Deixis, Binding and Presupposition

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Introduction

Dynamic semantic accounts of presupposition incorporate an important and novel element that links presupposition with anaphora (van der Sandt, 1992; Geurts, 1995). This approach, which accounts for a number of important facts about presupposition, extends to integrate bridging and other discourse phenomena (Asher and Lascarides, 1998a, b). In this extended anaphoric account, presuppositions, like assertions, attach to the discourse context via certain rhetorical relations. These discourse attachments constrain accommodation and help avoid some infelicitous predictions of standard accounts of presupposition. Further, they have interesting and complex interactions with underspecified conditions that are an important feature of the contributions of most presupposition triggers.

Deictic uses of definites, on the other hand, seem at first glance to fall outside the purview of an anaphoric theory of presupposition. Deictically used definites simply denote, perhaps through some additional help from the context, the individuals in the context that satisfy them. There seems little that a discourse-based theory would have to say. I will argue, however, that an extended, anaphoric account has an important role to play in analysing such uses of definites, and it can capture how these uses of definites function in conversation. In particular such accounts can clarify the interaction between the uses of such deictic definites and various conversational moves. At least
some deictic uses of definites generate presuppositions that are bound to the context via a rhetorical function that I’ll call anchoring, which if successful entails a type of knowing how. If this anchoring function is accepted, then the acceptors know how to locate the referent of the definite in the present context. I’ll concentrate here just on definites that refer to spatial locations, where the intuitions about anchoring are quite clear. But I think that this view extends to other deictic uses of definites and has ramifications for an analysis of de re attitudes as well.

**Different Ways to Bind Presuppositions**

To set the stage for an analysis of anchoring uses of definites and the role that their presuppositions play there, it is useful to see how many roles an extended anaphoric theory takes the presuppositions of definites to play in standard anaphoric uses. According to “Dynamic” accounts like Heim’s familiarity theory (1982), definites presuppose familiar discourse referents. Such presuppositions must be satisfied in the discourse context in the Tarskian sense or must be accommodated (i.e. added) to the discourse context. Van der Sandt (1992) tells us to find these discourse referents via anaphora resolution, i.e. try to bind, and failing that, accommodate. Geurts (1995) extends this view by including propositional identity as a means of binding.

Nevertheless, there is much more that can be said about binding. Consider bridging examples like the following:

(1) a. I met two interesting people last night at a party.
   b. The woman was a member of Clinton’s Cabinet.

(2) a. John took engine E1 from Avon to Dansville.
   b. Then he picked up the boxcar
   c. and took it to Broxburn.

Let’s consider what happens to the presupposition generated by the boxcar in (2b). On standard accounts, we can’t bind the boxcar to any discourse entity in the context nor can we satisfy the presupposition that there is a boxcar in the discourse context created by the first sentence. So all the standard theories of presupposition would say that we should accommodate a boxcar in the context. This misses an important aspect of the meaning of this discourse, which we can focus on by asking ourselves, where is the boxcar? The boxcar is manifestly in Dansville. A discourse-based account like that in Asher and Lascarides (1998a) gets this interpretation of (2b) by assuming that the presuppositional material introduced by the definite contains some