Can we kill the king of France?

Emmanuel Chemla

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The problem

■ **First example**

(1) John knows that it's raining.
    a. Assertion: John believes that it's raining.
    b. Presupposition: It's raining.

■ **Questions**

▶ What is the status of this information?
(common ground, shared belief, background, easy to agree upon)
▶ What tests do we have?

■ **Theoretical interest**

Triggering problem, projection problem...

Common ground and accommodation

■ **Common ground**

(2) John knows that it's raining.

A sentence is felicitous only if its presupposition is common ground prior to its utterance.

■ **This can't be**

(3) I'm sorry I'm late, I had to pick up **my cat** to the vet.

■ **Refinement: late common ground, easy agreement**

A sentence is felicitous only if its presupposition *would* become common ground at some early point after its utterance.

Late common ground

■ **Technically**

▶ If a speaker makes it common ground that s/he believes that p is common ground (or shared belief);
▶ and if the hearer believes that p is true.

→ Then p becomes common ground.

Test 1: Complaints

Complaints for something which is not (easily) common ground.

■ **Hey wait a minute**

(4) – John knows that it's raining.
    – Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know **it was raining**.

■ **Not specific enough**

(5) – John is married and Mary knows it.
    – Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know **he was married**.
(6) – John is married and I love him.
    – Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know **he was married**.
(7) – John didn't kill all his students.
    – Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know **he killed any student**.

Test 2: Impossible reinforcement

■ **Must-test**

If s assumes that p is/will become common ground, it should be impossible to reinforce this statement more explicitly:
(8) – John knows that it's raining.
    – **It** must **be raining**.

■ **Not specific enough...**

(9) – John is married and Mary knows it.
    – **John** must **be married**.
(10) – John is married and I love him.
    – **John** must **be married**.
(11) – John didn't kill all his students.
    – **John** must **have killed some of his students**.

Test 3: projection

■ **Resistance against a series of linguistic operators**

(12) a. John knows that he's lucky.
    b. John does**n't** know that he's lucky.
    c. **Does** John know that he's lucky**?**

    ⤳ John is lucky

Issue with the projection test

■ **What do they say about the status?**

These tests crucially rely on the fact that presuppositions trigger **inferences**.

■ **Some sentences are difficult to embed**

Conditionals, questions, exclamatives, polarity items...

(Although the test can be somewhat refined)

■ **How specific are they?**

Specificity of the projection tests: negation

■ **Negation**

(13) a. John knows it's raining.   It's raining.
    b. John does**n't** know it's raining.   It's raining.

■ **Quite generally**

Entailments become scalar implicatures under negation:

(14) a. John ate some of the cookies.   not all
    b. John did**n't** eat any of the cookies.   not all
(15) a. John ate all the cookies.   He ate some.
    b. John did**n't** eat all the cookies.   He ate some.

■ **The negation test alone is not specific enough**

Specificity of the projection tests: questions

■ **Negation**

(16) a. John knows it's raining.   It's raining.
      b. Does John know that it's raining?   It's raining.

■ **Scalar implicatures?**

(17) a. John ate some of the cookies.   not all
      b. Did John eat any of the cookies?   not all

(18) a. John ate all the cookies.   He ate some.
          (John didn't eat all the cookies.   He ate some)
      b. Did John eat all the cookies?   He ate some.

■ **So?**

  ▶ Gricean approach of SI based on quantity
  ▶ The test is not specific enough

Specificity of the projection tests: quantifiers

■ **Presuppositions**

(19) **None** of them **knows** that **he**'s lucky.

                                    Each of them is lucky.

■ **Scalar implicatures?**

(20) **None** of them ate **all his** (own) cookies.

                        Some of them ate some of his cookies.
                        *****Each** of them ate some of his cookies.

■ **Some scalar implicatures?**

(21) **None** of these 10 teachers killed **all his** students.

                        Some of them killed some of his students.
                        Each of them killed some of his students.

So far

■ **Summary**

  ▶ No test seems to be entirely specific to presupposition.
  ▶ No test provides a clear understanding of the specific status of presupposition.
  ▶ Presup. do not differ much from (some) scalar implicatures.

■ **Possible solutions**

  1) Presuppositions do not exist.
  2) Presuppositions can show up everywhere.
  (pragmatic presuppositions)

A rough attempt

■ **Intuition**

  Presuppositions are inferences. When the inference differs too much from the assertion, it acquires a special status (backgrounding?).

  Complex information (A + B) is difficult to 'process' if A and B differ.

■ **Illustration**

Triggers	Asertion	Inference	Link	Status
Factives	Belief	World	low	strong trigger
Change of state	present	past	medium	weak trigger
Scalar items	x	x^+	high	implicature

Conclusions

■ **Methodologically**

  Single tests are not very powerful, and not very informative.

■ **Theoretically**

  ▶ The triggering problem (lexicon)
  ▶ Link between the triggering problem and the projection problem