What is Presupposition Accommodation?

Kai von Fintel

MIT

In his paper "What is a Context of Utterance?", Christopher Gauker (1998) argues that the phenomenon of informative presuppositions is incompatible with the "pragmatic" view of presuppositions as involving requirements on the common ground, the body of shared assumptions of the participants in a conversation. This is a surprising claim since most proponents of this view have in fact dealt with informative presuppositions by appealing to a process called presupposition accommodation. Gauker's attack shows the need to clarify the nature of this process.

Introduction: The Common Ground Theory of Presuppositions

Here is a stylized version of the picture of information-gathering discourse developed by Stalnaker.[1]

The common ground of a conversation at a particular time is the set of propositions that the participants in that conversation at that time mutually assume to be taken for granted and not subject to (further) discussion. The common ground describes a set of worlds, the context set, which are those worlds in which all of the propositions in the common ground are true. The context set is the set of worlds that for all that is currently assumed to be taken for granted, could be the actual world.

---

[1] Stalnaker (1972, 1973, 1974, 1978, 1988, 1998). Other important work in this tradition includes Karttunen (1974), Lewis (1979), Heim (1982, 1983, 1992), and Thomason (1990).

When uttered assertively, sentences are meant to update the common ground. If the sentence is accepted by the participants, the proposition it expresses is added to the common ground. The context set is updated by removing the worlds in which this proposition is false and by keeping the worlds in which the proposition is true. From then on, the truth of the sentence is part of the common ground, is mutually assumed to be taken for granted and not subject to further discussion.

Sentences can have pragmatic presuppositions in the sense of imposing certain requirements on the common ground. For example, one might want to say that

(1) It was Margaret who broke the keyboard.

presupposes that someone broke the keyboard (and then asserts that Margaret broke the keyboard). If this is a pragmatic presupposition of the sentence, then what is required is that the common ground include the proposition that someone broke the keyboard, in other words, that the context set only include worlds where someone broke the keyboard. That means that the sentence requires that it is taken for granted and not subject to (further) discussion that someone broke the keyboard. A speaker who asserts the sentence would have to assume that its requirements are satisfied; that is, such a speaker would have to assume that it is common ground that someone broke the keyboard. This is what we mean when we say that the speaker presupposes (in asserting the sentence) that someone broke the keyboard.

One natural source of pragmatic presuppositions may be semantic presuppositions associated with the sentence: conditions that need to be satisfied for the sentence to have a determinate semantic value. Stalnaker assumes that a sentence cannot be used to update a common ground unless it has a determinate semantic value in all of the worlds in the context set described by that common ground. If a speaker asserts such a sentence and intends for it to successfully do its job of updating the common ground, that speaker can do so only if he assumes that the semantic presuppositions of the sentence are entailed by the common ground.

Informative Presuppositions: A Fatal Problem?

There appear to be clear counterexamples to this view of presuppositions:

(2) I am sorry that I am late. I had to take my daughter to the doctor.

We may well want to say that the second sentence in this sequence presupposes that the speaker has a daughter, perhaps even exactly one daughter. Furthermore, we also may want to say that the speaker in saying the sentence is presupposing that he has a daughter.

On the other hand, it is clear that this sentence can quite appropriately and successfully be uttered in a context where it is <u>not</u> already part of the common ground that the speaker has a daughter. It is also not necessary that the speaker assumes (falsely) that it is already part of the common ground that he has a daughter.

We appear to have a problem. There is intuitively a presupposition here but the common ground theory does not seem to give the right description of what is going on.

Some people, including Burton-Roberts (1989) and most recently Gauker (1998), have thought that this is indeed a fatal problem for the common ground theory. Burton-Roberts writes that a theory of presupposition framed 'in terms of assumption-sharing between speaker and hearer' is 'quite simply wrong':

> If I were to say to you, 'My sister is coming to lunch tomorrow', I do presuppose that I have a sister but in presupposing it I do not necessarily assume that you have a prior assumption or belief that I have a sister. (Burton-Roberts, 1989: 26)

Gauker in his paper "What is a Context of Utterance?" (1998) discusses the problem in detail and concludes that the common ground theory cannot be maintained. My exploration of accommodation below is largely a response to Gauker's concerns.

