

Future-Time Reference in Truth-Conditional Pragmatics

Future-time reference can be expressed in English by a variety of means, as (1)-(4) exemplify:

- (1) Tom will play a concert at the Royal Albert Hall on Friday.
- (2) Tom is going to play a concert at the Royal Albert Hall on Friday.
- (3) On Friday Tom is playing a concert at the Royal Albert Hall.
- (4) On Friday Tom plays a concert at the Royal Albert Hall.

In capturing future-time reference, semantic theory such as DRT (Kamp & Reyle 1993) relies on the representation of tense and hence has a difficulty with reconciling the reference of the temporal adverbial and the tense in (3) and (4). In order to capture the futurity of ‘plays’ and ‘is playing’ (traditionally called ‘tenseless future’ and ‘futurative progressive’ respectively), I propose to use a truth-conditional pragmatic account (e.g. Recanati 2003) in which truth value is predicated of an *utterance*, or *what is said* by the speaker. In other words, in order to capture the temporal reference of (3) and (4), we proceed through *what is said* and assume a theory of meaning that allows for a pragmatic intrusion to the truth-conditional content. We obtain a representation of the speaker’s meaning to which various sources of information about meaning contribute. This can be contrasted with DRSs of DRT which rely closely on representing tenses, as they are founded on the output of syntactic processing (‘triggering configuration’):

‘The algorithm must represent the temporal information that is contained in the tense of a sentence and in its temporal adverb (if there is one).’ Kamp & Reyle (1993: 512)

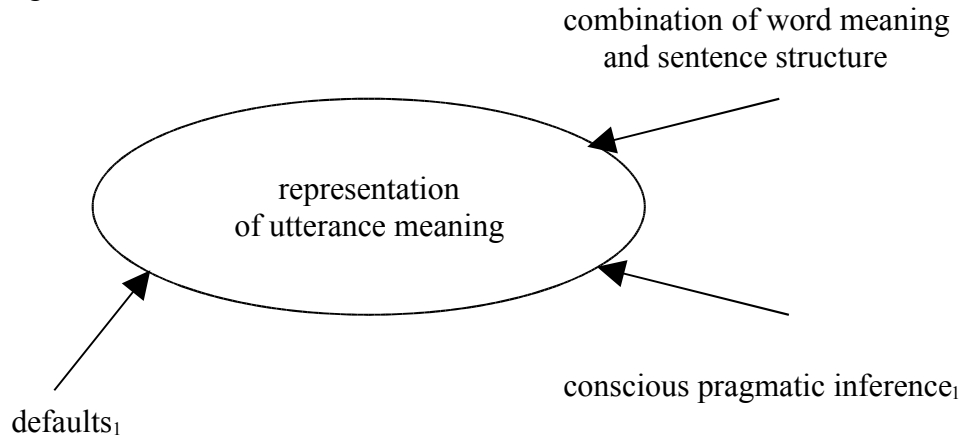
and

‘...[the feature] TENSE has three possible values, *past*, *present*, and *future*, signifying that the described eventuality lies before, at, or after the utterance time, respectively. The value of TENSE for a given sentence S is determined by the tense of the verb of S. When the main verb is in the simple past, TENSE = *past*; when it is in the simple present, TENSE = *pres*; and when the verb complex contains the auxiliary *will*, TENSE = *fut*.

Kamp & Reyle (1993: 512-513)

On the other hand, on the truth-conditional pragmatic account, the future reference of (3) and (4) can be arrived at on the level of *what is said*. Espousing the contribution of truth conditions to *what is said*, as well as the role of default interpretations (Levinson 2000), I propose a schema for the representation of utterance meaning as in Fig. 1 below. The representation of utterance meaning combines the output of the syntactic processing (combination of word meaning and sentence structure, henceforth [...]_{WS}), the output of conscious pragmatic processing that contributes to *what is said*, i.e. to the proposition expressed by WS, henceforth [...]_{CPI 1}, and a default interpretation of the proposition expressed (henceforth [...]_{D 1}). The representation of utterance meaning is the only cognitively real level of meaning of interest to utterance interpretation. Stage 2 concerns the generation of implicatures that are separate from the proposition expressed.

Stage 1



Stage 2

- defaults₂
- conscious pragmatic inference₂

Fig. 1

In processing (4), the combination of tense from ‘plays’ with the information from the temporal adverbial ‘on Friday’ by means of CPI 1 results in the output as in (4a) below. Square brackets stand for the material to which D 1, CPI 1 and WS apply.

(4a) [[Next Friday]_{D 1} Tom [play *fut*]_{CPI 1} a concert at the Royal Albert Hall.]_{WS}

By D 1, ‘on Friday’ is resolved as [next Friday]; by CPI 1, ‘play’ is resolved as [play *fut*], and the representation of utterance meaning is arrived at by WS, i.e. by the combination of word meaning and sentence structure. In conclusion, I also tentatively point out that such representations can be regarded as coarse-grained equivalents of thoughts that have the properties of being truth-conditional and compositional. The compositionality is founded on the assumption of the supervenience of mental representations on physical reality (Schiffer, e.g. 2003).

References:

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