

Elwood Warren-Kuelgen

10/11/2025

Philosophy of Language

Two Accounts of Presupposition

What are “presuppositions”? Building from traditional views—most notably, Stalnaker (1974) and Karttunen (1974)—Fintel (2008) characterizes presuppositions as requirements that sentences impose on the common ground of conversations they are asserted in. Alternatively, Beaver and Stanley (2023) depart drastically from traditional views, characterizing presuppositions in terms of ‘associative resonances’ (i.e. statistical correlations between speech practices and features of the context). Here, I argue that Fintel’s somewhat traditional view provides a more plausible and explanatory powerful account of simple paradigmatic cases of presupposition, whereas Beaver and Stanley’s more radical view accounts for a much wider range of phenomena—including Saul’s (2024) ‘covert-effect dogwhistles’—but lacks explanatory power. Furthermore, I argue that both views are consistent with one another. Hence, combining both views yields an improved account of presupposition which is both wide-ranging and explanatorily powerful.

In part one, I describe Fintel’s (2008) account of presupposition, which purports to explain the interaction between semantically encoded requirements on the common ground and pragmatic principles guiding the evolution of the common ground. This account provides a plausible and psychologically grounded explanation of why utterances of specific sentences have some of the specific presuppositions that they do.

In part two, I turn to Beaver and Stanley’s (2023) account of presupposition, which does not provide an explanation of *why* utterances of specific sentences reliably produce the same presuppositions, but nevertheless predicts *which* presuppositions any given utterance will have. On this account, a feature of the context is a presupposition of an utterance to the extent that the utterance is probabilistically correlated with the occurrence of that feature.

In part three, I show how the theories presented in sections one and two can be combined to produce an improved account of presupposition. Beaver and Stanley’s account possesses the virtue of picking out a wider range of phenomena that can intuitively be called ‘presuppositions.’ Unlike Fintel’s account, however, Beaver and Stanley’s account provides no explanation of why there exists a statistical correlation between utterances and their presuppositions. Hence, I conclude that Beaver and Stanley’s account points to the target phenomena that Fintel’s account must be expanded to explain.

Finally, in section four, I anticipate and reply to three strong objections to my thesis that both accounts of presupposition can and should be combined in the way specified above. The first objection rejects the claim that both accounts pick out the same type of phenomena, the second rejects that all the phenomena picked out by Beaver and Stanley's account are within the purview of the philosophy of language, and the third claims that even if my thesis is true, it does not provide much insight towards a comprehensive account of presupposition. My responses to these objections help to strengthen, clarify, and substantiate my thesis, as well as inspire speculation about what a comprehensive account of presupposition would amount to.

Part 1: Fintel's Account

Consider the following canonical cases of presupposition:

- (1) Sorry I am late. I had to pick my daughter up from the airport.
- (2) It was Margaret who broke the keyboard.
- (3) If Alice hates music, so does her cat.

In (1) the speaker presupposes that s/he has a daughter, in (2) that someone broke the keyboard, and in (3) that Alice has a cat (or at least: if she hates music, then she has a cat). Each of these examples has in common the fact that if the speaker were to utter them and immediately proceed to utter the presupposed statement, the resulting utterance would come off as unacceptable, infelicitous, or (at the very least) strange (Consider, for instance, "I had to pick up my daughter from the airport. I have a daughter."). Hence, sentences with presuppositions cannot be analyzed as mere conjunctions; the order of statements matters (call this the 'order feature'). Traditional accounts of presupposition are largely motivated by the need for an explanation of the order feature.

The picture advocated by Fintel (2008) combines Stalnaker's (1974) idea that presuppositions are requirements that utterances impose on the common ground¹ and Karttunen's (1974) idea that utterances have presuppositions because they are encoded into the semantic content of sentences. The result is a theory which takes presuppositions to be requirements imposed on the common ground of a conversation by the semantics of the sentences uttered therein. Now, to explain how a conversation evolves—and hence, how the common ground evolves—we need to posit some pragmatic principle which connects the requirements on the common ground encoded in the semantics of sentences

¹ Where the "common ground" is defined as an idealized set of propositions which all interlocutors accept (i.e. assume to be taken for granted and not subject to further discussion) and all accept that all accept, and so on. The common ground describes a set of possible worlds (the context set) each of which is consistent with the truth of all propositions in the common ground.

uttered to the actual amendment of the common ground by conversational participants. Lewis' (1979) famous rule of accommodation serves exactly this purpose:

If at time *t* something is said that requires presupposition *P* to be acceptable, and if *P* is not presupposed just before *t*, then - *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits - presupposition *P* comes into existence at *t*.

