Factivity mirrors interpretation: The selectional requirements of presuppositional verbs

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Abstract

Different verbs can take different kinds of arguments. Factive verbs such as *remember* and *forget* take clausal complements which are presupposed to be true. In contrast, verbs such as *say* and *think* do not presuppose the truth of their complements. I suggest that the complements of *presuppositional verbs* like *remember*, *forget*, *admit* and *deny* are actually definite DPs, picking out a discourse referent in the Common Ground. Under this view, factive verbs turn out to be subset of presuppositional verbs, verbs which presuppose the existence of their complement as a proposition in the Common Ground. Factive verbs further require that this proposition be true. It has been established that certain effects arise in clauses embedded by presuppositional verbs: only complements can be extracted from them and argument fronting inside of them is not allowed. I also note that these clauses can have DP pro-forms (*which*). This stands in opposition to non-presuppositional clauses, where extraction and fronting are possible, and only CP pro-forms (*as*, *so*) are allowed. The DP view allows for a uniform solution to these puzzles; the crucial distinction is whether the matrix verb selects for a definite entity (presuppositional) or for a proposition (non-presuppositional). Going further, I introduce crosslinguistic data showing that the entity/proposition split parallels a split in interpretation between DP and CP complements: a presuppositional DP complement is interpreted like a presupposed entity, while a non-presuppositional CP complement has the semantics of a novel proposition. This way of looking at clausal complements also allows us to account for the behavior of sentential subjects, which have been argued to be both nominal and factive. I flesh out these generalizations and show that they emerge as a natural result in our framework. With sentential subjects as with clausal complements, factivity and presupposition correlate with the syntactic category of the argument. I take this to imply a form-meaning isomorphism in the syntax and semantics with regard to what a verb licenses (DP or CP).
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1. Introduction

This paper is a study in the kind of arguments that a verb can take. When considering the arguments of a verb, it is tempting to assume that there is a straightforward mapping from syntax to semantics: a DP complement would be an individual whereas a CP would be a proposition. However, since at least Grimshaw (1979) it has been recognized that this view is not always correct: verbs like *ask* can take a question as their semantic complement but either a DP or a CP as their syntactic complement. Grimshaw (1979) was led to discuss two kinds of selectional requirements on complements, c-selection (syntactic) and s-selection (semantic). Subsequent work has since focused on the question of whether the two could be united under a single licensing requirement. Here, I point out that a direct mapping from syntax to semantics is not only possible for certain verbs but is to be preferred, since it brings along additional empirical benefits.

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Work on the syntax-lexical semantics interface has often found it beneficial to divide verbs into classes (e.g. factive and non-factive, Kiparsky and Kiparsky, 1970). We will take the case of PRESUPPOSITIONAL VERBS. These are verbs such as *deny* and *know* that presuppose the existence of a discourse referent as their complement. A number of observations have been made about the class of presuppositional verbs, to be elaborated immediately below (or about factive verbs, which form a subset of the larger class). I will argue that these verbs take a DP argument as their direct object. Using the filecard metaphor from the ''file change semantics'' of Heim (1982, 1983), we may envision a conversation as a file with different filecards, each representing a discourse referent. Introducing a new discourse referent creates a new filecard, whereas making a comment regarding an existing discourse referent involves updating its filecard. All filecards make up the Common Ground, CG. Definite descriptions refer to existing filecards (discourse referents) and indefinite descriptions create new filecards (discourse referents). We will think of entire propositions as filecards.

The idea that presuppositional verbs take definite DPs will initially be motivated on semantic grounds, but taking it seriously will lead to a unified explanation for a range of facts concerning presupposed elements in a range of languages.

Here is a taste of things to come. For a number of decades now it has been observed that clauses introduced by presuppositional verbs pattern differently than clauses introduced by non-presuppositional verbs. First, **extraction** of complements is allowed from both, (1a)–(2a), while extraction of subjects and adjuncts is allowed from non-presuppositionals only, (1b–c)–(2b–c). In other words, presuppositional verbs induce weak islands.

(1)　Non-presuppositional (non-factive):
　　a.　*What do you think that John stole ___?*　　　　　　　　　　　COMPLEMENT
　　b.　*Who do you think ___ stole the cookies?*　　　　　　　　　　SUBJECT
　　c.　*Why do you think John stole the cookies ___?*　　　　　　　　ADJUNCT

(2)　Presuppositional:
　　a.　*What do you remember/deny that John stole ___?*　　　　　　COMPLEMENT
　　b.　**Who do you remember/deny ___ stole the cookies?*　　　　　SUBJECT
　　c.　*#Why do you remember/deny that John stole the cookies ___?*　ADJUNCT

In order to explain the weak islandhood effects I adopt the analysis of presuppositional islands in Honcoop (1998). Honcoop argues that a number of islandhood constructions can be explained through semantic well-formedness constraints within a dynamic semantics framework. Importantly, his account of presuppositional islands stipulates an existential requirement of a discourse referent. This is no mere stipulation if our system is adopted; instead, Honcoop's semantics can be derived directly from the syntactic structure.

To these examples we add novel data from Hebrew and other languages, showing presuppositional clauses introduced by a determiner. In this case no element can be extracted, (3). This is similar to the case of clauses in English prefaced by *the fact that*, in which no extraction is possible either (4). These ''full'' DPs are thus strong islands. We will call them Overt Definite Presuppositionals.

(3)　**ma　　ata　zoxer　　　et　**ze**　še-dani　　　ganav ___?*
　　　what　you　remember　ACC　**this**　COMP-Danny　stole
　　　(int. 'What do you remember the fact that Danny stole?')　　　　　　HEBREW

(4)　**What do you remember **the fact** that John stole ___?*　　　　　　ENGLISH

Second, **fronting** is allowed in non-presuppositional clauses but not in presuppositional clauses:

(5)　Non-presuppositional:
　　a.　John **thinks** that [this book, Mary read].
　　b.　I can **assure** you that [that film, I don't want to ever see again].

(6)　Presuppositional:
　　a.　*John **regrets** that [this book, Mary read].
　　b.　*John **remembers** that [this book, Mary read].

Following de Cuba and Ürögdi (2009) and Haegeman and Ürögdi (2010a) but sticking to the view of DP presuppositional clauses, I will treat presupposed clauses as ''smaller'' in some sense, with the covert definite determiner bleeding projection of Topic or Focus nodes in the embedded CP. The fronting ban arises since the fronted elements have no clause-initial landing site.