Some Terminology and Issues with Presuppositions

<u>TRIGGERS</u>: How is a presupposition introduced? (Answer: Conventionally, or by conversational maxims)

<u>PROJECTION</u>: How a presupposition of a part is "inherited" by a larger piece of language that contains the trigger.

<u>HOLES</u>: An embedding context in which the presuppositions of the part is *projected up to* or *inherited by* the larger sentence. Negation is usually thought to be a hole.

<u>PLUGS</u>: Embedding contexts where the presuppositions of the parts are canceled. *Say* is often thought to be a plug. (*Tony said that what Joan lost on the flight was her flute* does not presuppose *Joan lost something on the flight*)

<u>FILTERS</u>: Embedding contexts where the presuppositions of the parts are altered or sometimes blocked. For example, *and* and *or*.

Conventional vs. Conversational Implicatures (Grice)

Jim went to the store and bought nothing
Jim went to the store but bought nothing

True in exactly the same situations, but the second suggests that the speaker perceives a contrast between going to the store and buying nothing.

Intuitively, the contrast is conventionally conveyed by *but*.

Grice regarded this contrastive character of *but* as a "conventional implicature", an implication that is conventional in nature but not determinable by truth-conditional content.

Jim went to the store and bought something
Jim went to the store but bought something

[needs a special context to make the second sentence be felicitous]

Is it a presupposition? *If Jim went to the store but bought nothing, we're in trouble*

Conventional Implicature:

These arise from conversational dynamics. E.g. upon hearing

> **Mary has a child**

We assume the speaker is being cooperative in telling us all he knows about the matter, and so we infer

> **Mary has exactly one child**

Some conversational implicatures are presupposed:

> **If Jim discovers that Bill is in New York, there will be trouble**
> **If I discover that Bill is in New York, there will be trouble**

Shows that the implication can't arise purely from the conventional meaning of *discover* (a factive verb), or else we couldn't explain the difference in presuppositions here. (see p. 354 of text for their rationale)

Three different concepts:

a) A entails B: if A is true, B must be true

b) A presupposes B: B is backgrounded and taken for granted by A)

c) A conventionally or conversationally implicates B: B follows from the interaction of the truth conditions of A together with either linguistic conventions on the proper use of A or with general principles of conversation

pp. 355-6 for a discussion of entailment vs. presupposition

pp. 356-9 for a discussion of presupposition vs. implicature

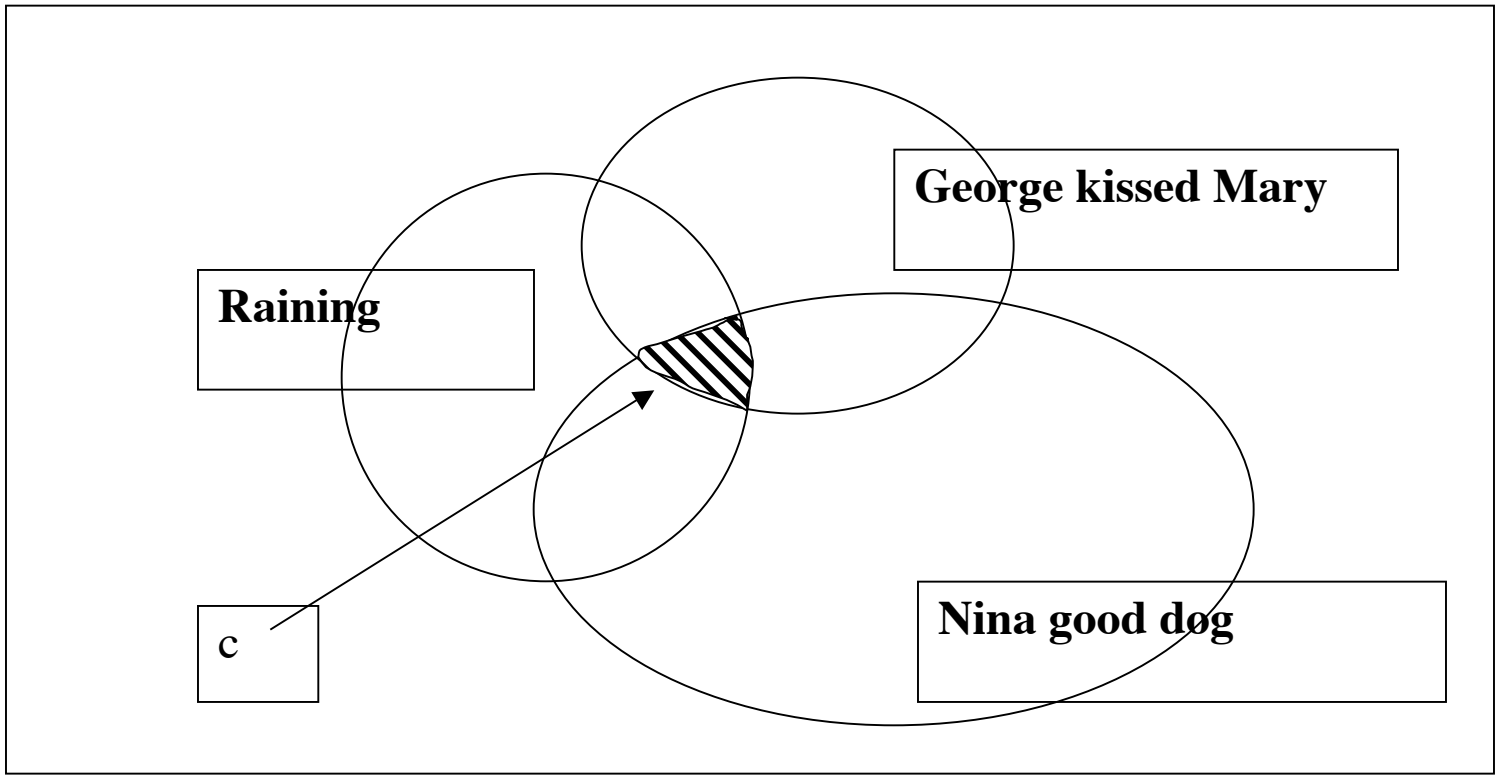
A "Dynamic Semantics" account of presupposition

