

# *Grounding anti-presuppositions by strong BiOT: the case of indefinite descriptions*

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## Outline:

- ▶ I Introduction
- ▶ II Anti-presupposition at work
- ▶ III Annulment of anti-presupposition (by content)
- ▶ IV Annulment of anti-presupposition (by complexity of form)
- ▶ V Heim's example revisited

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Conventional wisdom:

- ▶ Anti-presuppositions (Sauerland, Percus)
  - ▶ Constraints from absence of presupposition triggers
- ▶ Consensus:
  - ▶ Quantity implicature argument fails, still
  - ▶ pragmatic, competition phenomenon

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Our proposal:

- ▶ Strong BiOT in terms of content/form probability (Blutner 1998)

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Case study:

- ▶ the definite article: presupposition of familiarity
- ▶ the indefinite article: basically neutral in meaning
  - ▶ tends to receive an interpretation of novelty

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Motivation:

► a better understanding and explanation of this passage from Heim (1991):

"(124) Richard hat sich gestern abend das Beaux-Arts-Trio angehört und hinterher ein Bier mit dem Pianisten getrunken.

(125) Richard hat sich gestern abend das Beaux-Arts-Trio angehört und hinterher ein Bier mit einem Pianisten getrunken.

Angenommen, Richard hört sich das Beaux-Arts-Trio an und trinkt nachher mit Pressler, dem Pianisten dieses Trios. Über diesen Sachverhalt kann mit (124) angemessen und wahrheitsgemäß berichtet werden. (125) dagegen wäre irreführend und würde den Hörer zu dem Schluss berechtigen, dass Richard mit einem anderen Pianisten als Pressler getrunken hat.

[...]

Soweit haben wir vorausgesagt, dass (125) nicht ausschließt, dass der Pianist, mit dem Richard trinkt, ein anderer als Pressler ist. Bleibt zu erklären, warum es dies nicht nur zulässt, sondern geradezu erzwingt."

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Key example:

► an English version of Heim (1991):

- (1) Danny heard the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Cotton Club last night and afterwards had a beer with **the piano player**.
- (2) Danny heard the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Cotton Club last night and afterwards had a beer with **a piano player**.

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A BiOT version of Percus (2006):  
competition at the presuppositional level

$P(\cdot / [[\cdot]])$	$\exists!x.P(x)$	$\neg\exists!x.P(x)$
the P	$\Rightarrow 1$	0
a P	.5	$\Rightarrow .5$

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Predictions of Heim and Percus:

▶ "a P" is interpreted as  $\neq$  (difference, hence novelty)

(3) Vicky lives with a man and a woman. ?? She loves a man.  
*(adapted from Woody Allen: Vicky Christina Barcelona.)*



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Part II

- ▶ Anti-presupposition at work

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More complex story:

- ▶ "a P" is sometimes interpreted as  $z \neq x$ , but
- ▶ "a P" can (unexpectedly) be infelicitous, or
- ▶ "a P" can be OK, without the interpretation  $z \neq x$

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Proposal:

- ▶ distinguish between competition in presupposition and content
- ▶ competition must include items like "another"
- ▶ distinguish according to complexity of forms

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Competitors at the level of presupposition:

- ▶ "the P" presupposes that there is exactly one discourse referent  $x$  in  $U_c$  such that  $P(x)$  follows from  $C$
- ▶ "another P" presupposes that there is at least one discourse referent  $x$  in  $U_c$  such that  $P(x)$  follows from  $C$
- ▶ "one of the Ps" presupposes that there are at least two discourse referents  $x$  in  $U_c$  such that  $P(x)$  follows from  $C$

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Prediction:

- ▶ "a P"
  - ▶ antipresupposes that there is at least one discourse referent  $x$  in  $U_c$  such that  $P(x)$  follows from  $C$ ,
  - ▶ so should be infelicitous whenever there is –
  - ▶ **ceteris paribus**, i.e. as long as there are no other differences between the forms
  - ▶ (but often, there are ...).

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In strong BiOT (competition in presupposition):

$P(\cdot / [\cdot])$	$\exists!x.P(x)$	$\exists x,y.P(x)$ & $P(y)$	$\neg\exists x.P(x)$
the P	$\Rightarrow 1$	0	0
another P	.5	.5	0
one of the P	0	$\Rightarrow 1$	0
a P	.33	.33	$\Rightarrow .33$

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Prediction

► standard novelty effect (4a) and blocking of "a P" in (4b) due to anti-presupposition:

(4a) Madeleine Albright (...) told me that she'd met **a woman** (#the woman) and asked her if she was going to vote for me,

(4b) and **the woman** (#a woman) said no, because (...) (google).

