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# **Illocution and accommodation**

*Lisbon Summer School on Speech Acts in Public Discourse: Normative Questions*

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## PLAN:

1. Accommodation in intentional communication
  - 1.1. Accommodation narrowly construed
  - 1.2. Accommodation broadly construed
2. Accommodation in illocutionary games
  - 2.1. Two-mechanism model of illocutionary games
  - 2.2. “Panaccommodationalism”
3. Discussion

1. Accommodation in intentional communication

(1) Bob: a. Will you come to the party tonight?

Alice: b. I have to pick up my sister at the airport.

(2) a. Alice has to pick up her sister at the airport *tonight*.

b. Alice will not come to the party tonight.

c. Alice has a sister

*enriched what is said*  
*conversational implicature*  
*presupposition*

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(2c) is an informative presupposition of Alice's utterance of (1b);

it contributes to (2) through accommodation:

a “redressive action on the part of the addressee” (**Simons** 2003: 258) which consists in *either* context-repair (**Lewis** 1979) *or* context-adjustment (**Stalnaker** 2002, 2014).

Is (2c) speaker-meant?

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Two questions:

$Q_1$  What is it for a speaker or her utterance to presuppose that  $p$ ?

$Q_2$  How does the accommodating mechanism work?

## 1.1. Accommodation narrowly construed

### **Common-Ground Theory of Presuppositions**

“On that account, a speaker in making a given utterance presupposes proposition P just in case the felicity of the utterance necessitates that P be entailed by the interlocutors’ common ground at the time of utterance” (**Roberts** 2015: 347)

“Sentences can have pragmatic presuppositions in the sense of imposing certain requirements on the common ground.” (**von Stechow** 2008: 138)

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- (1) Bob: a. Will you come to the party tonight?  
Alice: b. I have to pick up **my sister** at the airport.
- (3) Jan **knows** that Charles is a spy.
- (4) **It's Ann who** broke the vase.
- (5) **The King of France** **won** the race.
- (6) Peter **managed** to **quit** smoking.

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      Alice:   b. I have to pick up **my sister** at the airport.

“[Sentence (1b)] is appropriately used only if the speaker is presupposing that she has a sister” (**Stalnaker** 2002: 709);

i.e., only if Alice believes/accepts that (2c) is part of CG (cf. **Green** 2017).

“Surface sentence A pragmatically presupposes a logical form L, if and only if it is the case that A can be felicitously uttered only in contexts which entail L” (**Karttunen** 1974: 181)

“Context” means “the set of background assumptions, that is, whatever the speaker chooses to regard as being shared by him and his intended audience” (*Ibid.*: 182)



## 1.1. Accommodation narrowly construed

### **Common-Ground Theory of Presuppositions**

A key idea:

- accommodation is a context-fixing process which underlies the functioning of informative presuppositions (see **Heim** 1983, **van der Sandt** 1992, **von Fintel** 2008, **García-Carpintero** 2020; for a critical discussion of this view, see **Abbott** 2008; **Gauker** 2008; **Thomason** 1990: 333; and **Thomason et al.** 2006: 12).

(7) I regret that I can't help you.

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### **Presupposition accommodation as a rule-governed process of context-repair**

“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.” (**Lewis** 1979: 340)

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### **Presupposition accommodation as a response to manifest events (→ context-adjustment)**

„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)

- (1) Bob:     a. Will you come to the party tonight?  
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## 1.2. Accommodation broadly construed

### **Presuppositions as background implicatures or not-at-issue contents**

- background implicatures  $\neq$  foreground implicatures (**Simons** 2013: 149);
- background implicatures  $\neq$  assertional (or asserted) implicatures (**Thomason** 1990: 352).

See also **Roberts** 2015; **Simons et al.** 2010; **Tonhauser et al.** 2013; **Kasjanowicz** 2022; for a critical discussion of this view, see **García-Carpintero** 2020: 288-290.

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*enriched what is said*

*foreground implicature*

*background implicature*

(7) I regret that I can't help you.

(8) I didn't tell you I will need a car.

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“The phenomenon of *presupposition accommodation*, much discussed in the literature about presupposition, is like the phenomenon of *conversational implicature* in that it is an inevitable feature of any practice the point of which is to mean things.” (**Stalnaker** 2002: 705)

“(...) the fact that accommodation is a pervasive and inevitable feature of any kind of cooperative activity (...) provides a different perspective on the status of a range of specific linguistic phenomena involving presupposition (...). (...) the concept of pragmatic presupposition, applied to sentences or utterances, is not an explanatory concept of semantics, but a concept (like *felicitousness* or *appropriateness*) for characterizing surface phenomena to be explained” (**Stalnaker** 2014: 7)

## 1.2. Accommodation broadly construed

### **Presuppositions as background implicatures or not-at-issue contents**

Key ideas:

- the use of the so-called presupposition triggers does not impose a givenness requirement on prior context;
- their felicitous use requires that the implications they give rise to are *not* at issue relative to the current question under discussion (**Simons et al. 2010; Beaver et al. 2017**);
- (pre)supposition triggers  $\neq$  anaphoric presupposition triggers (**Roberts 2015**);

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(1) Bob: a. Will you come to the party tonight?

