

GSAS Universals Workshop

Speaker: Ethan Wilcox

Title: Using Presuppositions to Convey Novel Information

Abstract: Presuppositions are the parts of meanings of utterances that are seemingly non-novel and backgrounded, and survive various entailment-canceling operations. They are introduced by individual lexical items called presupposition triggers. Some triggers can be used to introduce novel information into a discourse, while other triggers resist such usage, a phenomenon known as “informative presupposition” or variation in a trigger’s Contextual Felicity Constraint (CFC). Despite an abundance of recent quantitative work on presuppositions, this aspect of their behavior has received less attention via experimentation. I present the results of two studies testing the CFC strength of thirteen presupposition triggers in English. The results support a gradient approach to CFC strength with additive and iterative particles imposing the strongest constraints. Results are compared to previous proposals for CFC variation, and it is argued that none accounts for the full empirical picture.

Date: Friday, November 19, 12:00 pm-1:30 pm

Location: Sever Hall 102