<u>Common Ground</u> (CG): The set of propositions which the participants in a conversation agree to be uncontroversial for the purposes of this conversation

<u>Context Set</u> (c): The set of possible situations in which every proposition in the Common Ground is true.

Example: CG = {that it is raining, that George kissed Mary, that Nina is a good dog}

c = the set of possible worlds in which: it is raining ∧ George kissed Mary ∧ Nina is a good dog



Shuka is a nice dog too presupposes *Some dog other than Shuka is nice*

But given c, where Nina is a dog other than Shuka, this is a felicitous continuation.

Generally speaking, the theory of pragmatic presuppositions (what is presented in our textbook) says that "presuppositions are conditions on whether a sentence is admissible into a conversation."

A presupposition then is a statement of the form:

"Sentence S can only be used in c if …"

(for example, if there is already a dog in the common ground.)

For any proposition $p \in CG$:

Sp(c) believes $p \in CG$

Adr(c) believes $p \in CG$

Sp(c) believes Adr(c) believes $p \in CG$

Adr(c) believes Sp(c) believes $p \in CG$

…

…

I.e., p is "common belief" between Sp(c) and Adr(c)

Accommodation

What happens if a sentence is uttered in a context which does not satisfy its presuppositions?

Well, sometimes the conversation can't go any further: we say "huh? What do you mean, 'again'?? Johnny never did it before!"

But sometimes…suppose you've been inside all day and had no idea it was raining. Mary comes in and says *It stopped raining*. It is pretty "legalistic" and pedantic to say "huh? You never said it was raining!"

Unless you want to dispute the idea that it was raining, the cooperative thing to do is to act as if the proposition that it was raining had been in the Common Ground, by discreetly adding it and moving on.

***(presupposition) accommodation* [David Lewis, 1979]**

Not all presuppositions seem equally accommodatable, e.g. the following, when said out of the blue: *George arrived late too* and *The woman likes rutabagas*

Context Change Potential semantics (dynamic semantics)

The meaning of a sentence is its *context change potential*

The basic rule: the context change potential of a sentence S is: when you update context set c with S, discard from c all of those worlds in which S is not true.

i.e.: for any context c and simple sentence S, $C + S = C \cap [\![S]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g}$

($[\![S]\!]$ is the *static meaning* of sentence S in M,w,i,c,g)

Keep in mind also that c fixes the values of the contextual variables, such as *I, you, here, now, there, …*