Roughly, this principle posits that, under normal circumstances and at the time of a speech act, interlocutors automatically presuppose (i.e. add to the common ground) whichever propositions are necessary for allowing the speaker to successfully perform the speech act.

Now consider how this picture explains the order feature illustrated by (1) through (3). Plausibly, the primary purpose—and consequently, the condition of acceptability—of declarative speech acts (i.e. acts of assertion) is to update the common ground with information about the truth-value of some proposition. Hence, the presuppositions encoded in a sentence asserted are the requirements that the common ground must meet for that utterance to update the common ground. Therefore, since utterances of (1) through (3) cannot cause an update to the common ground if it does not contain certain propositions (namely, propositions that the speaker has a daughter, that someone broke the keyboard, and that Alice has a cat, respectively), it is inferred that (1) through (3) semantically encode those requirements on the common ground. The order feature is thus explained: by the rule of accommodation, utterances of (1) through (3) add the presupposed propositions to the common ground, making it inappropriate to reassert them.²

For present purposes, there are two important features to highlight about Fintel's account of presupposition (as characterized above). First, the account gives a psychological explanation of presuppositions by relying on a notion of common ground which is constituted by the psychological relations of acceptance and belief between interlocutors and propositions. And second, the account describes presuppositions categorically, meaning that given any sentence *S* and any proposition *p*, *p* either is or is not a presupposition of *S* (in other words, presuppositions are binary, and do not admit of degrees).³ These features provide crucial points of comparison between Fintel's account and Beaver and Stanley's account (as characterized below).

² Presumably, some maxim of conversation—for instance, Grice's (1975) maxim of quantity—explains the inappropriateness of reasserting something that's already in the common ground.

³ This results from the fact that some proposition either is or is not required to be in the common ground before the utterance of some sentence can make an update to it.

Part 2: Beaver and Stanley's Account

For the sake of exposition, call Fintel's more traditional account of presupposition (i.e. the account presented above) the 'accommodation account', and call Beaver and Stanley's more radical view (i.e. the view presented below) the 'resonance account'. According to the resonance account of presupposition, the degree to which something is a presupposition of some utterance (i.e. of an instantiation of a speech practice) is given by the following set of equations (from Beaver and Stanley, 2023, p. 220):

- I. Associative resonance = $p(\text{feature} | \text{instantiation of practice}) - p(\text{feature})$
- II. Effect probability = $p(\text{instantiation of practice} \text{--} \text{caused feature})$
- III. Presuppositional resonance = Associative resonance – Effect probability

Roughly speaking, the idea is this: The presuppositions of an utterance are a specific subset of those features of the context that have an increased probability given the occurrence of the utterance. Namely, the presuppositions of an utterance are defined by that subset of features which does not contain effects of the utterance. Unpacking this dense characterization requires unpacking the notions of associative resonance and effect probability, in turn.

As described by the first equation above, the degree to which something (i.e. a feature) is an associative resonance of the instantiation of a practice⁴ is determined by taking the probability of that feature given the instantiation of the practice and subtracting the prior probability of that feature. This notion of associative resonance is inspired by Kaplan's (1999) unpublished lecture on expressive meanings, in which he argues that words like 'ouch' and 'oops' (and perhaps expletives) are best characterized as expressing, rather than describing, their contents, where the contents expressed are the word's 'conditions of use.' Roughly, Beaver and Stanley's proposal is to expand and amend Kaplan's view, applying it to a much wider scope by characterizing all speech practices—and more broadly, all practices—in terms of the features of the context that those speech practices tend to co-occur with. For instance, since the probability that a speaker is in pain given that they said "ouch" is higher than the probability that they are in pain otherwise, a

⁴ Though the present discussion focuses on speech practices, Beaver and Stanley broadly characterize 'practices' as any complex human activities which are habitual and rule-governed, where 'habitual' essentially means repetitive and in some sense 'expected', and 'rule-governed' means that the practice has "sufficient consistency in its form that observers can identify a categorical similarity across different instantiations of the practice" (p. 76). The result is that everything from Catholicism to playing Monopoly to drinking a cup of tea are considered to be practices, given that those activities are comprised of habitual and rule-governed elements. Instantiations of practices are thus activities which are identifiable as being consistent with the general form of the practice, even if they differ in specific details.

speaker's being in pain is a strong associative resonance of their instantiation of the practice of uttering "ouch". Alternatively, a speaker's interest in philosophy, ability to speak English, and interest in analytical philosophy of language, are all (to greater or lesser degrees) plausible resonances of an utterance of "Bertrand Russel was a genius."

