoking*
- Hearers can accommodate presuppositions that are not CG, adding these to their discourse model
- Hence presupposition can be used to introduce new information
  - *I just found out that Claudia got a professorship*

# Backgrounding

- Information introduced by presupposition is generally not highly addressable (*backgrounded, not at issue*)
- Trick questions can thus arise
  - *Have you finished embezzling your funding yet?*
  - Direct “yes” or “no” responses seem to endorse the presupposition
  - Denial requires some kind of circumlocution, such as the “Hey, wait a minute...” of Von Fintel (2004)

# Flexible projection mechanisms?

- Issue: how do we explain variability in projection behaviour (and so-called 'local accommodation')?
- Concretely, why is it quite felicitous to say
  - *John didn't quit smoking; he has never smoked*
  - *Mary didn't meet Jill again; they never met before*
  - *Elaine didn't realise that she had won; she hadn't?*
- Or, why is it infelicitous to say
  - *John quit smoking; he has never smoked*
  - *Mary met Jill again; they never met before*
  - *Elaine realised that she had won; she hadn't?*

# Inevitable analogy

- For implicatures (e.g. *some* +> *not all*), the enrichment isn't always appropriate, for various reasons
- How do we proceed?
  - Assume the implicature, and back-track if necessary (the default account)?
  - Wait to see whether the conditions are met, thus avoiding unnecessary processing steps but achieving slower results (the contextualist account)?
  - If the latter, when exactly do we start?

# First experimental steps

- Paradigm cases for experimental pragmatics those in which
  1. there is agreement about the end result (interpretation)
  2. there are competing theories as to how we get there
  3. these theories make different predictions about time-course
- Studies of presupposition are still at stage 1...
- Hence, focusing here on the circumstances that lead to presupposition (non-)projection; in particular
  - Variability between triggers
  - Relevant aspects of prior context



# Variability between triggers

- It would be convenient to assume that all presupposition triggers behave similarly in projection
  - Theoretically, a unified analysis would suffice
  - Experimentally, we could make wide-ranging generalisations
- Implicature studies have tended to assume this consistency and fixated on *<some, all>* (and to some extent *<or, and>*)
  - Recent evidence (Geurts et al. in press) suggests that there are huge differences between the behaviour of different triggers
  - *<some, all>* is atypical

# Presupposition diversity?

- Could we have “scalar diversity” for presuppositions?
- Intuitively, very possibly:
  - *I just **found out** that it's going to rain tomorrow*
  - *It's raining **again***
- Informally, some triggers can be used more easily than others specifically to convey their presuppositions

# Presupposition taxonomies

- Various theoretical attempts made
- Zeevat (1992): three categories of trigger
  - Resolution/anaphoric, e.g. definite descriptions, *when, after*
  - Lexical, e.g. *stop, continue*
  - Bookkeeping, e.g. *again, too*
- Resolution and lexical triggers are argued to require different analyses
  - We'll assimilate bookkeeping triggers to the resolution class
  - *Mary saw John again vs.*  
*Mary stopped smoking / The King of France is bald*

# Experimental evidence?

- Are there experimental correlates of this distinction?
- Two reasons to explore this:
  - Reassurance of knowing that real speakers/hearers behave in a way that respects analysts' intuitions...
  - Possibility of drawing out finer distinctions than we can obtain by introspection (especially when dealing with gradient phenomena)
- Ongoing work with Patrícia Amaral and Napoleon Katsos

# General prediction

- Lexical triggers render their presuppositions more accessible than resolution triggers do
  - Argued on the basis that presupposition failure permits the negation of a lexical trigger, but not a resolution one:

*Did Mary quit smoking?*

*No, because she never used to smoke*

*Did Mary see John again?*

? *No, because she never saw him before*

# Design

- Dialogue fragments rated on a 5-point Likert scale
- 2x2 design of continuations: ps.-affirming or -denying, affirmative or negative response

*Did Mary stop smoking?*

*i. Yes, she stopped smoking*

*ii. No, she still smokes*

*iii. Yes, although she didn't use to smoke*

*iv. No, because she never smoked before*

# Predictions

- (i) and (ii) preferable to (iii) and (iv)
- (iv) preferable to (iii) for lexical triggers
- (iii) preferable to (iv) for resolution triggers