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(7) I regret that I can't help you.

(9) John is having dinner in New York, too. (**Kripke 1990**)

(10) a. Jacqueline's getting married.

b. He is a soccer coach. (**Roberts 2015: 351**)

(11) Jacqueline's getting married *to a certain male person*.



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- adjustment  $\neq$  abductive repair.

## 1.2. Accommodation broadly construed

### **Presuppositions as background implicatures or not-at-issue contents**

Varieties of accommodation:

- (a) accommodation of ‘suppositions’ in Roberts’ sense, i.e., adjustment of backgrounded implications;
- (b) accommodation of presuppositions triggered by anaphoric expressions, i.e., abductive process of repair;
- (c) accommodation of implicatures and explicatures, i.e., abductive filling in gaps in linguistically underspecified content.

(**Roberts** 2015: 355; cf. **Thomason** 1990: 344-357)

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**(Roberts 2015: 355; cf. Thomason 1990: 344-357)**

The central principle behind accommodation (**Thomason 1990: 344**):

“Adjust the conversational record to eliminate obstacles to the detected plans of your interlocutors.”

# 1. Accommodation in intentional communication

## Summary

There are two notions of accommodation:

### *narrow*

*context-repair;*

*applies to presuppositions only  
(givenness requirement);*

*functions against the background of  
appropriateness rules.*

### *broad*

*obstacle elimination;*

*applies to different aspects of  
communicated meaning;*

*functions in the context of  
plan recognition.*

## 2. Accommodation in illocutionary games

Illocutionary games:

their constituent moves bring about changes in the domain of normative facts  
(**Austin** 1975; **Sbisà** 2002, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2019; **Heal** 2013; **Witek** 2015, 2021);

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(13) Go and pick up wood!

The successful illocutionary acts:

- (*e*<sub>1</sub>) secures uptake,
- (*e*<sub>2</sub>) takes effect,
- (*e*<sub>3</sub>) invites, by convention, a response or sequel.

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The felicity of the act:

*presupposes* that the speaker has certain normative properties.

→ Austinian presuppositions (**Witek** 2013)

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(**Austin** 1975; **Sbisà** 2002, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2019; **Heal** 2013; **Witek** 2015, 2021);  
they exploit two mechanisms: *illocution* and *accommodation*.

(13) Go and pick up wood!

The successful illocutionary acts:

(*e*<sub>1</sub>) secures uptake,

(*e*<sub>2</sub>) **takes effect**,

→ *illocution*

(*e*<sub>3</sub>) invites, by convention, a response or sequel.

The felicity of the act:

*presupposes* that the speaker has certain **normative properties**.

→ *accommodation*

→ Austinian presuppositions (**Witek** 2013)



## 2.1. Two-mechanism model of illocutionary games

Speech acts = functions from contexts into contexts (**Gazdar** 1981: 68).

Context:

- conversational score (**Lewis** 1979; **Langton** 2018; **McGowan** 2004, 2018, 2019);
- conversational record (**Thomason** 1990; **Lepore & Stone** 2015).

## 2.1. Two-mechanism model of illocutionary games

Score functions (**Lewis 1979**):

### *interpretative/evaluative*

score at stage  $x$  = a sequence of abstract entities relative to which every move made at  $x$  is to be interpreted and/or evaluated; it defines the scope of speech acts that can be appropriately made at  $x$ ;

### *kinematic/dynamic*

score = an abstract data structure that tracks and represents publicly recognizable contributions to the state of the conversation.

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Score components (**Lewis 1979**):

*presuppositions shared by interlocutors* ( $\rightarrow$  CG),

*deontic facts* (permissible/impermissible facts, authority, obligations, entitlements, *etc.*),

*points of reference*,

*rankings of comparative salience*,

*standards of precision*,

and so on ...

## 2.1. Two-mechanism model of illocutionary games

(14) You are permitted to cross the white line.

(Langton 2018; cf. Witek 2021)

The felicity of (14) *qua* an exercitive speech act:

*presupposes* Jones's authority as the master, → SC<sub>S</sub>(14)

and *consists in* changing the boundary between what Smith is permitted to do and what he is not permitted to do. → SC<sub>T</sub>(14)

Rules of appropriateness (Lewis 1979):

define, for any speech act that can be made, the conditions for its felicitous performance; i.e., they impose requirements on its source score.