Others, in fact most of the people advocating the common ground theory, do not see this as a fatal problem but just as a phenomenon that requires an additional story. But what that story is has actually evolved somewhat over the years and is still often misunderstood. We will try to elucidate it.

Stalnaker's First Attempt

Since in the problematic examples, the speaker is clearly not actually assuming that the presupposed proposition is already part of the common ground, Stalnaker (1973, 1974) proposes to see such examples as a kind of pretense. The speaker is pretending to make this assumption, he is acting as if he is making the assumption.

> [A] speaker may act as if certain propositions are part of the common background when he knows that they are not. He may want to communicate a proposition indirectly, and do this by presupposing it in such a way that the auditor will be able to infer that it is presupposed. In such a case, a speaker tells his auditor something in part by pretending that his auditor already knows it. The pretense need not be an attempt at deception. It might be tacitly recognized by everyone concerned that this is what is going on, and recognized that everyone else recognizes it. In some cases, it is just that it would be indiscreet, or insulting, or tedious, or unnecessarily blunt, or rhetorically less effective to assert openly a proposition that one wants to communicate.
>
> Where a conversation involves this kind of pretense, the speaker's presuppositions, in the sense of the term I shall use, will not fit the definition sketched above [to presuppose something is to assume that it is mutually assumed to be true]. That is why the definition is only an approximation. I shall say that one actually does make the presuppositions that one seems to make even when one is only pretending to have the beliefs that one normally has when one makes presuppositions. Presupposing is thus not a mental attitude like believing, but it is rather a linguistic disposition – a disposition to behave in one's use of language as if one had certain beliefs, or were making certain assumptions. (Stalnaker 1974)

In "Assertion" (1978), Stalnaker follows his own recommendation and defines presupposition in the terms suggested in the earlier paper:

> A proposition is presupposed if the speaker is disposed to act as if he assumes or believes that the proposition is true, and as if he assumes or believes that his audience assumes or believes that it is true as well.

With this definition, Stalnaker has made space for the intuition that the speaker of our examples is actually making a presupposition even though he does not take the presupposed proposition to be common ground material. Presupposing is simply pretending that or acting as if the presupposed proposition is common ground.

One immediate concern one might have with this pretense-theory of our examples is that it doesn't explain the sense in which the sentence presupposes the presupposed proposition. Since the sentence can be quite appropriate and successful even if the common ground doesn't contain the proposition in question, we seem forced to give up the common ground-oriented definition of sentence presupposition. So one might want to retreat to the speaker-oriented definition: a sentence presupposes p iff it is only appropriately uttered if the speaker presupposes (in the pretense sense) that p. But this gives up on the nice theoretical explanation for why sentences put certain requirements on the common ground, which had to do with the job of assertion.

Another response is to rethink what "common ground" means. If people's presuppositions are those propositions p such that they are disposed to act as if p is mutually assumed to be true, then the common ground might naturally be the set of propositions that everyone in the conversation is disposed to act as if they are mutually assumed to be true. In this sense of common ground, one might say that the hearers of our examples are actually presupposing the relevant propositions as well. Of course, they are not (yet) assuming that they are true. But, in the right circumstances, they may well be disposed to act as if they are true.

But of course, there remain problems.

First of all, it is not our intuition that the hearers in such examples are already presupposing the relevant proposition, even if they are disposed to act as if the proposition is true as soon as the speaker presupposes it.

Further, even on the speaker's part there is no air of pretense in run-of-the-mill examples, as Stalnaker admits in his 1974 paper:

> I am asked by someone who I have just met, "Are you going to lunch?' I reply, "No, I've got to pick up my sister." Here I seem to *presuppose* that I have a sister, even though I do not assume that the addressee knows this. Yet the statement is clearly acceptable, and it does not seem right to explain this in terms of pretense, or exploitation. … [To analyze this example in terms of exploitation is] to stretch the notion of exploitation, first because the example lacks the flavor of innuendo or diplomatic indirection which characterizes the clearest cases of communication by pretense, and second because in the best cases of exploitation, it is the main point of the speech act to communicate what is only implied, whereas in this example, the indirectly communicated material is at best only a minor piece of required background information. (1974)