The notion of associative resonance is too broad to account for any ordinary definition of 'presupposition' because many resonances of practices are effects that occur after the practice has been instantiated. Contrastingly, *Presuppositions* are, by all definitions, suppositions that are prior conditions of speech acts. The notion of effect probability accounts for this consideration by providing the probability that some feature of the context is an effect of a practice. For instance, suppose that A says "hi" to B. An associative resonance of A's utterance is that the hearer, B, will respond with a greeting. But B's probable greeting occurs after A's utterance, and hence does not seem to be presupposed by A. To solve this problem, effect probability is subtracted from associative resonance to yield presuppositional resonance⁵. Thus, the presuppositions of a practice are those features of the context which are not effects of that practice, but which have an increased probability given that the practice has occurred.

The resonance account of presupposition has neither of the features that I highlighted about the accommodation account; it does not provide a psychological account of how presuppositions update the common ground, nor does it hold that presuppositions are categorical. Consider each of these differences, in turn. First, it's crucial to emphasize that resonance is a non-psychological notion based on probabilities⁶, where probabilities are defined in terms of a simple measure of the frequency at which events co-occur. Practices can have resonances which some people do not recognize or are not attuned to. Further, presuppositional resonance makes no explicit reference to a psychologically constituted common ground, though most practices will likely have as resonances facts about the common ground. Second, presuppositional resonance is a measure of the degree to which features of the context are presuppositions of some practice. Thus, nearly all practices will have presuppositional resonances that are probabilistically (rather than necessarily) correlated with their instantiation. For instance, though it is plausible that the speaker's being angry is a weak presuppositional resonance

⁵ Leaving aside, for present purposes, obvious questions about the nature of causation and the difficulty of identifying cause and effect relationships between practices and their resonances.

⁶ Beaver and Stanley do provide a measure of the extent to which an agent is 'attuned' to a resonance or practice, writing "an agent is attuned to a practice to the extent that their state and behavior predictably evolve in accordance with its presence in the agents context" (pg. 80). But it's a different psychological question as to how agents become attuned to practices. This is beyond the scope of this paper, but it should suffice to say that Beaver and Stanley endorse a roughly associationist picture of how the mind processes information where we become attuned to practices by picking up on patterns of association.

of an utterance of “It was Margaret who broke the keyboard,” not all utterances of that sentence—or, for that matter, utterances of slightly different sentences subsumed under the practice of a more abstract ‘accusational’ form—occur in contexts where the speaker is angry.

Part 3: Towards a Unified Account

Both of the latter accounts of presupposition aim to solve radically different problems. Fintel’s accommodation account was primarily designed to solve the order problem and explain the formal semantic processes involved in conversation, whereas Beaver and Stanley’s resonance account was primarily designed to explain political rhetoric and the relation between linguistic practices and human behavior. Given these radical differences, it is tempting to conclude that both accounts capture different phenomena and so are not both accounts of presupposition. On the contrary, I here argue that combining both accounts of presupposition yields a wide-ranging and explanatorily powerful explanation of what is plausibly a single kind of phenomenon.

Recall the canonical cases of presupposition—(1) through (3). Both accounts predict that utterances of (1) through (3) respectively presuppose the propositions that the speaker has a daughter, that someone broke the keyboard, and that Alice has a cat (or at least: if she hates music, then she has a cat). On the accommodation account, this is explained by the fact that those presuppositions must be in the common ground before utterances of (1) through (3) can make updates to the common ground. Contrastingly, on the resonance account, utterances of (1) through (3) presuppose the corresponding propositions because acceptance of those propositions by all interlocutors in the conversation is a strong presuppositional resonance of those utterances. In other words, in nearly every context in which utterances of (1) through (3) are deemed acceptable, it is the case that the corresponding presuppositions are accepted by all parties in the conversation. So both accounts agree in their predictions about what is canonically presupposed by (1) through (3). However, where the resonance account makes this prediction on the basis of mere statistical evidence, the accommodation account gives a substantive explanation of why the utterances have the presuppositions they do, employing sophisticated semantic notions and a psychological account of the common ground to do so. Nevertheless, despite its explanatory power, the resonance account fails to pick out a wide range of phenomena which plausibly count as cases of presupposition.