*Did Mary stop smoking?*

*i. Yes, she stopped smoking*

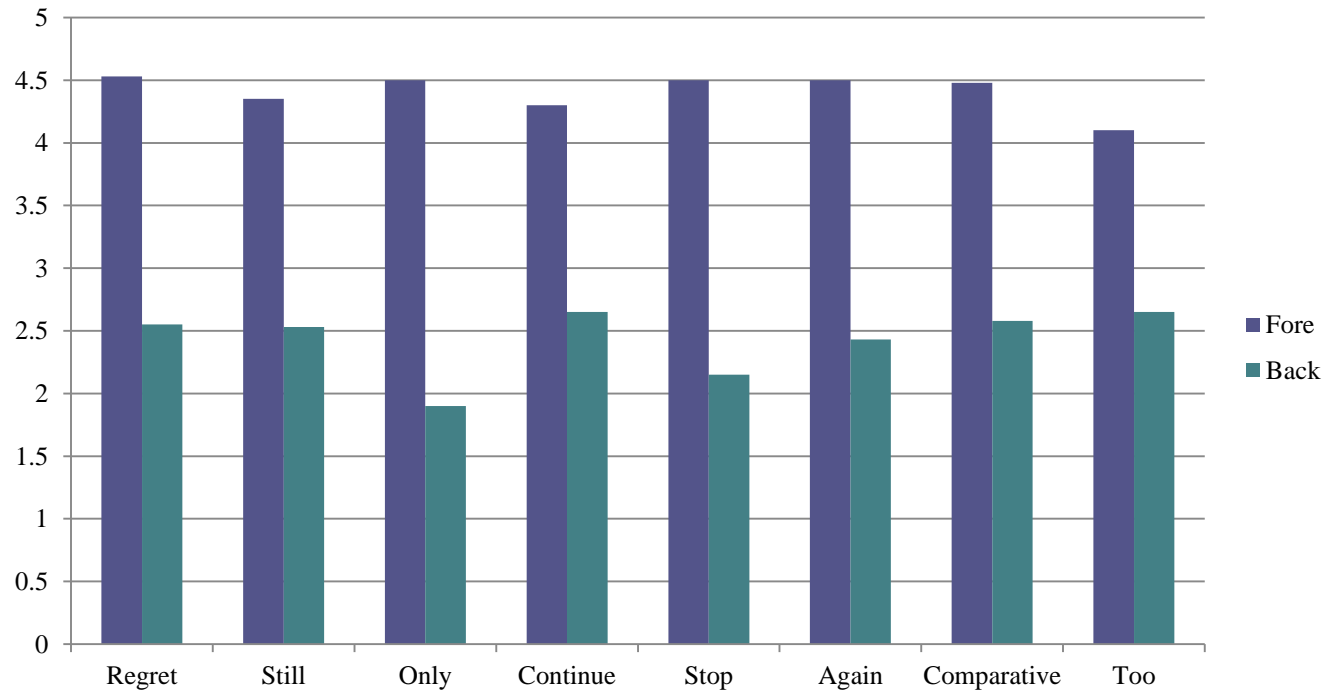
*ii. No, she still smokes*

*iii. Yes, although she didn't use to smoke*

*iv. No, because she never smoked before*

# Results

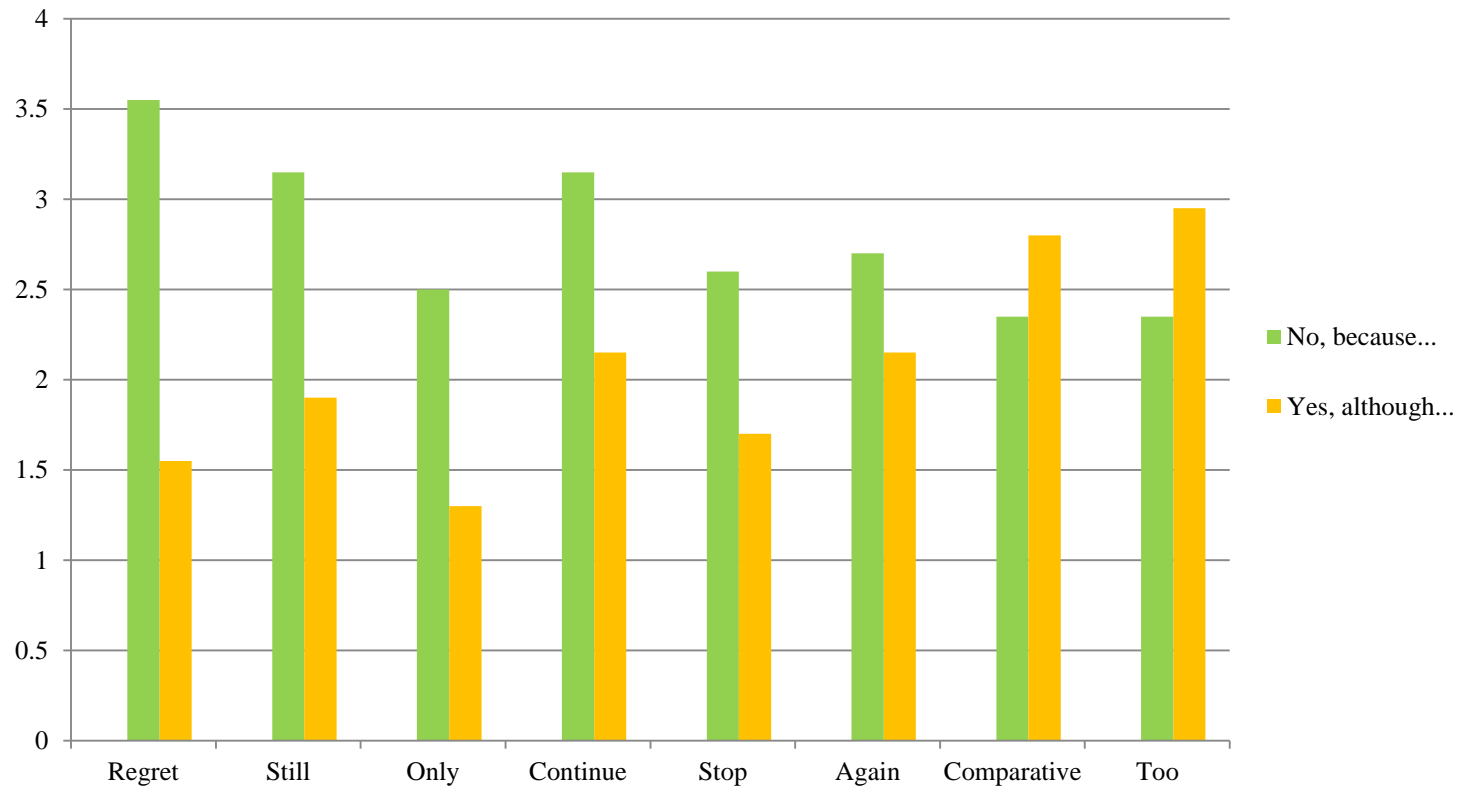
Cummins, Amaral & Katsos (2012)





# Results

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# Results

- (i) and (ii) preferable to (iii) and (iv)
- (iv) preferable to (iii) for lexical triggers
- (iii) preferable to (iv) for resolution triggers  $\approx$

And possible **gradience**?