Lastly, there is the worry that pretense is in fact also not quite right for true cases of exploitation. This is articulated by Gauker, who talks about an example of informative presupposition found by Karttunen (1974):

(3) We *regret* that children cannot accompany their parents to commencement exercises.[2]

Gauker writes:

> If I pretend that something is the case, then I act as one might expect I would act if that thing were in fact the case (though not perhaps just as I would in fact act). If I pretend not to notice your embarrassing remark, I continue talking just as one might have expected me to do if in fact I had not noticed. So if I were pretending or acting as if everyone already knew that children cannot accompany their parents to the commencement exercises, I would not announce that we regret that that is the case. I might make such an announcement if our regret per se were actually something that needed to be communicated, but in the usual sort of case the regret per se would not really be an issue. The point is to inform the parents that the children cannot come, and I put it that way in order to acknowledge that this news may be disappointing to some. (Gauker 1998)

[2] Karttunen notes that he found this example in an official MIT bulletin about the spring 1973 commencement.

Sadock and Soames

Stalnaker reports in Fn. 2 of the 1974 paper that Sadock, who had pointed out to him the sister example, suggested to define presuppositions as involving the speaker's assumption "that the addressee *has no reason to doubt* that *P*."

Stalnaker immediately detected a problem with defining presupposition that way: It would mean that anything that the speaker assumes to be uncontroversial for the addressee is thereby a presupposition of the speaker. But then, Stalnaker notes, it would be impossible to formulate important pragmatic principles such as his rule "Do not assert what you already presuppose". If what you presuppose is what you assume your addressee has no reason to doubt, then you would be prohibited from asserting many things. Stalnaker asks us to "consider a routine lecture or briefing by an acknowledged expert. It may be that everything he says is something that the audience has no reason to doubt, but this does not make it inappropriate for him to speak" (1974: Fn. 2).

Soames (1982) is convinced by Stalnaker's objection to Sadock's proposal. Furthermore, he does not adopt Stalnaker's pretense-definition of speaker's presupposition but retains the simpler assuming-to-be-common-ground notion. So, he says that in the crucial cases, "a speaker's utterance presupposes a proposition, even though the speaker himself does not presuppose it in the sense I have defined". He defines a notion of utterance presupposition which does involve the concept of a proposition being uncontroversial:

(4) Utterance Presupposition (Soames 1982)

An utterance U presupposes P (at t) iff one can reasonably infer from U that the speaker S accepts P and regards it as uncontroversial, either because

a. S thinks that it is already part of the conversational context at t, or because
b. S thinks that the audience is prepared to add it, without objection, to the context
against which U is evaluated.

Sentence presupposition is then defined as follows: "A sentence S presupposes P iff normal utterances of S presuppose P."

We can now maintain that the utterance (and the sentence uttered) has the presupposition we thought it had. We can't say that the speaker presupposes what we thought he presupposed. But Soames offers a further notion that would give us a close substitute:

(5) Taking P to be Uncontroversial

A speaker S takes a proposition P to be uncontroversial at t (or, equivalently, takes P for granted at t) iff at t, S accepts P and thinks

a. that P is already part of the conversational context at t; or
b. that the other members of the conversation are prepared to add P to the context
without objection.

Now, we can at least say that the speaker in our examples is taking the relevant proposition to be uncontroversial.

I think that Soames' definitional acrobatics do not help us much in understanding the phenomenon. It is left open <u>why</u> one would be able to reasonably that infer that the speaker thinks that the audience is prepared to add the presupposed proposition P, without objection, to the context against which U is evaluated. We can't say that that is because the sentence presupposes P, since sentence presupposition is defined in terms of utterance presupposition. Somehow, the semantics of the sentence would have to directly stipulate the fact that it gives rise to utterance presuppositions.

The Proper Treatment of Informative Presuppositions

Soames (1982: Fn. 5) concluded that the phenomenon of informative presuppositions "undermines all definitions which make the presence of presupposed propositions in the conversational context prior to an utterance a necessary condition for the appropriateness of the utterance".

