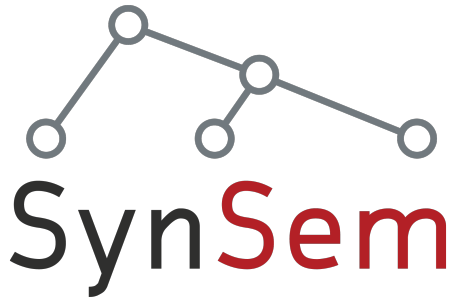
Comments on Uli Sauerland's presentation, 'Reducing Information Structure to Non-At-Issue Meaning'

Matthew Gotham

University of Oslo

Non-At-Issue Meaning and Information Structure
Oslo, 9 May 2017



Recap of some data

Q: [Welcher Junge]$_{\mathrm{T}}$ hat mit [welchem Mädchen]$_{\mathrm{F}}$ getanzt?
which boy has with which girl danced
'Which boy danced with which girl?'

A: Hans$_{\mathrm{T}}$ hat mit Maria$_{\mathrm{F}}$ getanzt und Tom$_{\mathrm{T}}$ hat mit Britta$_{\mathrm{F}}$
Hans has with Maria danced and Tom has with Britta
getanzt.
danced.
'Hans danced with Maria and Tom danced with Britta'.

A′: Hans$_{\mathrm{T}}$ hat mit Maria$_{\mathrm{F}}$ getanzt und sonst hat niemand
Hans has with Maria danced and otherwise has no-one
getanzt.
danced.
'Hans danced with Maria and no-one else danced'.

A″: #Nur ein Paar hat getanzt. Nämlich, Hans$_{\mathrm{T}}$ hat mit Maria$_{\mathrm{F}}$
only one couple has danced namely Hans has with Maria
getanzt.
danced.
'Only one coupled danced. Namely, Hans danced with Maria'.

Recap of the explanation

Hans$_T$ hat mit Maria$_F$ getanzt presupposes (due to the givenness feature)

- Hans danced with someone.
- Someone danced with Maria.

In the presence of the additional assumption that only one couple danced (as in A″), ↑ these presuppositions entail that Hans danced with Maria, which is the asserted content of the sentence. The asserted content would therefore be in some sense redundant ('trivial').

Principle

An utterance of ϕ is infelicitous if CG, $p(\phi) \Rightarrow a(\phi)$

Where $p(\phi)$ is the presupposed content of ϕ and $a(\phi)$ is the asserted content of ϕ.

Question: does this principle always hold?

Context: two police detectives are investigating some crime. Det. Wright has just been viewing CCTV footage of the city centre.

(1) [Det. Smith:] Do you know where Jones was at midnight?

(2) [Det. Wright:] Yes.

a. He was at O'Neill's.

b. I know that he was at O'Neill's.

- CG: Det. Wright know where Jones was at midnight.
- a((2-a)): Jones was at O'Neill's at midnight.
- p((2-b)): Jones was at O'Neill's at midnight.
- a((2-b)): Det. Wright knows that Jones was at O'Neill's at midnight.

$\text{CG}, p((\text{2-b})) \Rightarrow a((\text{2-b}))$ $\quad$ $\text{CG}, p((\text{2-a})) \not\Rightarrow a((\text{2-a}))$

Another example

Context: Two doctors who work in a drug rehab clinic are discussing what a total failure their rehab programme has been, one day after it finished.

(3) [Dr. Williams:] Everyone who came to us for treatment is using every drug they used before!

(4) [Dr. Taylor:] Including Alex?

(5) [Dr. Williams:] Including Alex.

a. He's using heroin.
b. He's using heroin again.

- CG: Everyone this clinic treated is using every drug they used before. The clinic treated Alex. $\Rightarrow$ Alex is using every drug he used before.
- a((5-a)): Alex is using heroin.
- p((5-b)): Alex used heroin before.
- a((5-b)): Alex is using heroin.

$$\text{CG}, p((5\text{-b})) \Rightarrow a((5\text{-b})) \qquad \text{CG}, p((5\text{-a})) \not\Rightarrow a((5\text{-a}))$$

Thoughts

Hans hat mit Maria getanzt.	Hans_{T} hat mit Maria_{F} getanzt.
Jones was at O'Neill's at midnight.	I know that Jones was at O'Neill's at midnight.
Alex is using heroin.	Alex is using heroin again.

There's an information-structural difference in the second case that I haven't touched on yet: the topic on the right hand side is the speaker, whereas on the left hand side it's Jones. This might make the difference as far as felicity goes, but how does this aspect of information structure get reduced to non-at-issue meaning?