Introducing Propositional Discourse Referents
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Overview

- Karttunen 1969 looked at what introduces (individual) discourse referents—things that can be referred to by e.g. pronouns
- Here I do the same for propositional discourse referents (pdrfs)
- I look at two existing approaches (syntactic and discursive) and challenge both
- I argue that we must look to the semantics: operators which take propositional arguments introduce pdrfs for those arguments

Introduction

Karttunen 1969 showed not all NPs introduce drefs.

1. # Lucy doesn’t have a car. It’s blue.
   He concluded that NPs introduce drefs in sentences whose propositional content is “asserted, implied or presupposed by the speaker to be true”. Krifka 2013 showed that the same can’t be true for pdrfs.

2. Lucy doesn’t have a car, even though she tells people that. (cf. Krifka 2013:(24))
   So what does(n’t) introduce pdrfs?
   There are two existing accounts worth evaluating.

   Approach 1: Syntactic: TP+
   Krifka 2013 argues that TP (and higher projections like NegP) introduces a pdrf for its content.

   [LVP ASSERT [neg Edie didn’t [TP the [S TP p[VP [S TP s[e lex steal the cookie]]]]]]]
   This makes strong testable predictions.

   Approach 2: Discursive: EDU
   Others identify pdrf introduction with (sub)DRSs or elementary discourse units (EDUs) from recent work on discourse relations & structure (Asher 1993; Carlson & Marcu 2001; Asher et al. 2012; Hunter and Asher 2016; Asher et al. 2017).

   These can be tricky to identify, but there are guidelines in place, so the approach is testable.

   (Asher 1993: 242)

Subclausal: Small Clauses

Predictions:

TP+ Small clauses don’t introduce pdrfs (sub-TP)
   EDU Unclear, unless SCs are ‘causal complements’
   Most types of SCs behave as predicted (no pdrfs):

   (3) # Lucy wanted her steak rare, but that’s not true. (It’s medium.) SEC. PREC.
   (4) # Lucy made Charlie angry, but that’s not true. (He’s happy.) CAUSATIVE
   (5) # The rabbi pronounced them married, but that’s not true. (They’re single.) RESULT
   But epistemic small clauses do introduce pdrfs: ! (6) Lucy considered them married, but that’s not true. (They’re not.)
   For TP+, the SC syntax in (5&6) must differ. (This is possible, if epistemics are covert infinitives.)

Subclausal: NP Adverbs

Predictions:

TP+ Only TP+ adverbs introduce pdrfs (not NPs)
   EDU Only elliptical or temporal adverbs are EDUs
   Most NP adverbs don’t introduce pdrfs; even the agent-oriented surprisingly in (8) doesn’t introduce a pdrf for ‘the box was heavy’ (subj/spkr anchor):

   (7) # Lucy lifted a fairly heavy box, but I don’t believe that.
   (8) # Lucy lifted a surprisingly heavy box, but I don’t believe that.
   But an epistemic adverb does introduce that pdrf: ! (9) Lucy lifted a supposedly heavy box, but I don’t believe that.
   For TP+, heavy box in (9) would have to be its own TP (as speaker believes it was supposedly heavy).

Interim Observation

At least some sub-TP/sub-EDU material has an associated pdrf.

Multiclausal: Raising & Control Constructions

Predictions:

TP+ All infinitive complements should introduce pdrfs (whether analyzed as TP or CP):
   EDU Only non-infinitive complements of attribution or cognitive predicates are EDUs:
   All subject raising constructions introduce pdrfs (contra EDU);
   No object control constructions do (contra TP+):

   (10) Lucy seemed to be at the party, but that wasn’t true. (She was home.) SUBJ raising
   (11) # Patty asked Lucy to be at the party, but Linus didn’t believe that.
       (He thought she would stay home.) OBJ CONTROL
   But object raising & subject control constructions sometimes introduce a pdrf for the infinitive complements:

   (12) Patty expected Lucy to be at the party, but Linus didn’t believe that.
       (He thought she would stay home.) OBJ raising
   (13) # Patty wanted Lucy to be at the party, but Linus didn’t believe that.
       (He thought she would stay home.) OBJ raising
   (14) Lucy claimed to be at the party, but that wasn’t true. (She was home.) SUBJ CONTROL
   (15) # Lucy tried to be at the party, but that wasn’t true. (She was home.) SUBJ CONTROL
   Complements of the epistemic embedding verbs expect and claim get pdrfs; not for want or try.
   This is not expected under either TP+ or EDU, nor can either easily be tweaked to account for this data.

Crucial Observation

Whether a construction introduces a pdrf depends on not just the embedded structure, but its embedding.

Generalization

It is not specific structures which determine whether a pdrf is introduced (contra both TP+ and EDU), nor their status in discourse (Snider 2017), but the things which embed them.

If sentential mood ‘embeds’ the matrix proposition (Bittner 2011), this extends to matrix clauses.

Operators which take propositional arguments introduce discourse referents for those arguments. (DECL, NEG, certain verbs...)

This captures a wide range of data, including sub-clausal, monoclusal, multiclusal, and multiten-tential constructions across declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences (see Snider 2017).

Implementation

This characterization of proposition-taking operators can be modeled in a Bittner-style Update with Modal Centering system.

\[
\text{DECL} \sim [\perp \omega \in [T \omega]]; [T \omega = \perp \omega]; [p\neg p = T \omega] \]

Following Murray 2014, the declarative mood triggers a proposal to update, an update, and then introduces a pdrf for the new context set (into \(T\)-list).

\[
\text{NEG} \sim [p\neg p = \perp \omega]; [w|w \notin p]
\]

Sentential negation introduces a pdrf for its prejacent (into \(T\)-list) and then adds the complement of the prejacent-worlds. Embedding verbs are similar.

For sentences like (2)—DECL(NEG(ϕ))—NEG adds a \(\perp\)-pdrf for \(ϕ\) and DECL adds a \(\perp\)-pdrf for \(\neg \phi\).

Selected References


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