Let me draw attention to the phrase <u>prior to an utterance</u>. Our examples are clearly cases where the presupposed proposition is not in the common ground <u>prior to the utterance</u>. But note that this in fact is not what the common ground theory of presupposition says, at least not once we look very closely at what it tries to do. We saw that sentence

presuppositions are requirements that the common ground needs to be a certain way for the sentence to do its intended job, namely updating the common ground. Thus, the common ground must satisfy the presuppositional requirements before the update can be performed, not actually before the utterance occurs.

Thus, when we say that a speaker is assuming that the common ground satisfies the necessary presuppositional requirements, we actually mean that the speaker is assuming that the common ground will satisfy the requirements by the time that the update is to be performed. The speaker need not at all assume the common ground prior to the utterance already has the right properties. This will work out fine if the speaker can assume that the fact he made an utterance which imposes certain requirements on the common ground will lead to hearers to make the necessary adjustments to the common ground.

This perspective on the time-dependent nature of presuppositional assumptions is made clear by Stalnaker in his most recent paper on context dynamics (1998):

> If certain information is necessary to determine the content of some speech act, then appropriate speech requires that the information be shared information at the time at which that speech act is to be interpreted. But exactly what time is that? The context – what is presupposed in it – is constantly changing as things are said. The point of a speech act – an assertion, for example – is to change the context, and since the way the speech act is supposed to change the context depends on its content, interpretation must be done in the prior context – the context as it is before the assertion is accepted, and its content added to what is presupposed. But the prior context cannot be the context as it was before the speaker began to speak. Suppose Phoebe says *I saw an interesting movie last night*. To determine the content of her remark, one needs to know who is speaking, and so Phoebe, if she is speaking appropriately, must be presuming that the information that she is speaking is available to her audience – that is shared information. But she need not presume that this information was available before she began to speak. The prior context that is relevant to the interpretation of a speech act is the context as it is changed by the fact that the speech act was made, but prior to the acceptance or rejection of the speech act.

Having been admonished to pay attention to timing, let us walk through an example of informative presupposition given by Stalnaker (1998) (here, I merely spell out a denser passage in that paper). Phoebe says

(6) I can't come to the meeting - I have to pick up my cat at the veterinarian.

Let us suppose, as is reasonable, that (6) is associated with the pragmatic sentence presupposition that Phoebe owns a cat. The proposition expressed by (6) can only be added to the common ground if that common ground entails that Phoebe owns a cat. Assuming that Phoebe sincerely intends her assertion to be successful, we can infer that she must be assuming that the common ground to which (6) is to be added does satisfy this condition. Now, let us assume that prior to her utterance the common ground did not in fact satisfy this condition because her listeners did not assume that she owns a cat. Let us also assume that Phoebe was quite aware of her listeners' ignorance in this matter. Nevertheless, there is no miscommunication here, no conversational hiccup. Her listeners infer that Phoebe assumes the common ground to which (6) is to be added to entail that she owns a cat. The only obstacle to that being the case is that the listeners do not yet assume that Phoebe owns a cat. But if they do start making that assumption, the common ground will entail that Phoebe owns a cat. So, if Phoebe's listeners are accommodating, they will start making that assumption. In that case, (6) can be added to the common ground.

Thus, we have (i) that (6) presupposes that Phoebe has a cat, i.e. it requires that the common ground it is to be added to entails that Phoebe has a cat; (ii) that Phoebe in asserting (6) presupposes that she has a cat, i.e. that she assumes that common ground that (6) is to be added to entails that she has a cat; (iii) that Phoebe does not assume that the hearers already before her utterance presuppose that she has a cat; (iv) that she trusts that the hearers will change their assumptions in time for (6) to be added to the common ground; (v) that the hearers can figure out that (i)-(iv) hold and will accommodate Phoebe if they are willing.

