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Accommodation in Linguistic Interaction

(work-in-progress)

Seminario *L' "Accomodamento" Nell' Interazione Linguistica:*

Effetti Comunicativi e Implicazioni Sociali

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1. Starting ideas

- accommodation involves "some redressive action" (Simons 2003: 258);
- in general, accommodation is a response to requirements that the performance of an **act** imposes on the context in which the act is executed;
- in particular, accommodation is a mechanism whereby the context of a **speech act** is redressed so as to maintain the presumption that the act is an appropriate conversational move of a certain type (i.e., it counts as correct play);
- the appropriateness of a speech act puts certain requirements on the context in which it is performed (in which it is to be interpreted and evaluated).

2. Examples

(1) a. I cannot come to the meeting.

b. I have to pick up *my cat* at the veterinarian.   (Stalnaker 1998; von Fintel 2008)

(2) Jacqueline's getting married. He is a soccer player.   (Roberts 2015)

(3) Jacqueline is getting married to a certain male person.

(4) Go and pick up wood.   (Austin 1962: 28; cf. Langton 2015; Witek 2013; 2015)

(5) I name this ship the 'Queen Elizabeth'.   (Austin 1962: 5)

The hearer of (1) is entitled to believe that:

(*i*)   Phoebe cannot come to the meeting.

(*ii*)   Phoebe has to pick up her cat at the veterinarian.

(*iii*)   Proposition (*ii*) explains proposition (*i*).

(*iv*)   Phoebe has a cat.

The *understanding* of (1b) requires accepting assumption (*iv*).

An *appropriate use* of 'he' as an anaphora requires a contextually salient antecedent.

Resolving anaphora in (2) involves *bridging*: assumption (3) provides the antecedent for 'he'.

The *felicity* of an act made in uttering (4) *qua* an order requires that the speaker of (4) stands in an appropriate authority relation to the addressee.

The *truth* of (5) requires, among other things, that the ship bears the name 'Queen Elizabeth'.

3. Questions

(Q$_1$)   What guides and motivates the accommodating mechanism?

(Q$_2$)   What type of context does it affect?

(Q$_3$)   What kind of redressive action does it involve?

(Q$_4$)   What sort of inappropriateness would ensue without it?

(Q$_5$)   What is the nature and source of the contextual requirements
          whose recognition motivates the accommodating context-change?

4. Four models

4.1.   Lewis's *score-keeping* model

Central idea: *context = conversational score*

Conversational score (Lewis 1979; Kölbel 2011; Langton forthcoming a, b)

or *conversational record* (Thomason 1990; Lepore & Stone 2015):

- a sequence of abstract entities that represent aspects of the context of a speech act relative to which the act is to be interpreted and evaluated;

  → the *interpretive* and *evaluative* function

- an abstract data structure whose function is to track and represent publicly recognizable contributions to the state of the conversation.

  → the *dynamic* function

Score components:

- presuppositions shared by interlocutors,

- deontic fact (e.g. the permissible/impermissible boundary),

- points of reference, rankings of comparative salience,

- standards of precision, and so on …

- they put constraints on what can happen next in the conversation,

- and change in response to what happens during the conversation.

Lewis's key ideas:

- the dynamics of conversational score is rule-governed;

- there are *rules of score-change* or *kinematics rules*.

kinematics rules
→ determine how the performance of a given speech act
affects the context of its production;

rules of direct kinematics	**rules of accommodation**
→ determine, for any move that can	→ govern a process whereby
be appropriately made in the game,	the context of a move is adjusted
what would count as its target score	to make the move appropriate
{source-scores} → {target-scores}	{source-scores} → {source-scores$_{ACC}$}

General pattern for rules of accommodation:

> If at time t something is said that requires component s_n of conversational score to have a value in the range *r* if what is said is to be **true***, or otherwise acceptable; and if s_n does not have a value in the range *r* just before *t*; and **if such-and-such further conditions hold****; then at *t* the score-component s_n takes some value in the range *r*.
>
> (Lewis 1979, p. 347)

* truth as the designated aspect of appropriateness;

** e.g., if nobody blocks the accommodating change (Langton *forthcoming*).

Rule of accommodation for presuppositions:

> If at time *t* something is said that requires presupposition *P* to be acceptable, and if *P* is not presupposed just before *t*, then – *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits – presupposition *P* comes into existence at *t*. (Lewis 1979: 340)

(1)   a. I cannot come to the meeting.

      b. I have to pick up *my cat* at the veterinarian.