*Did Mary stop smoking?*

*i. Yes, she stopped smoking*

*ii. No, she still smokes*

*iii. Yes, although she didn't use to smoke*

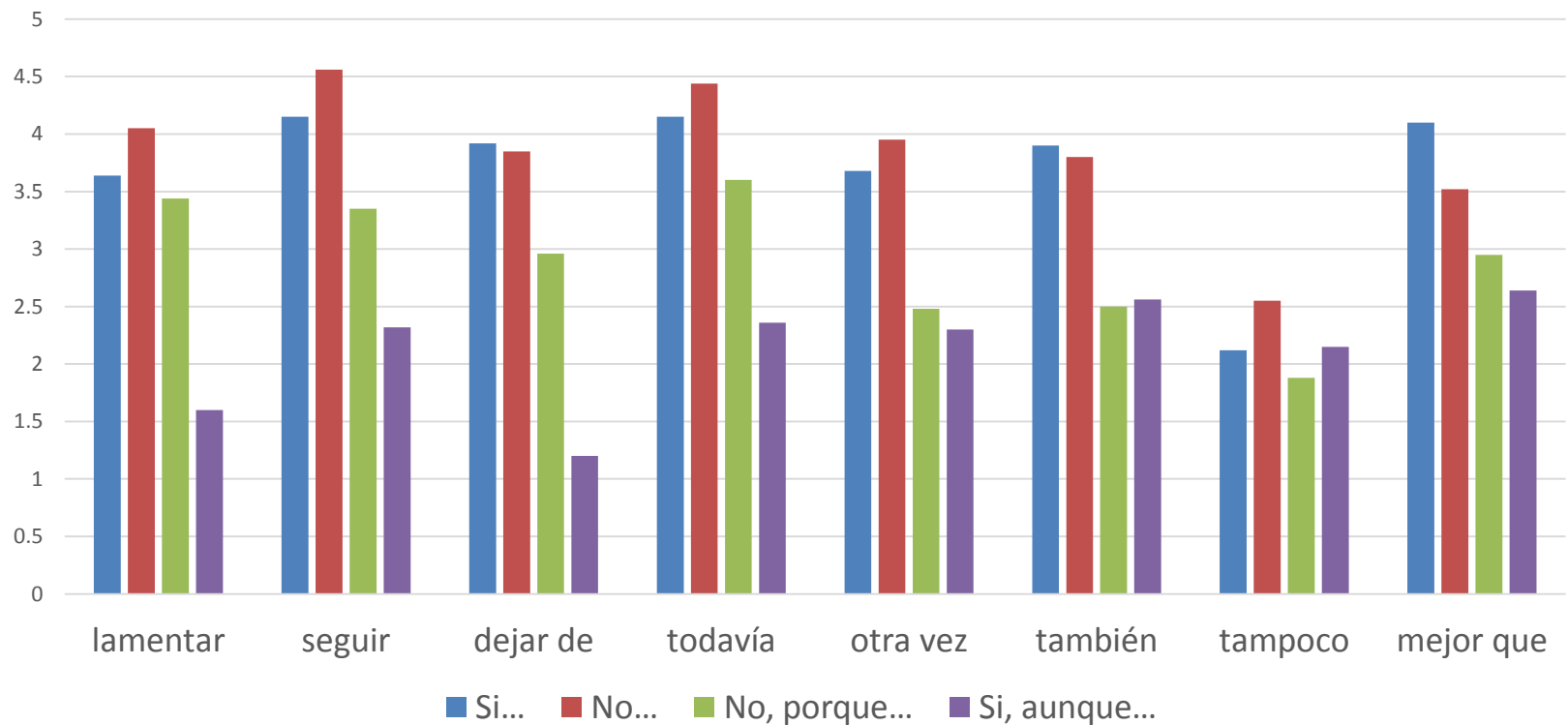
*iv. No, because she never smoked before*

# Cross-linguistic pattern?

- Theoretical analyses mostly advanced with respect to English (and to some extent Dutch)
- Claimed patterns derive from language-independent logical principles
- Do we get the same pattern for other languages?

# Results for Spanish

## Amaral and Cummins (submitted)



# Translation equivalence

- Similar pattern for English and Spanish, with respect to Zeevat's proposed typology
- Possible evidence for gradience
- Open question of whether apparent translation equivalents are located at the same place on these clines
  - If not, are these really translation equivalents, or is something being lost?

# Role of context

- A belated attempt to explain the title of this talk  
(“Not accommodating what you already know”)
- Previously (as in much experimental work) have assumed that triggers appear “out of the blue”
- Some advantages experimentally:
  - Tighter control
  - Greater possibility for generalisation
- But some disadvantages:
  - Maybe specific contextual support is required for these examples
  - Participants may attempt to guess a prior context (cf. Breheny et al. 2006, again for the case of implicature)

# Repeating triggers

- Idea: maybe presuppositions are not projected in cases where the triggers have already been used
- Could it only be felicitous to say
  - *John didn't quit smoking; he has never smoked*
  - *Mary didn't meet Jill again; they never met before*
  - *Elaine didn't realise that she had won; she hadn't?*if the QUDs associated with the triggers are already broached?

# Significance of repetition

- On this analysis, “local accommodation” would be a special case
- It would suggest a possible strategy for projection:
  - Project at once if the trigger occurs out of the blue
  - Otherwise, wait and see
- Similarly to implicature, repetition suggests that the speaker is not as committed to the choice of words
  - Maybe they’re used because they were primed
  - Maybe they’re used to address a particular QUD
  - Maybe they’re used quotatively
- In any case, pragmatic effects would be weakened



# Repeating triggers and epistemic state

- Consider the exchange
  - A: *Why did John quit smoking?*
  - B: *John didn't quit smoking; he has never smoked.*
- Here, B seems to attempt to project A's presupposition, finds a clash, and corrects this
- An overhearer C could reasonably project A's presupposition
  - Then B's initial utterance wouldn't provoke any change in C's state
  - B's continuation then cancels A's presupposition, not B's
- Claim amenable to experimental testing (future work...)