In addition to the propositions canonically presupposed by (1) through (3), the resonance account also predicts that (1) through (3) have numerous presuppositional resonances which are not necessary for utterances of (1) through (3) to enact updates to the common ground. For instance, in addition to the presupposition that the speaker has a

daughter, utterances of (1) (“Sorry I am late. I had to pick my daughter up from the airport.”) plausibly have as presuppositional resonances a feeling of regret on the part of the speaker, the speaker’s being a parent, and the speaker’s being at some time sensitive event. These presuppositions are not captured by the accommodation account because they are not necessary conditions on the common ground for (1) to enact an update, and they are not propositions. Given that the aforementioned features are reasonably called ‘presuppositions,’ this is a serious disadvantage of the accommodation account and a serious advantage of the resonance account.

So not only does the resonance account make accurate predictions about canonical cases of presupposition, but it also makes plausible predictions about a much wider range of presuppositions. This advantage is difficult to overstate. Consider how naturally the resonance account applies to the puzzling phenomena of unintentional covert effect dogwhistles characterized by Saul (2024). Unintentional covert effect dogwhistles are “communicative act[s] meant to raise particular attitudes to salience without the audience’s awareness, where the attitudes being raised to salience violate some widespread norm”. Take, as a paradigmatic example of a covert effect dogwhistle, the 1988 ‘Willie Horton ad’ which George H. W. Bush used to campaign against his political opponent, Michael Dukakis. The ad—which prominently features an image of a black man who was released from prison on a furlough program and convicted of rape and murder shortly thereafter—was designed to raise audience member’s racist attitudes to salience without their realizing it. On the resonance account, covert effect dogwhistles like the Willie Horton ad are paradigmatic cases of presupposition resonance; since people’s racial attitudes commonly co-occur with instances of the advertisement, those racial attitudes are strong presuppositional resonances of the ad. Contrastingly, it is difficult to see how the accommodation account could be applied to cases like the Willie Horton ad; racial attitudes are non-propositional and non-categorically associated with instances of the ad.

In sum, since the resonance account of presupposition makes all of the same predictions (and much more) about what is presupposed by any given utterance as does the accommodation account, there is good reason to think that both accounts are picking out the same type of linguistic phenomena. Furthermore, both accounts are consistent with one another and do not seem to make conflicting claims, as they are both restricted to different domains of explanation; the resonance account of presupposition is non-psychological and does not provide an explanation for how interlocutor’s interpret or become attuned to presuppositional resonances, whereas the accommodation account provides a mechanistic account of how the semantic content of sentences affects the common ground, which is constituted by psychological states of participants in conversations.

I have argued that the accommodation account of presupposition provides a psychologically grounded explanation of simple paradigmatic cases of presupposition, whereas the resonance account targets a much wider range of phenomena but fails to provide a psychological explanation. The moral I wish to impart is this: Something is missing from the accommodation account of presupposition as it fails to explain a plethora of non-categorical and nonpropositional cases of presuppositional resonances. A good starting point for addressing this problem is thus to recognize that any adequate explanation of the semantic and psychological processes undergirding presupposition should explain all of the cases picked out by the notion of presuppositional resonance.

Part 4: Objections

Here, I clarify and substantiate my thesis by anticipating and responding to three objections: the objection from difference in explanandum, the objection from the division of labor, and the objection from triviality. My response to the third objection speculates about the potential form that a comprehensive account of presupposition might take, highlighting promising avenues for future research.

4.1.1 Objection from Difference in Explanandum

Why conclude that the resonance account picks out the same type of phenomenon as the accommodation account? The set of presuppositional resonances of any given utterance contains, in addition to propositions, non-propositional items such as human behaviors, the presence of certain objects, and the likelihood of a large number of events. Contrastingly, on the accommodation account, only propositions are presuppositions. This radical difference in what the different views pick out as ‘presuppositions’ points to the fact that—contrary to the thesis of this paper—each account aims to explain different explanandum which should not be subsumed under the same label.

Reply:

In response, I present a constructive dilemma involving two ways of construing the objection, arguing that each resulting construal fails to support the claim that the resonance and accommodation accounts pick out different types of phenomena which should not be subsumed under the same label.

