

The Projection Problem for Predicates of Taste

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Abstract:

Utterances of simple taste sentences typically give rise to an ‘acquaintance inference’: they suggest that the speaker’s assertion is based on first-hand experience with the item in question rather than on some form of indirect evidence (Mothersill 1984, Pearson 2013, MacFarlane 2014). For example, an assertion of (1) would typically suggest that the speaker has actually tasted the cake in question and is not simply basing her assertion on the testimony of others.

(1) The carrot cake is delicious.

According to one approach to this phenomenon, this inference is essentially a Quality implicature, arising from features of the pragmatics and epistemology of taste (Ninan 2014). Other theorists have instead argued that the inference is somehow lexically encoded in the meaning of taste predicates, perhaps as a presupposition (Pearson 2013, Anand and Korotkova 2018, Willer and Kennedy Forthcoming). But since the projection profile of this inference is rather different from that of standard presuppositions, any presuppositional approach will need a mechanism that allows the acquaintance requirement to be obviated by certain operators (Anand and Korotkova 2018). A natural question that arises is whether such an account can be developed in a principled way.

A pair of empirical observations suggests an affirmative answer to this question. First, the acquaintance requirement behaves quite like a standard presupposition with respect to *extensional* operators, such as Boolean connectives and generalized quantifiers. Second, the acquaintance requirement seems to be obviated by *intensional* operators, such as modals, conditionals, and attitude verbs (Cariani Forthcoming). These data can be predicted by: treating the acquaintance inference as a presupposition; adopting a *supervaluationist* treatment of that presupposition; and then positing a mechanism that allows intensional operators to obviate or erase that presupposition. While the resulting account still faces certain empirical and conceptual challenges, it seems overall more promising than the pragmatic-epistemic account that I discussed in earlier work.