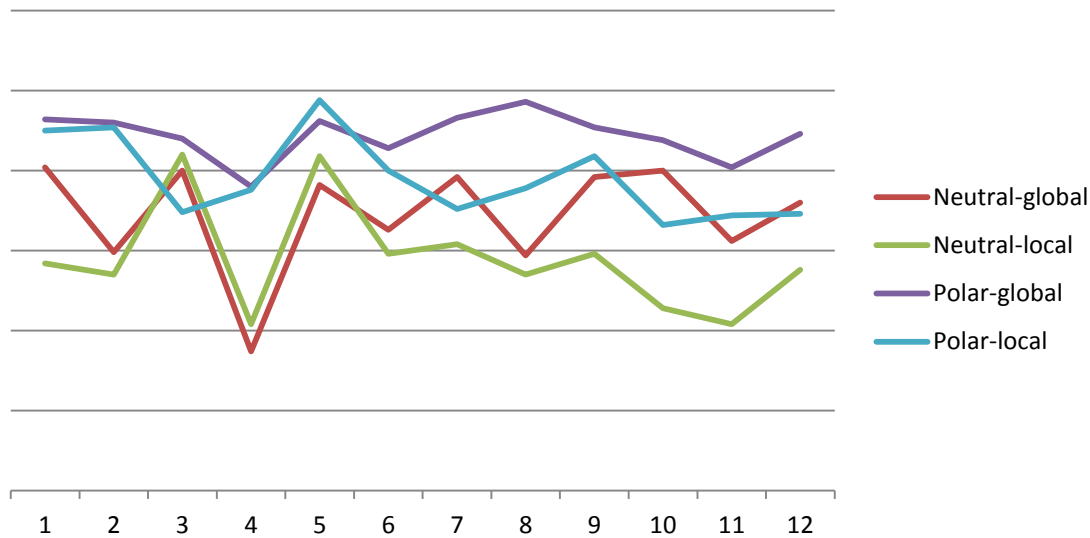
# Pilot study

- Presupposition-triggering sentences placed as responses in mini-dialogues
- Four conditions
  - A: What about Mary? / Did Mary manage to solve the problem?*
  - B: Mary didn't manage to solve the problem/(; she did it easily).*
- MTurk, 4 versions, 25 participants per condition
- Magnitude estimation (numerical): 10 set as baseline
- Naturalness rating

# Pilot study

	Global response	Local response
Neutral question	6.89	5.80
Polar question	8.88	7.81

9.06 felicitous control  
3.01 infelicitous control



# Interpretation(s)

- Supports the suggestion that “local accommodation” does require prior use of the trigger to be felicitous
- However, there are two main effects here, prior mention and type of accommodation
- So perhaps this conclusion is illusory
  - What would happen with better materials?
  - Are people still imagining licensing contexts?
- Even so, the results give us an impression of why that intuition about local accommodation might arise...

# Interim summary

- Evidence of variability between triggers
- Some evidence of contextual effects
- What about the interaction between these factors?

# Rational inferences?

- Goodman and Stuhlmüller (2013) – rational speech-act theory
  - “Listeners assume that speakers choose their utterances approximately optimally, and listeners interpret an utterance by using Bayesian inference to “invert” this model of the speaker”
- For presuppositions, speakers must have some reason to use a trigger, but this needn't be to convey the ps.
  - Could be low-level priming
  - Could be QUD / discourse coherence management
  - Could be metalinguistic / quotative [cf. “badgers moving goalposts”]

# Alternatives

- Whether the use of a trigger is justified depends on the availability of alternatives
- This varies across the set of triggers
  - *I know that my Redeemer liveth*
    - believe, think, suspect...
  - *John saw Mary again*
    - (null)
  - *Bill quit smoking*
    - ?
- For a rational hearer, the availability of alternatives should influence the inferences drawn, in specific ways

# Conclusion, for now

- Variability between triggers, in terms of propensity for projection
- Influenced by context
  
- Consequences of this difficult to grasp experimentally

**Disappointingly  
noncommittal**

**Blatantly  
unhelpful**



# Thank you!

- Thanks also to the Euro-XPRAG network and to the Bielefelder Nachwuchsfonds for their support