Note certain properties of this process. The common ground will only come to satisfy the presupposition of the sentence if the listeners change their assumptions. Why would they do that? Why wouldn't they insist on the relevant information being proffered as an assertion which is subject to discussion? Informative use of presupposition may be successful in two particular kinds of circumstances: (i) the listeners may be genuinely agnostic as to the truth of the relevant proposition, assume that the speaker knows about its truth and trust the speaker not to speak inappropriately or falsely; (ii) the listeners may not want to challenge the speaker about the presupposed proposition, because it is irrelevant to their concerns and because the smoothness of the conversation is important enough to them to warrant a little leeway.

Stalnaker's discussion in the 1998 paper is one of the most explicit of the phenomenon. But I think that the picture we just worked out is indeed more or less the one that most proponents of the common ground theory have been (tacitly) assuming. Karttunen (1974) discusses the phenomenon as follows:

> [O]rdinary conversation does not always proceed in the ideal orderly fashion described earlier. People do make leaps and shortcuts by using sentences whose presuppositions are not satisfied in the conversational context. … I think we can maintain that a sentence is always taken to be an increment to a context that satisfies its presuppositions. If the current conversational context does not suffice, the listener is entitled and expected to extend it as required. He must determine for himself what context he is supposed to be in on the basis of what was said and, if he is willing to go along with it, make the same tacit extension that his interlocutor appears to have made. This is one way in which we communicate indirectly, convey matters without discussing them. (Karttunen, 1974)

Karttunen clearly says that the common ground theory can be maintained as is, as long as it is clear that the common ground that needs to satisfy a sentence's presupposition is not necessarily the one that existed before the sentence was uttered, but can be one that is created via tacit extension of the prior common ground in order to satisfy the presupposition of the sentence.

Lewis in his score-keeping paper named the phenomenon "accommodation", without however giving any natural examples of the kind earlier writers had recognized.

The *Rule of Accommodation for Presupposition*

> 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*. (Lewis, 1979)

While Lewis's Rule remained mysterious, Stalnaker's recent elucidation of the process makes clear that no magic is involved. Or at least, that the magic lies in the fact that the common ground is a public object under the metal control of the participants in a conversation and can be adjusted tacitly and without fuss. The following passage from Thomason (1990) makes clear this aspect of the phenomenon of accommodation:

> Acting as if we don't have a flat tire won't repair the flat; acting as if we know the way to our destination won't get us there. Unless we believe in magic, the inanimate world is not accommodating. But *people* can be accommodating, and in fact there are many social situations in which the best way to get what we want is to act as if we already had it. Leadership in an informal group is a good case. Here is an all-too-typical situation: you are at an academic convention, and the time comes for dinner. You find yourself a member of a group of eight people who, like you, have no special plans. No one wants to eat in the hotel, so the group moves out the door and into the street. At this point a group decision has to be made. There is a moment of indecision and the someone takes charge, asks for suggestions about restaurants, decides on one, and asks someone to get two cabs while she calls to make reservations. When no one objects to this arrangement, she became the group leader, and obtained a certain authority. She did this by acting as if she had the authority; and the presence of a rule saying that those without authority should not assume it is shown by the fact that assuming authority involved a certain risk. Someone could have objected, saying *Who do you think you are, deciding where to go for us?* And the objection would have had a certain force.
>
> Another familiar case, involving even more painful risks, is establishing intimacy, as in beginning to use a familiar pronoun to someone in a language like French or German. Here the problem is that there is a rule that forbids us to act intimate unless we are on intimate terms; and yet there are situations in which we want to become intimate, and in which it is vital to do it <u>spontaneously</u>, rather than by explicit agreement. If I find myself in such a situation, my only way out is to accept the risk, overcome my shyness, and simply act as if you and I are intimate, in the hope that you will act in the same way. If my hopes are fulfilled, we thereby <u>will have become</u> intimate, and it will be as if no social rule has been violated. A process of accommodation will have come to the rescue.

> Opening the door for someone is a form of obstacle elimination. So is adding *p* to the presumptions when someone says something that presupposes *p*. The difference between the two has mainly to do with the social nature of the conversational record [which includes Stalnaker's common ground, KvF]. In the case of the door we simply don't have the practical option of acting as if the door were already open. In the case of the conversational record, to act as if the previous state of the record already involved the presumption *p* is to reset the record. The fact that changes in the conversational record can be made so effortlessly accounts in large part for the extensive role that is played by accommodation in conversation - at least in informal and noncompetitive conversation. The principle behind accommodation, then, is this:
>
> > Adjust the conversational record to eliminate obstacles to the detected plans of your interlocutor.
>
> (Thomason 1990: 342-344)

Alternatives?

