Focus Effects on the Factivity of know
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Overview

- **Know** has traditionally been analyzed as a factive predicate.
- I show that, when focused, **know** behaves like a nonfactive.
- I provide a unified account of the syntactic and semantic behavior of **know** as it interacts with focus. I propose that **know** is a “camouflaged” nonfactive predicate that exhibits factive behavior in default contexts.

**Factive vs. Nonfactive Predicates**

- Kiparsky & Kiparsky 1979: propositional attitude predicates can be classified into two categories, factive and nonfactive.
- These predicates differ in both their semantic and syntactic behavior.

**Semantics – Presupposition**

- Factive predicates presuppose the truth of their sentential complements:
  - (1) Factive:
    - a. Andrew knows that Faith ate the last Hot Pocket.
    - b. Jonathan knows that Warren was talking about him yesterday.
  - (2) Nonfactive:
    - a. Andrew thinks that Faith ate the last Hot Pocket.
    - b. Jonathan suspects that Warren was talking about him yesterday.

**Syntax – Island Effects**

- Factive predicates are also weak islands to sub-extraction from their complements:
  - (3) Factive:
    - a. *Who does Andrew assert (that) ate the last Hot Pocket?
    - b. *Who does Jonathan hate (that) Warren was talking about him yesterday?
  - (4) Nonfactive:
    - a. *When does Andrew doubt (that) Faith ate the last Hot Pocket?
    - b. *When does Jonathan suspect (that) Warren was talking about him yesterday.

**Semantics & Pragmatics – Background**

- The standard analysis: factive presuppositions are lexically encoded:
  - (9) [know] = λpλx [Fx&Mx]C[p, Cx]
  - (10) [believe] = λpλx [Fx&Mx]C[p]

- *When under focus, **know** seems to mean something like “strongly believe”.*
- *I take focus intonation to: 1) give rise to a scale based on the base meaning of **know** which can be thought of as an alternative set (as in Rooft 1992) and, 2) pick out the maximum value on that scale.*

- **Syntax – Background**

  - I take the ordinary (non-focused) meaning of **know** to be completely nongradable in this way: it is the focus intonation (and potentially other salient factors) that allows for this scalar gradability.

- **Syntax – Proposal**

  - *Know* is syntactically nonfactive, i.e., it selects for a cP.
  - The distinction between **know** and **believe** is that the complement of **know** contains an additional operator, which I label [absolute], setting in the specifier of cP.

**Semantics & Pragmatics – Proposal**

- Instead, I assume that the asserted content of both **know** and **believe** is (10).
- They differ only in their selectional requirements, which syntactically determine the presuppositional content.
- When under focus, **know** seems to mean something like “strongly believe”.
- I take focus intonation to: 1) give rise to a scale based on the base meaning of **know** which can be thought of as an alternative set (as in Rooft 1992) and, 2) pick out the maximum value on that scale.

- **Conclusions & Open Questions**

  - Although **know** is often cited as a classic example of a factive verb, evidence from focus intonation lends support to the notion that **know** is actually nonfactive.
  - Putting the analysis in this framework helps account for the fact that focus affects the factivity of **know** in both the syntactic and semantic domains (without resorting to postulating multiple lexical entries, another potential solution).
  - It is interesting that **know** appears to be the only “factive” verb that is sensitive to focus effects in this way. However, there are a number of other factive verbs whose presuppositions disappear in certain contexts, such as **discover, realize, learn, find out**, etc. Future work on this topic will examine whether a similar story can be told for the behavior of these predicates.
  - It would be worth examining gradability cross-linguistically to see if corresponding effects are observed.
  - Additionally, more data providing evidence for the speaker-oriented [absolute] operator in other contexts would lend further support for this analysis.

**Selected References**


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