Rules of kinematics (Lewis 1979):

determine, for any speech act that can be made, what counts as its target score.

⟨SC<sub>S</sub>(14), SC<sub>T</sub>(14)⟩

The utterance of (14) counts as **Y** in context **C**.

## 2.1. Two-mechanism model of illocutionary games

(13) Go and pick up wood!

(Austin 1975: 28; cf. Langton 2015; Witek 2013, 2015)

The felicity of (13) *qua* an order:

*presupposes* Jones's authority as the leader, → SC<sub>s</sub>(13)

and *consists in* putting Smith

under an obligation to go and pick up wood. → SC<sub>T</sub>(13)

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The utterance of (13) counts as **Y** in context **C**.

Illocution is not the only norm-producing mechanism;

→ The 'desert island' scenario (Austin 1975: 28; Langton 2015: 15n; Witek 2013: 151; for a critical discussion, see McDonald 2021: 13-14, and McDonald forthcoming);

→ *uptake* and *invited responses*;

→ *pattern-recognition* (Sbisà 2019: 42) and *plan-recognition* (Thomason et al. 2006).

## 2.1. Two-mechanism model of illocutionary games

**Lewis (1979):**

- accommodation is a rule-governed process.

### **rules of direct kinematics**

→ determine, for any move that can be appropriately made in the game, what would count as its  $SC_T$

$$\{SC_S\} \rightarrow \{SC_T\}$$

### **“rules” of accommodation**

→ govern a process whereby the context of a move is fixed to make the move appropriate

$$\{SC_{S\_DEFECTIVE}\} \rightarrow \{SC_{S\_FIXED}\}$$

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→ govern a process whereby the context of a move is fixed to make the move appropriate

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**Sbisà (2019: 42-44):**

- accommodation involves no rules of its own;
- it functions against the background of *kinematics* and *appropriateness* rules; it is governed by general principles of human cognition (*e.g.* pattern-recognition);
- accommodation is not *rule-governed*, but *rule-dependent*.



## 2.1. Two-mechanism model of illocutionary games

### **The mechanism of accommodation of Austinian presuppositions**

If at time  $t$  speaker  $S$  makes a binding illocution  $I$ , and if the felicity of  $I$  requires Austinian presupposition  $p$  to be part of SC<sub>s</sub> relative to which  $I$  is evaluated, and if  $p$  is not part of SC<sub>s</sub> just before time  $t$ , then — *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits —  $p$  becomes part of SC<sub>s</sub> at  $t$ . (**Witek** 2013, 2015)

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### **In sum:**

- illocution / accommodation;
- Searle's essential rules / his preparatory rules.

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationalism”

### **Panaccommodationalism about illocutionary games**

→ **Lewis 1979; Roberts 2015; Langton 2015**

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationalism”

(14) You are permitted to cross the white line.

**Lewis (1979):**

- the new norm is produced by following a rule of accommodation;
- its felicitous performance requires and thereby creates the new permissibility fact;
- in general, the functioning of **exercitives *qua* exercitives** involves accommodation which is guided by the default principle “whatever the master says is **true**”.

If at time  $t$  something is said about permissibility by the master to the slave that requires for its **truth** the permissibility or impermissibility of certain courses of action, and if just before  $t$  the boundary is such as to make the master’s statement false, then — *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits — the boundary shifts at  $t$  so as to make the master’s statement true. (**Lewis** 1979: 341)

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Likewise for self-verified orders (**Langton** 2015: 5), *e.g.*:

(15) You are obliged to go and pick up wood.

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationism”

(16) I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*.

**Lewis** (1970: 59n):

- Performative sentences are well-formed syntactic objects with truth conditions.

If at time  $t$  something is said that requires for its **truth** that ship  $s$  bear name  $n$ ; and if  $s$  does not bear  $n$  just before  $t$ ; and if the form and circumstances of what is said satisfy certain conditions of felicity; then  $s$  begins at  $t$  to bear  $n$ . (**Lewis** 1979: 356)

Other conditions (**Lewis** 1979: 356):

- ship  $s$  did not bear the name beforehand ( $\rightarrow$  anti-givenness condition),
- the speaker makes it the case that ship  $s$  begins to bear the name,
- and she does it by uttering sentence (16), and so on.

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationism”

### **In sum:**

- Lewis’s panaccommodationism is motivated by his reductionism;
- *i.e.*, his contention that the primary goal behind making a move in a language game is to make a ***true statement***.

→ (14) is a “statement about permissibility” (**Lewis 1979: 341**);

→ (15) is a statement about the addressee’s obligation;

→ (16) and explicitly performative utterances are statements (**Bach and Harnish 1979**).