The view we explicated is of course not the only one that can capture the possibility of informative uses of presuppositionally loaded sentences. Critics of the common ground theory such as Burton-Roberts and Gauker see the phenomenon as supporting a purely semantic theory of presupposition. Gauker, for example, proposes that presuppositions need to be satisfied by the "propositional context", which in his view is not made up of common or shared presumptions. Instead, it is made up of a set of propositions that are objectively given as those propositions that are relevant to the current conversation. Both speaker and hearer can be ignorant of the exact extent of the propositional context and sometimes the speaker can inform the hearer of a proposition's being part of the propositional context by uttering a sentence that presupposes it.

Even proponents of the common ground theory might explore other approaches. For example, Beaver (1995, 1999) develops a much more complicated picture of discourse than the one we adopted from Stalnaker. Beaver assumes that there is never such a thing as <u>the</u> common ground of a conversation. Participants are constantly uncertain about what other participants take the common ground to be. He proposes a system where a participant's model of a conversation is associated with a set of common ground candidates, ordered in terms of how plausible it is that a particular common ground candidate is in fact the common ground assumed or intended by the speaker. Now when a

sentence with a presuppositional condition on the input common ground is asserted, the set of candidate common grounds is winnowed down to those candidates which satisfy the condition. Each of the candidate common grounds is then updated with the asserted proposition. Beaver's proposal would say this about Stalnaker's example with Phoebe's cat. The set of candidate common grounds includes some where it is presupposed that Phoebe has a cat and some where it is not. Phoebe's assertion requires the common ground to be one where it is presupposed that she has a cat. So, only those candidates that satisfy this condition survive. Each one of them is then updated by adding the asserted proposition (that Phoebe had to take her cat to the vet).

Cases Where Accommodation Is Impossible

I will end with two considerations having to do with accommodation that suggest that the common ground theory is superior to the alternatives.

There are presupposition triggers that cannot (easily) be used in informative presupposition scenarios. The common ground theory has a possible explanation: these are cases where for some obvious reason the hearer will not be able to adjust her presuppositions satisfactorily.

Imagine I utter the following out of the blue:

(7) John can't come to the meeting tonight. He is having dinner in New York, too.

This will lead to a conversational breakdown. The explanation is that the expression *too* in (7), together with a particular prosodic structure, triggers a presupposition that a salient person other than John is having dinner in New York tonight. The hearer faced with such a presupposition will not be able to accommodate. The most she could accommodate is the unspecific proposition that someone is having dinner in New York tonight, which in

fact is so obviously true that it may already be part of the common ground. But that is not enough to make (7) appropriate.[3]

It appears that Gauker has no such story to tell. For him, the hearer does not have to be aware of the contents of the propositional context on which an utterance relies in order to be appropriate. So, for him, the hearer confronted with (7) should conclude that the context includes some proposition of the form *x is having dinner in New York tonight* (with x not equal to John). Since there is no presumption that the hearer needs to know the exact extent of the context, there is predicted to be no inappropriateness. And that is contrary to fact.

Beaver as well may have problems with such examples. We would need to know how candidate common grounds are established. But since the candidates do not have to be truly shared assumptions and since a variety of candidates can survive the assertion of a sentence, it is unclear whether Beaver can correctly predict (7) to be difficult.

Choice between Presupposing and Asserting

Another point on which the common ground theory has something substantive to say while Gauker doesn't is this. Speakers routinely need to decide between asserting *p* or presupposing *p*. The common ground theory (together with its explication of the phenomenon of accommodation) says that one can presuppose *p* as long as it is assumed that the hearer will not want to dispute *p*. From Gauker's paper it is not clear whether there is anything that would drive the choice. Both presupposing that *p* and asserting that *p* would be successful only if *p* is an objective fact.