      >>   Phoebe has a cat.

(6)   *Even* George could win.

      >>   George in not a leading candidate.

(7)   Tonight, John is having dinner in New York, *too*.

                                  (Kripke 1990; cf. Stalnaker 2014; Roberts 2015)

      >>   Some specific and contextually salient person (or group)

            is having dinner in New York.

Problem:

- Lewis says nothing about the source of presuppositional requirements;
- he is interested in the dynamics of presuppositions,

    not in how presuppositions and presuppositional requirements arise.

Lewis's answers:

(Q_1) → *guided* (Lewis 1979; Kölbel 2011) and *mandated* (Sbisà *forthcoming*)

     by rules of accommodation;

(Q_2) → conversational score;

(Q_3) → context-repair or context-fixing (see Stalnaker 2002; Simons 2003);

(Q_4) → falsehood or other type of inappropriateness;

(Q_5) → no definite answer.

4.2.   Stalnaker's *sequential-update* model

Unlike Lewis, Stalnaker limits his analysis to presuppositional requirements and presupposition accommodation; like Lewis, however, he is interested in how presuppositions behave and how they are accommodated, rather than in how they arise.

Stalnaker represents context not as conversational score, but as common ground: a social object "definable in terms of the propositional attitudes of the members of some group" (Stalnaker 2014: 25); nevertheless, common ground plays the role analogous to that of conversational score (→ *interpretive* and *dynamic*).

The notion of **common ground** in a propositional attitude concept. (…) it is a concept with an iterative structure: a proposition is common ground between you and me if we both accept it (for the purposes of the conversation), we both accept that we we both accept it, we both accept that we both accept that we both accept it, and so on. (Stalnaker 2014: 25)

We can (…) define the individual propositional attitude of **speaker presupposition** in terms of common ground: An agent A presupposes that ф if and only if A accepts (for purposes of the conversation) that it is common ground that ф. (*ibid.*)

Stalnaker claims that accommodation involves no rules of its own;
pace Lewis, there are no specific rules governing accommodation.

Accommodation is an essential feature of any communicative practice. If common ground is (at least close to) common belief, then it will adjust and change in the face of manifest events that take place, including events that are themselves speech acts. Accommodation is just an example of this kind of change. (Stalnaker 2014: 58)

A manifest event is something that happens in the environment of the relevant parties that is obviously evident to all. A goat walks into the room, or all of the lights suddenly go out. In such a case, it immediately becomes common knowledge that the event has happened (…). (Stalnaker 2014: 47)

Central idea:
- speech acts are manifest events.

(1) a. I cannot come to the meeting.
   b. I have to pick up my cat at the veterinarian.

- When (1) is uttered, it becomes a manifest event
  that a certain utterance with a certain <u>set of properties</u> has be made.
  <center>↑ ?</center>

- It is a manifest event that in uttering (1b) Phoebe:
  (*i*)   performs a speech act with a <u>certain meaning</u>
  (*ii*)   and a <u>certain force</u>;
  (*iii*) <u>presupposes</u> that she has a cat;
  in short, Phoebe <u>manifestly presupposes</u> that she has a cat.

(*i*) & (*ii*)   →   in virtue of the fact that the semantics of the language Phoebe speaks
        is common ground;

(*iii*)   →   in virtue of .... ?

Stalnaker 2014:

> (...) presupposition requirements may have diverse explanations. (70)
>
> The simplest and most common case where a presupposition is required by the use of a sentence is a case where the addressee can apply the semantic rules to figure out what the speaker is saying only if he has certain information. In a case like this, the semantic rules help to explain why a presupposition is required, but the rules themselves need make no mention of presuppositions. (53)

(7)   Tonight, John is having dinner in New York, too.

- "too" means "in addition to x" (following Heim; cf. Stalnaker 2014: 71);
- therefore, the use of "too" involves tacit reference to a contextually salient x;

Hypothesis:

- the presuppositional or contextual requirement imposed by (7)
  is determined by a rule of reference (construed of as a speech act);
- the rule says that the information needed to determine the reference
  must be available in the context
  (→ Searle 1969 on the 'axiom of existence' and the 'axiom of identification').