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationism”

**Roberts** (2015: 346)

(16) I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*.

(17) The speaker names this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*.

(18) This ship is named the *Queen Elizabeth*.

(19) I pronounce you husband and wife.

(20) The speaker pronounces the addressees to be husband and wife.

(21) The addressees are husband and wife.

(17) & (20) → compositionally asserted propositions

(18) & (21) → verified propositions



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“Note that the felicity of the act itself [i.e., the act made in (16)] seems to require that [(18)] was *not* true prior to the act; so **this is not accommodation of a presupposition**. But by virtue of the authority vested in the speaker, the act *makes* [(18)] *true in the actual world*. Since that is so, the competent, cooperative interlocutor, when confident that the preconditions of authorized performance of the act are satisfied, then **accommodates the truth of the conventional result to the conversational score.**” (Roberts 2015: 346)

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationism”

**Langton’s** (2015) two-part model:

- presupposition accommodation / illocutionary accommodation.

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(13) Go and pick up wood!

**Langton (2015):**

on the desert island, the functioning of (13) as a binding order, involves a two-part process of accommodation:

- through *presupposition accommodation*, **part I** creates Jones’s authority;
- through *illocutionary accommodation*, **part II** brings about Smith’s obligation;

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- through *illocutionary accommodation*, **part II** brings about Smith’s obligation;

**both parts** can be accounted for along the Lewisian lines, *i.e.*, by his “requires and thereby creates what is required” formula.

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationism”

(13) Go and pick up wood!

### **Part I. Presupposition Accommodation of Authority**

If (1. Utterance) — at time  $t$  something is said [Jones says to Smith, ‘Go and pick up wood!’]; and

(2. Requirement) — a score component is required to be a certain way [Jones has authority] in order for what is said to be correct play [a felicitous order]; and

(3. Novelty) — the component wasn’t that way before; and

(4. Conditions) — certain conditions hold [e.g. Smith falls in, treats Jones as having authority]; then

(5. Creation) — at  $t$  the score component is that certain way [Jones has authority], enabling what is said to be correct play [a felicitous order].

**(Langton 2015: 16)**

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationism”

(13) Go and pick up wood!

### **Part II. Illocutionary Accommodation**

If (1. Utterance) – at time  $t$  something is said [Jones says to Smith, ‘Go and pick up wood!’]; and

(2. Requirement) – a score component is required to be a certain way [Smith is obliged to go and pick up wood] in order for what is said to be correct play [a felicitous order]; and

(3. Novelty) – the component wasn’t that way before; and

(4. Conditions) – certain conditions hold [e.g. Jones has authority].

(5. Creation) – at  $t$  the score component is that certain way [Smith is obliged to go and pick up wood], enabling what is said to be correct play [a felicitous order].

**(Langton 2015: 12)**

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationism”

(13) Go and pick up wood!

### Part I. Presupposition Accommodation of Authority

(2. Requirement<sub>1</sub>) – a score component is required<sub>1</sub> to be a certain way [Jones has authority] in order for what is said to be correct play [a felicitous order]; and

### Part II. Illocutionary Accommodation

(2. Requirement<sub>2</sub>) – a score component is required<sub>2</sub> to be a certain way [Smith is obliged to go and pick up wood] in order for what is said to be correct play [a felicitous order];

### Note:

“requires” in “requires, and thereby creates what is required” formula is ambiguous:

- *require*<sub>1</sub> = *presuppose*,
- *require*<sub>2</sub> = *consist in* or *result in*;
- *requirements*<sub>1</sub> are put on *prior* context ( $\rightarrow$  CS<sub>S</sub>);
- *requirements*<sub>2</sub> are put on *posterior* context ( $\rightarrow$  CS<sub>T</sub>).

## 2.2. “Panaccommodationalism”

The two-part model is intended to:

- “shed light on the diverse and unnoticed ways a speech act can create a norm;
- highlight the unity in this diversity, in their conformity to a rule of accommodation;
- and bring out their dependence (obvious and subtle) on the dynamics of authority, as a condition of their success” (**Langton** 2015: 7).



### 3. Discussion

#### Questions

- (Q<sub>1</sub>) What motivates panaccommodationism about intentional communication, and what motivates panaccommodationism about illocutionary games?
- (Q<sub>2</sub>) Is the difference between the *two-mechanism model* and the *two-part model* substantive or merely verbal?
- (Q<sub>3</sub>) Is it always the case that it is the addressee, not the speaker, who is invited to accommodate the Austinian presupposition of the speakers act?
- (Q<sub>4</sub>) What is it for the speaker to *secure uptake* on the part of the addressee?

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**Thank you!**

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