The first way of construing the objection from difference in explanandum is as making a descriptive claim about how people use the word, ‘presupposition.’ On this view, the explanandum of any account of presupposition is whatever kind of phenomena that people are talking about when they use the words ‘presupposition’ or ‘presupposes.’ If—as a common version of this objection is likely to claim—people do not use the term ‘presupposition’ to refer to the kind of thing that the notion of presuppositional resonance

picks out, then, unlike the accommodation account, the resonance account does not pick out ‘presuppositions’ at all.

But there do seem to be many reasonable uses of the term ‘presupposition’ which pick out things which the resonance account predicts, yet the accommodation account does not. Consider exchanges (4) and (5):

(4) A: I will apologize; that will make things right.

B: You presuppose they are ready to forgive you.

(5) A: I’ll convince them with logic.

B: You presuppose their decision was based on logic in the first place.

In both cases, B uses the term ‘presuppose’ in a way that seems to fit with standard usage, and yet which is arguably not picked out by the accommodation account, as the presuppositions that B attributes to A are not necessary conditions for A’s utterances causing his intended updates to the common ground. For instance, in (4), Perhaps A believes that apologizing will make things right even if those he is apologizing to are not ready to forgive him. In which case it need not be common ground that ‘they’ are ready to forgive A. Similarly, in (5), it need not be common ground that ‘their’ decision was based on logic, as even if it was not, A could still want to try and convince ‘them’ with logic.

As (4) and (5) show, the descriptive construal of the objection from difference in explanandum fails because it is false that the accommodation account picks out what people typically mean by ‘presuppositions’ and that the resonance account does not. According to the accommodation account, none of A’s utterance presuppose what B claims they do. But, as the resonance account predicts, this seems wrong; the presuppositions that A attributes to B are presuppositional resonances of A’s utterances because the probability that A assumes them is increased as a result of A’s utterances.

The second way of construing the objection from difference in explanandum is as a normative or prescriptive claim about how people *should* use the word, ‘presupposition’. According to this version of the objection, if the phenomena referred to by the resonance account of presupposition are deeply distinct from the phenomena referred to by the accommodation account, then theorists should not subsume both sets of phenomena under the same name. Indeed, as a general rule, if two sets of phenomena are dramatically different, then (to avoid confusion and methodological error) theorists should not subsume both sets under the same name. The error with this second construal of the objection from difference in explanandum, I argue, is that it ignores that both accounts of presupposition pick out sets of phenomena that overlap significantly; the resonance account picks out all of the cases that the accommodation account does, and more. Thus, there seems to be a

common core between the two sets of phenomena. And for practical reasons, this common core justifies using the name ‘presuppositions’ for both sets of phenomena.

Taking inspiration from Haslanger’s (2000) paper entitled, *Gender and Race: What Are They? What Do We Want Them To Be?*, the question is not what *is* ‘presupposition,’ but rather, what do we want the concept of presupposition to do for us. So even if (as the first construal of the objection claims) people’s use of the term ‘presupposition’ picks out different phenomena than the resonance account, it does not follow that we should not use term presupposition to describe both sets of phenomena. Rather, if there are good theoretical or pragmatic reasons to lump both sets of phenomena under the label of ‘presupposition’, then how people use the term is somewhat irrelevant. Below, I propose two reasons in support of the claim that it is productive and pragmatically justified to label the phenomena picked out by the accommodation and resonance accounts under the blanket term, ‘presupposition’.

As Sally Haslanger acknowledges, any project which aims at revising or re-engineering concepts must respond to the objection that changing the meaning of a term or concept amounts to changing the topic. She writes,

[...] in an explicitly revisionary project, it is not at all clear when we are warranted in appropriating existing terminology. Given the difficulty of determining what “our” concept is, it isn’t entirely clear when a project crosses over from being explicative to revisionary, or when it is no longer even revisionary but simply changes the subject. (Haslanger 2000, pg. 34)

Herman Cappelen (2018) explicitly discusses this worry as an abstract problem for anyone who aims to engage in ‘conceptual engineering’. Broadly speaking, he distinguishes between two types of replies to this kind of worry, corresponding to two kinds of conceptual engineers—topic improving engineers and lexical effect-exploiting engineers. My reply to the second construal of the objection from difference in explanandum makes use of both of these general strategies.