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More complex case: local satisfaction

- ▶ same projection behavior as presuppositions proper

(5) Joan has farmed her land for many years with only **a faithful horse** to help. EVEN if she had a TRACTor, she would use **a horse** for SOME purposes. (constructed)

- ▶ counterfactual conditional

- ▶ anti-presupposition forces Joan's "faithful horse" out of the local common ground



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Part III

- ▶ Annulment of anti-presupposition (by content)

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Competition in content:

- ▶ We concentrate here on the case where there is exactly one  $x$  in  $U_c$  such that  $P(x)$  follows from  $C$ :
  - ▶ "a P": there is a  $z$  such that  $P(z)$  and  $Q(z)$
  - ▶ "the P": there is a  $z$  such that  $(P(z) \text{ and } Q(z))$  and  $z=x$
  - ▶ "another P": there is a  $z$  such that  $(P(z) \text{ and } Q(z))$  and  $z \neq x$

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In strong BiOT (competition in content):

$P(\cdot / [\cdot])$	=	$\neq$
the P	$\Rightarrow 1$	0
another P	0	$\Rightarrow 1$
a P	.5	.5

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Violation of the ceteris paribus condition

- ▶ difference in content matters
- ▶ annulment of anti-presupposition
  - ▶ irrelevance or speaker inexpertise

(6) I only saw the mouse during the evenings. It usually hid behind/under the fridge when it got a scare. Bungalow number 10 also had **a local mouse**. Or maybe it was the same mouse I saw there? I have no idea how far they venture... (google)

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- ▶ Even if we assume speaker expertise and relevance, annulment of the anti-presupposition can occur if "a P" is embedded in a local context where the difference in content makes a clear difference after all.

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Intensional context:

(7) Although most Jews avoided Samaria, Jesus walked right into it, taking his disciples with him. He was tired, so he sat down at a well near the city of Sychar, and sent his disciples into town to buy some groceries (John 4:38). Along came **a Samaritan woman**, and Jesus talked to her. She was surprised that he would talk to a Samaritan; his disciples were surprised that he would talk to **a woman** (verses 9, 27). (google)

- ▶ The surprise is related to the property, e.g. "surprised that the individual Jesus talked to was a woman"
- ▶ Potential problem for Percus who accords the same content (assertion) to "a P" and "the P"

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Quantificational context:

(8) - What is your avatar and why did you choose it?

- It's **a bullet bill** from the Mario series. I'm not sure why I chose it, just figured everybody has seen **a bullet bill** before. (google)



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Part IV

- ▶ Annulment of anti-presupposition (by complexity of form)



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Complexity of "another"

▶ "another" = "a(n)" + "other"

(9) **A Roxbury man** has admitted to a rape that wrongfully sent **a man** to prison 15 years ago (google)

(10) Bart, Paul and Rob were lucky in the amusement park yesterday night: First, Bart won **a tiger** at the shooting stand, then Paul won **a tiger** at the darts stand, and to top it off. Rob won a sleeping doll at some lottery. (constructed example)

▶ another source for the novelty effect – the impression that "a" may signal difference.

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Phonological complexity: focus profile

- ▶ "another" is usually accented, "a" is never accented
- ▶ Often, substitution of "a" for "another" results in infelicity simply because it forces us to accent the given noun:

(11) **A young man** was sent to the lake with a basket to bring water. He did not return. After a time the people, thinking he had forgotten his errand, sent **#a(nother) man**. He also failed to return. (google)

- ▶ Not possible to say whether the infelicity is due to anti-presupposition or focus profile (avoidF-violation)

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But arguably anti-presupposition in (3):

▶ (3) Vicky lives with a man and a woman. ?? She loves a man.

▶ Due to contrast with previous coordinated NP, we get competition between two candidate forms of similar complexity:

▶ (3a) She LOVES aNOTHER man

▶ (3b) She LOVES a MAN

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Part V

- ▶ Heim's example revisited

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### Bridging

- ▶ definite in (1) is felicitous because of the bridging from the Duke Ellington Orchestra to the piano player of this Orchestra.
- ▶ different scenarios are conceivable in (2).

(1) Danny heard the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Cotton Club last night and afterwards had a beer with the piano player.

(2) Danny heard the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Cotton Club last night and afterwards had a beer with a piano player.

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▶ stronger anaphoric requirements of "another" compared to "the" – bridging is not enough for the former.

▶ Heim's intended meaning of (2) is explicitly, but infelicitously expressed in (12):

(12) #Danny heard the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Cotton Club last night and afterwards had a beer with another piano player.

▶ Compare also:

(13) ??Danny heard the Duke Ellington Orchestra with their new piano player BS at the Cotton Club last night, and afterwards he had a beer with a piano player.

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Possible interpretations (scenarios) for "a piano player" in (2):

- ▶ infelicitous #"a" (anti-presupposition proper)
- ▶ inexpert speaker
  - ▶ the speaker doesn't know the orchestra has a piano player (so in speaker's CG there is none)
  - ▶ speaker doesn't know which piano player had a beer
- ▶ blocking of "another" due to bridging constraint permits annulment of anti-presupposition and deblocking of the ≠ content

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