---

[3] The point that items like *too* trigger presuppositions stronger than the unspecific one mentioned in the text is due to Kripke (1990). Gauker discusses such cases to argue that the propositional context includes only relevant propositions, but he doesn't seem to think that they in fact raise a problem for his account. In fact, they are a straightforward counter-example to his assertion, in his Footnote 9, that "for any kind of presupposition to which the account of presupposition as shared assumption is supposed to apply we will be able to find instances in which the so-called presupposition may be informative".

In an email exchange, Gauker suggests that the choice may have to do with considerations of economy of expression. This may in fact work for explaining why Phoebe says *I have to pick up my cat at the veterinarian*, instead of *I have a cat and I have to pick it up at the veterinarian.*

But consider the daughter who tells her father *O Dad, I forgot to tell you that my fiancé and I are moving to Seattle next week.* While this is certainly more economical than first telling him that she got engaged, it does seem that she is trying to smuggle an important piece of information into the common ground that merits more attention. If it is correct to say that this speech act is pragmatically inappropriate, the common ground theory knows why.[4],[5]

Conclusion

The common ground theory of pragmatic presuppositions is fully compatible with the phenomenon of informative presuppositions. The process of presupposition accommodation that needs to be appealed to is entirely natural within this framework. In fact, it would be surprising if conversation didn't work this way.

---

[4] That we need a theory of informative presupposition that explains the difference between informative presuppositions and informative assertions is already noted in a footnote by Soames (1982: Fn. 5): "[A]ny adequate definition must take account of (i) the ability to use [presuppositions] to increment a context by adding new information, (ii) the special, privileged status accorded this information."

[5] Beaver's alternative system may well have the necessary machinery to capture the distinction. After all, presuppositions and assertions are dealt with in two discrete steps in his mechanism.

REFERENCES

Beaver, David. 1995. Presupposition and Assertion in Dynamic Semantics, University of Edinburgh.

Beaver, David. 1999. Pragmatics (to a First Approximation). Ms. Stanford University.

Burton-Roberts, Noel. 1989. *The Limits to Debate: A Revised Theory of Semantic Presupposition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gauker, Christopher. 1998. What Is a Context of Utterance? *Philosophical Studies* 91:149-172.

Heim, Irene. 1982. The Semantics of Definite and Indefinite Noun Phrases, University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Heim, Irene. 1983. On the Projection Problem for Presuppositions. *WCCFL* 2:114-125.

Heim, Irene. 1992. Presupposition Projection and the Semantics of Attitude Verbs. *Journal of Semantics* 9:183-221.

Karttunen, Lauri. 1974. Presupposition and Linguistic Context. *Theoretical Linguistics* 1:181-193.

Kripke, Saul. 1990. Presupposition and Anaphora: Remarks on the Formulation of the Projection Problem. Princeton University.

Lewis, David. 1979. Scorekeeping in a Language Game. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8:339-359.

Soames, Scott. 1982. How Presuppositions are Inherited: A Solution to the Projection Problem. *Linguistic Inquiry* 13:483-545.

Stalnaker, Robert. 1972. Pragmatics. In *Semantics of Natural Language*, eds. Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman, 380-397. Dordrecht: Reidel.

Stalnaker, Robert. 1973. Presuppositions. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 2:447-457.

Stalnaker, Robert. 1974. Pragmatic Presuppositions. In *Semantics and Philosophy*, eds. Milton Munitz and Peter Unger, 197-213. New York: New York University Press.

Stalnaker, Robert. 1978. Assertion. In *Syntax and Semantics* ***9***, ed. Peter Cole, 315-322. New York: Academic Press.

Stalnaker, Robert. 1988. Belief Attribution and Context. In *Contents of Thought*, eds. Robert Grimm and Daniel Merrill, 140-156. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Stalnaker, Robert. 1998. On the Representation of Context. *Journal of Logic, Language, and Information* 7:3-19.

Thomason, Richmond. 1990. Accommodation, Meaning, and Implicature: Interdisciplinary Foundations for Pragmatics. In *Intentions in Communication*, eds. Philip Cohen, Jerry Morgan and Martha Pollack, 325-363. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.