Topic improving engineers start with an expression that has a certain intension and extension, which they either extend or narrow to “end up with an improved intension—where an improved intension for F is understood as a *better way to talk about F’s*” (pg. 148). Returning to presupposition, this strategy can be deployed by claiming that defining ‘presupposition’ in terms of presuppositional resonance yields a better concept for talking about the ‘topic’ of presupposition. In other words, defining ‘presupposition’ in the way specified by the resonance account does not amount to changing the topic, as the topic of presupposition is broader than the proposed definitions. The accommodation account describes ‘presuppositions’ as the necessary conditions for utterances of sentences to

update the common ground, where the necessary condition is always some requirement that the common ground contain some set of propositions. The resonance account, on the other hand, describes ‘presuppositions’ as features of the context that are statistically correlated with (and prior to) instantiations of speech practices. Adopting the definition provided by the resonance account does not amount to changing the definition because both accounts pick out phenomena with a broad common core that defines the topic of presupposition. The common core is something akin to the conditions of the context that interlocutors predict to be prior to the instantiations their speech practices. Analogously, apples and oranges are both fruit, as they share the same common core features that are necessary for something’s being fruit.

Alternatively, topic improving engineers focus, “not on the content of speech, but on the lexical effects of the expressions they use—a change in topic isn’t, for such engineers a fatal flaw” (pg. 149). According to this strategy, changes in topic are not problematic, so long as the change in topic has useful or pragmatically justified lexical effects (i.e. effects that result from the use of lexical items that have cultural associations and/or societal baggage). Applying this view to the present discussion, the question is whether (despite a change in topic) there is good reason to adopt a wide definition of presupposition which picks out non-propositional, presuppositional resonances. I argue that yes, we should define ‘presupposition’ in terms of presuppositional resonances because doing so picks out a much more interesting set of phenomena than that limited set which is picked out by the accommodation account. Since the accommodation account is limited to propositional presuppositions, it fails to explain the connection between speech practices and human behavior. Alternatively, on the resonance account, human behaviors *are* presuppositions of most speech practices. Thus, the resonance account picks out the kind of phenomena that philosophers of language should be interested in explaining, provided they care not just about propositions and abstract representations of content, but also about human behavior and how it is influenced by speech.

In sum, this long-winded reply has taken the form of a constructive dilemma involving two ways of construing the objection from difference in explanandum. The descriptive way of construing the objection fails because it’s not clear that the way people use the term ‘presupposition’ diverges drastically from the set of phenomena picked out by the resonance account. The normative way of construing the objection fails because even if the way people use the term ‘presupposition’ does diverge drastically from the set of phenomena picked out by the resonance account, there is nevertheless a good theoretical reason to adopt a definition of presupposition which accords with the resonance account; namely, adopting such a definition would lead theorists to study the relationship between speech practices and human behavior.

4.2 Objection from the Division of Labor

[I have yet to write this section, and since I have already gone quite far over the word limit, I decided to leave this for a final draft (if it is included at all). For now, it should suffice to say that this objection and my response are unnecessary for understanding the rest of the arguments presented in this paper].

4.3 Objection from Triviality

Suppose theorists accept the thesis that any adequate explanation of the psychological and semantic processes undergirding presupposition should explain all of the cases picked out by the notion of presuppositional resonance. Still, this proposal is unhelpful, as it provides no guidance as to what an adequate account of presupposition would look like. Further, the resonance account fails to provide an *explanation* of presupposition at all! Rather, the resonance account just picks out the things that are plausibly called presuppositions.

Reply:

It is true that the resonance account (as presented in part 2) does not provide an explanation of presupposition in the sense that it does not tell us why certain features of the context are correlated with certain speech practices. Rather, given a specific instantiation of a speech act and the context of that instantiation, the resonance account provides a measure of the extent to which each aspect of the context is a presuppositional resonance of the instantiated speech act. This measure can be used to predict the presuppositional resonances of future speech acts, but it does not give us insight into *why* speech acts are strongly correlated with aspects of the context.

However, since (as I have argued) the notion of presuppositional resonance picks out a set of phenomena which both aligns relatively well with ordinary intuitions about presuppositions and captures interesting edge cases, there is still good reason to accept my main claim that any adequate explanation of the semantic and psychological processes undergirding presupposition should explain all of the cases picked out by the notion of presuppositional resonance. To the extent that theorists are interested in how the use of speech practices is causally connected with widespread patterns of human behavior, they should strive to explain why those patterns are presuppositional resonances of said speech practices.