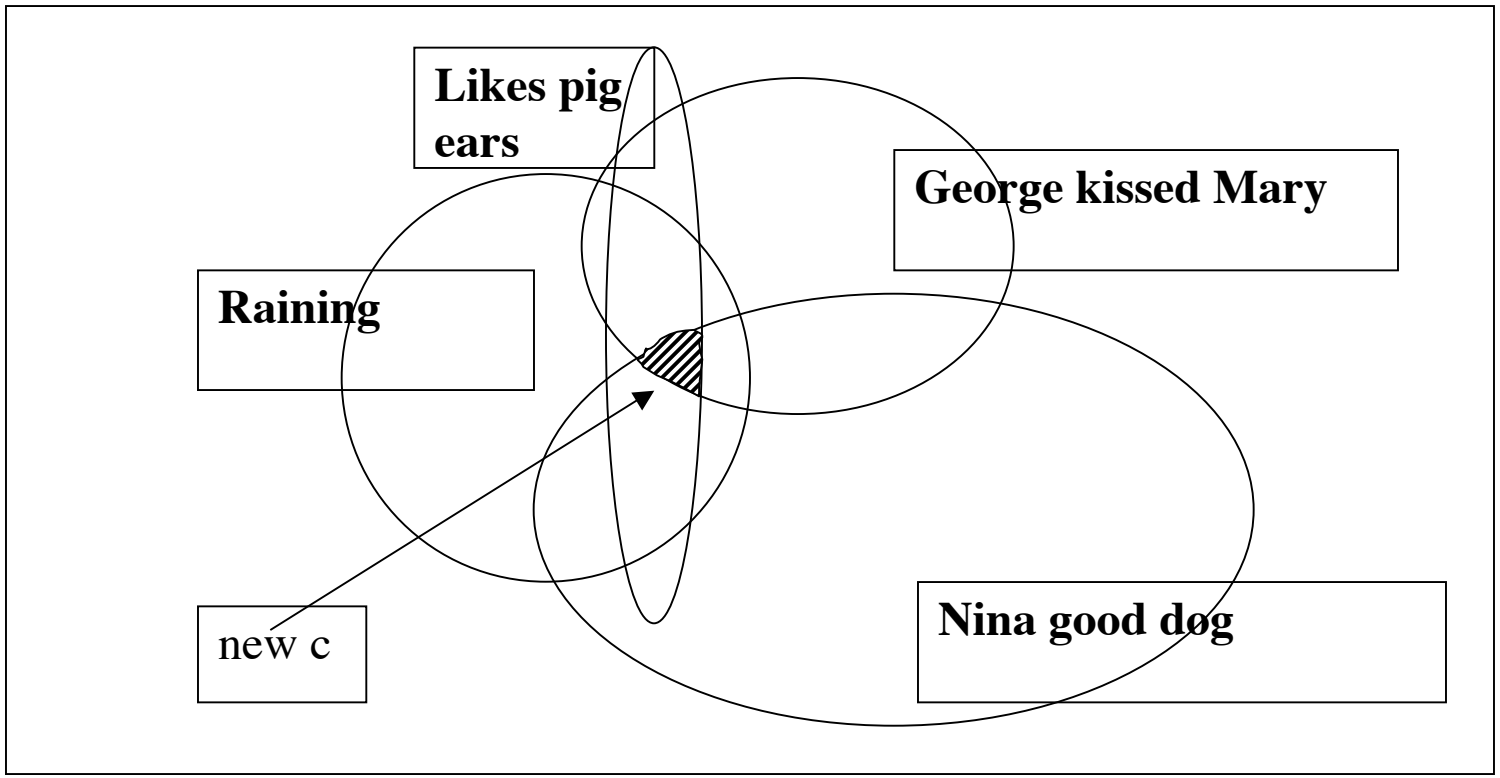
David Lewis [1979] has the metaphor of a "scoreboard" where the values of these items are displayed; the discourse and background can put values in and change them during the continuation of a discourse.

Utterance of a sentence containing (e.g.) *that* is infelicitous if the value is not filled in

If we consider the diagram before, where we had

CG = {that it is raining, that George kissed Mary, that Nina is a good dog}
c = the set of possible worlds in which: it is raining ∧ George kissed Mary ∧ Nina is a good dog

Now we add that Nina likes pig ears:



Now suppose we continue with *Nina ate a bone and Shuka ate a bone too*.

$c + (\phi \wedge \psi) = ((c + \phi) + \psi)$

Here: c + *Nina ate a bone and Shuka ate a bone too* = ((c + *Nina ate a bone*) + *Shuka ate a bone too*

Since the last conjunct has a presupposition, we can only add it if the c up to that point has a dog (other than Shuka) in it who has eaten a bone. But it does, from the first conjunct.

What about other dynamic continuations?

$c + (\phi \rightarrow \psi) = (c - ((c + \phi) - ((c + \phi) + \psi))$

$(c + \phi)$ is: increment context with ϕ. $((c + \phi) + \psi))$ is: increment the context with ϕ and then with ψ. Subtract the latter worlds from the former. This gives the worlds in c where ϕ is true but ψ is false. Now subtract these from c, which yields the worlds where either ϕ is false or ψ is true, when evaluated in that order