Sequential update involves two steps:

[1]   accommodation as a cooperative response to a manifest speech event
        (that a certain speech act, e.g. an assertion, is made);

[2]   the production of the 'essential effect' of the act
        (e.g., adding the asserted content to the common ground).

$$[1] \qquad\qquad\qquad [2]$$
$$\text{prior CG} \;\rightarrow\; \text{accommodated CG} \;\rightarrow\; \text{updated CG}$$

Step [1] is mandated by the *norm of agreement* (Stalnaker 2014: 46).

Stalnaker's answers:

(Q_1) → general pragmatic principles, e.g., the 'norm of agreement';

(Q_2) → common ground;

(Q_3) → context-adjustment;

(Q_4) → no definite answer; 'appropriateness' as a descriptive category;

(Q_5) → contextual requirements are determined pragmatically

    (hypothesis: they are determined by speech act rules).

4.3.   Thomason's *plan-recognition* model

Central ideas:

- Interpretation = abductive intention recognition;

- Intention = a complex information structure that involves:
    – a **goal**, i.e., a state of affairs to be achieved;
    – a **plan**, i.e., a partially specified way of achieving the goal;
    – **preconditions**, i.e., ways that the world is **assumed** to be,
      on which the achievement of the goal according to the plan depends.

- Public action *versus* tacit though publicly recognizable action,
  what is asserted *versus* what is supposed or assumed in (8):

(8)   Susan regrets <u>that she bought a ferret</u>.   (Roberts 2015)

            → <u>projective content</u> that is not-at-issue relative to the current QUD

(9)   a. Susan doesn't regret that she bought a ferret.
       b. Does Susan regret that she bought a ferret?
       c. Susan may regret that she bought a ferret.
       d. If Susan regrets that she bought a ferret, she can sell it.

Roberts 2015:

- the compliment of the factive in (8) is not a presupposition,
  since the appropriateness of the act made in uttering (8) does not require
  that the projective content was part of CG *before* the utterance was made.

Informative presupposition arises as a problem in the presence of a pragmatic rule requiring an utterance involving a presupposition to be appropriate only if its presuppositions are mutually supposed at that stage of the conversation. We are not committed to such a rule; the alternative rules (...) would rather be (1) that an utterance involves a presupposition *P* if the intention underlying the utterance is committed to the presupposition, and (2) that an utterance is only appropriate to the extent that its presuppositions can be recognized and added to the common ground. (Thomason et al. 2016: 33)

Thomason:

- Accommodation is "a special case of obstacle elimination" (Thomason 1990: 343) and an 'enlightened update' (Thomason et al. 2006).

  A is standing by an obviously immobilized car and is approached by B.
  The following exchange takes place:

(10)   A: I'm out of petrol.
        B: There is a garage around the corner.

(Grice 1989: 32; cf. Thomason 1990: 347)

Following Roberts (2015), we can distinguish between **three types of accommodation**:
- cases like **(1b)** and **(8)**; they involve the use of projection triggers and explicit expression of what is to be accommodated; the projective content is 'taken for granted without being asserted', but not presupposed;
- cases like **(2)** and **(7)**; they involve the use of *pre*suppositional triggers that put conventional constraints on the kind of *prior* context in which they can be felicitously used;
- cases like **(10)**; they involve no overt triggers, but their interpretation involves preconditions abductively inferred to make sense of why and how the speaker is saying what she is saying;

But they **all** involve 'enlightened update' and 'obstacle elimination'.

Problem:
- what determines preconditions (private commitments, tacit actions) as parts of speakers' intentions?

         ?↓

(...) the grammar might require a speaker to commit to certain information, privately, but in a publicly recognizably way, WITHOUT thereby requiring the speaker to somehow treat it as

public, prior information. This gives an attractive way to resolve the well-known and frequent gaps where information must be grammatically backgrounded but need not be shared information among interlocutors. Classic examples include the ❽nformative presuppositions❾of change-of-state verbs, factives, and definite noun phrases. (Thomason et al. 2006: 6)

Thomason's answers:

$(Q_1) \rightarrow$ cooperative attitude; a tendency to eliminate obstacles;

$(Q_2) \rightarrow$ conversational record that registers public conversational commitments;

$(Q_3) \rightarrow$ obstacle elimination (depending on cases, context-fixing or context-adjustment);

$(Q_4) \rightarrow$ no definite answer;

$(Q_5) \rightarrow$ the *grammar*-constituted structure of intentions.

