

Craige Roberts

**Meaning postulates in lexical pragmatics:
Background vs. presupposition**

ABSTRACT

In work on *only* (Roberts 2006,2011), I argued that in *Only Mary came* the prejacent *Mary came* is neither presupposed, proffered nor conversationally implicated. Instead, it is a background entailment, something that speakers take for granted in the local context of utterance in which the clause is interpreted. This content may project or not, as a function of various contextual factors; but it is robustly locally entailed to be true. Similarly, the complements of purportedly factive predicates like *know* and *annoy* are often informative, forcing presuppositional accounts of factivity—according to which the felicity of utterances containing these predicates requires that their complements be entailed by the interlocutors' Common Ground—to invoke accommodation. But why is accommodation so freely available in these cases, but much more difficult with anaphoric triggers? Further, recent experimental work on projection in clause-embedding predicates argues that whether or not a given verb is traditionally classed as factive, contextual factors including the QUD and prior expectations about real world scenarios play an important role in determining whether the verb's complement will project in a given utterance. (See Tonhauser & Degen 2020 for an overview.) However, in the same experimental literature it is clear that, holding contextual factors constant, particular verbs—most traditionally deemed factive or semi-factive—show a much stronger tendency to project overall than their non-factive counterparts. Whatever the lexicon is doing, the pattern with respect to projection is stable and strong, for example the same across all the experiments in the work of Tonhauser and her associates (Tonhauser et al. 2018, 2019; Tonhauser & Degen 2020; Degen & Tonhauser 2021).

The conclusion I draw from all this is that (a) like the projectivity of the prejacent of *only*, the projectivity of a clause-embedding predicate—the tendency of its complement to project—is partly a reflection of the semantic content of the predicate, but (b) whether or not in a given utterance the prejacent or complement content projects is a function of contextual factors (QUD, priors, etc.): Actual projection is conversational (Simons 2001/2011 & references,2004,2007).

I propose here a simple idea about how to capture the projective implications in triggers like *only* and the factives: Unlike anaphoric presuppositions, which are properly captured by a Stalnaker/Karttunen/Heim account, the projective implication of *only* or a factive is an entailment (Simons 2001, Abrusán 2011,2016) associated with the concept underlying the predicate's proffered content. This entailment between the proffered content and the projective implication can be captured by a meaning postulate (Montague 1970,1973), a constraint on suitable models for any language that lexicalizes the underlying concept. For a factive predicate like *know*, the truth of its complement is not presupposed, but is guaranteed by a meaning postulate to be locally entailed: true in all worlds in which the proffered predicate content is true.

This approach explains why we should expect that such predicates' projective implications are so often informative (not in the Common Ground), as well as why we find this projectivity for the same predicates in language after language. And because projection itself is conversational, it should be possible to explain why projection judgments are gradient rather than categorical, and we can account pragmatically for the contextual factors that clearly play a role in projection.