Presuppositions

LING-053 Semantics 1
UCSC
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Presupposition triggers

• Consider various cases of standard presuppositions:

verbs of change of states

(1) Sally quit smoking last year. 
    Sally did not quit smoking last year. 
    p = Sally smoked last year.

particles such as too, even, again, etc.

(2) Sally will read a paper at SALT too. 
    p = Somebody other than Sally will read a paper at SALT.
cleft sentences

(3) It was Sally who called Sue last night. 
It wasn’t Sally who called Sue last night.  
\( p = \) Somebody called Sue last night.

factive verbs

(4) Sally regrets not attending the party. 
Sally doesn’t regret not attending the party.  
\( p = \) Sally is not attending the party.

definite DPs

(5) The Chair of the Humanities is having breakfast right now. 
The Chair of the Humanities is not having breakfast right now.  
\( p = \) The Chair of the Humanities exists and is unique.
Presupposition projection

- How and when does a presupposition get associated with the larger structure embedding the smaller clause containing the trigger?

- Are the presuppositions of the embedded sentence inherited by the bigger sentence?

(6) John stopped reading the *NY Times*.  
\[ p = \text{John used to read the *NY Times*}. \]

(7) John didn’t stop reading the *NY Times*.  
\[ \neg (\text{John stopped reading the *NY Times*}). \]
\[ p = \text{John used to read the *NY Times*}. \]
Conclusion: The presuppositions of a sentence embedded under negation are inherited by the embedding sentence.

NEGATION IS A HOLE

• Antecedents of conditionals are HOLES:

(8) John failed the test again.
\[ p = \text{John failed the test once before.} \]

(9) If \[\text{[John fails the test again]},\] there will be trouble.
\[ p = \text{John failed the test once before.} \]
• Are presuppositions always inherited?

(10) Charlie believes that Sally has stopped eating candies.

(11) *Charlie mistakenly believes that Sally used to eat candies,* and he believes that she has stopped now.

The speaker of (38) does not have to take for granted the fact Sally used to eat candies. In fact, she may even believe that the presupposition of the embedded clause (that Lucy used to eat candies) is false (as shown by (39)).

• **Conclusion:** *Believe* is a **PLUG**
• There is a third type of operators:

(12) If John quit smoking, there will be no ashtray in the house.
   \( p = \) John used to smoke.

(13) If John used to smoke, he quit.

• Conditionals let some presuppositions through, but not all.

Conclusion: Conditionals are **FILTERS**.
Summary

• Whether a presupposition of an embedded clause will “project”, i.e. will be inherited by the embedding sentence, depends on the type of operator in the embedding clause.

1. **HOLES**: the presuppositions of the embedded sentence project. Example: negation, antecedent of conditionals.

2. **PLUGS**: the presuppositions of the embedded clause do not project. Example: believe.

3. **FILTERS**: some presuppositions of the embedded clause project, some don’t. Example: conditionals.