4.4. Speech-act based model

(Q_5) What is the nature and source of the contextual requirements
whose recognition motivates the accommodating context-change?

$\rightarrow$ the 'triggering problem'

Hypothesis:
- at least in some cases the requirements (preconditions, tacit commitments) are determined by rules of appropriateness.

Recall the distinction between:
- the interpretive/evaluative role of score $\rightarrow$ appropriateness rules
- and its dynamic function. $\rightarrow$ kinematics rules

Appropriateness rules:
- define the appropriateness of the moves in terms of their *source scores*;
- determine, for any stage of the game, what would count as a correct move at this stage;
- provided a given move is taken by default to be appropriate, they help us determine and recognise its contextual requirements and preconditions.

Two approaches to appropriateness rules (Sbisà *forthcoming*):
- the set of appropriateness rules is complete (Searle),
- the set of appropriateness rules is incomplete and open (Austin).

[Unlike Searle, Austin does not present his rules A, B, and Γ] as (templates for) jointly sufficient conditions, but leaves the performance of illocutionary act tokens open to unforeseen forms of defeasibility. (Sbisa, forthcoming)

Central idea (borrowed from Sbisà):
- mechanisms underlying accommodation involve pattern-recognition, and are guided by default assumptions of appropriateness;
- there are no rules of accommodation.

Accommodation, then, is (…) governed by general principles, one of which concerns pattern recognition (a pattern can well be recognized from the presentation of some of its parts) and the other the by-default recognition of other minds or subjects. (…) It is indeed quite obvious that a pattern that is partially presented may be completed by the observer if the part presented suffices to make it emerge. (Sbisa, forthcoming)

The existence of shared patterns of conventional action (which are cultural facts and can be expected to be linguistically encoded at least up to a certain point) could account for the "accepted conventional procedure" of Austin's rule A1 without binding us to an obsessively rule-governed view of how illocutionary acts are performed.7 Moreover, patterns may be cognitively processed in different ways, for example by means of Gestalt-like mechanisms, but also, if needed (as in the case of unfamiliar patterns, gravely incomplete display, and other complications), inferentially, which would assign a legitimate role to inferential theories of illocutionary force understanding. (Sbisà 2009: 48-49)

Recall:

Intention = a complex information structure that involves:
- a **goal**, i.e., a state of affairs to be achieved;
- a **plan**, i.e., a partially specified way of achieving the goal;
- **preconditions**, i.e., ways that the world is **assumed** to be, on which the achievement of the **goal** according to the **plan** depends.

Hypothesis:
- the rules or appropriateness are built into the structure of intentions and correlate **goals** and **plans** with the **preconditions** of their achievement.

Accommodation involves:
- default evaluation of the speaker's utterance as an appropriate act of a certain type, i.e., as the act that achieves its goal
  (→ Austin's conventional effects, Searle's essential rules);
- assumption that all preconditions for the achievement of this goal are met
  (→ Lewis's *ceteris paribus* condition).
- The set of these preconditions is open: studding new 'breakdown cases' we can discover new requirements;

(4)   Go and pick up wood.
        (Austin 1962: 28; cf. Witek 2013: 154 and Witek 2015: 14; Langton 2015: 2-5)
(11)   You are now permitted to cross the white line.   (Langton *forthcoming* a)
(5)   I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth.   (Austin 1962: 116; cf. Langton *forthcoming* a)

Lewis's 'reductionist' approach:
- truth is the designated aspect of appropriateness;
- the functioning of the exercitive act made in (11) and the ceremonial act made in (5) involves accommodation guided by the presumption that (5) and (11) are true (cf. Langton 2015 on illocutionary accommodation).

Alternative approach (Witek 2013, 2015):
- 'being a binding act of a certain act' is a key aspect of appropriateness;
- the functioning of the exercitive act made in (11) and the ceremonial act made in (5) involves the operation of respective kinematics rules (akin to Searle's essential rules);
- interpretation of these acts involves the recognition (or even establishment) of their deontic preconditions (by accommodation involving rules akin to Searle's preparatory conditions).

(Q_1) → cognitive capacities akin to pattern-recognition;
(Q_2) → conversational score or common belief;
(Q_3) → context-adjustment or context-repair;
(Q_4) → various forms of misfires and abuses;
(Q_5) → schemas and patterns that constitute the structure of plans and intentions.

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