Further, perhaps the notion of presuppositional resonance provides more guidance as to what an adequate account of explanation would look like than this objection gives it credit for. As a case in point, Beaver and Stanley's (2023) book employs the notion of

presuppositional resonance (and resonance more generally) to introduce a radical theory of meaning and interpretation. Without going into too much detail, the basic idea is that people become psychologically ‘attuned’ to speech practices by coming to internalize patterns of association between those practices and features of the context. Indeed, something like ‘attunement’ seems necessary to explain how presuppositional resonances influence processes involved in conversation and interpretation. Resonances are statistical correlations, and so internalizing and recognizing them must involve some kind of internal representations of statistical correlations between events.

But there is clearly more to meaning than attunement or recognition of statistical correlations between speech practices and aspects of the context. Complex expressions are formed out of discrete parts which compose to produce meaningful wholes. To explain this feature of compositionality we cannot appeal to mere statistical correlations but must posit the existence of discrete mental representations which combine to represent the semantic contents of complex sentences. Indeed, as Elizabeth Camp (2023) is apt to point out in her review of Beaver and Stanley’s book,

[...] in their zeal to offer a radical, ‘non-ideal’ alternative to orthodox philosophy of language, Beaver and Stanley deny some of the orthodoxy’s genuine insights, especially about aspects of communication that stem from our treating each other as rational agents, and aspects of language that stem from its role as a system for building complex structures out of discrete parts. (pg. 1)

This problem (Beaver and Stanley’s inability to explain complex structures and compositionality) emerges clearly when considering novel utterances such as (6).

- (6) The indefatigable stenographer gleefully pranced down the street whilst carrying a typewriter and taking note of everything that he heard.

Despite the fact that you have most certainly never read or heard (6), you are likely able to automatically interpret what the sentence means. This results from your ability to represent and combine discrete representations into complex wholes in a form that corresponds to the form of the sentences you interpret. The notion of resonance does not help to explain how people interpret novel sentences like (6) because utterances of sentences such as (6) do not have resonances; completely novel utterances do not have correlations with anything features of the context because they have never been uttered before. However, in addition to the semantic content explicitly expressed in (6), you were likely mildly amused when you represented the content of (6). This ‘perlocutionary’ meaning of (6) cannot be captured by any purely ‘compositional’ account of meaning and is certainly not captured by Fintel’s accommodation account of presupposition, which

requires that presuppositions are necessary conditions on the common ground that are encoded in the semantic content of sentences uttered.

I conclude this reply by suggesting that any adequate account of presupposition should explain how meanings compose into complex structures and how people become attuned to statistical correlations between speech practices and features of the context. This suggestion follows relatively straightforwardly from considerations motivated by the resonance account of presupposition. Hence, the objection from triviality fails; I have shown that acceptance of the thesis that any adequate account of explanation should explain the cases picked out by the notion of presuppositional resonance does provide significant guidance as to how such an account might work.

Works Cited

- Beaver, D., & Stanley, J. (2023). *The politics of language*. Princeton University Press.
- Kaplan, D. (1999, October 12). *The meaning of “ouch” and “oops”* [Video]. University of California Television (UCTV). YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaGRLlgPl6w&t=1252s>
- Karttunen, L. (1974). Presupposition and linguistic context. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 1(1–3), 181–194. <https://doi.org/10.1515/thli.1974.1.1-3.181>
- Lewis, D. (1979). Scorekeeping in a language game. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 8(1), 339–359. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00258436>
- Saul, J. (2023). *Dogwhistles and figleaves: Pragmatics, ideology, and inequality*. Oxford University Press.
- Stalnaker, R. (1974). Pragmatic presuppositions. In M. Munitz & P. Unger (Eds.), *Semantics and philosophy* (pp. 197–213). New York University Press.
- von Fintel, K. (2008). What is presupposition accommodation, again? *Philosophical Perspectives*, 22(1), 137–170. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2008.00144.x>
- Cappelen, H. (2018). *Fixing language: An essay on conceptual engineering*. Oxford University Press.
- Haslanger, S. (2000). Gender and race: (What) are they? (What) do we want them to be? *Noûs*, 34(1), 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0029-4624.00201>
- Camp, E. (2024). [Review of the book *The politics of language*, by D. Beaver & J. Stanley]. *Philosophical Review*.