

Redundant Affirmation, Deliberation and Discourse

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1 Introduction

One of the fruits of the Gricean program is the distinction between those truth-conditional aspects of the meaning of utterances that are part of semantics proper, entailments, and those non-logical ‘pragmatic’ aspects of the meaning of an utterance such as conversational implicatures. Thus in 1, the speaker asserts that *Kim ate some of the cookies*, but may intend to communicate in fact that *Kim didn’t eat all of the cookies*.

- (1) Kim ate some of the cookies.

Example 2a shows that this inference from *some* to *not all* is nonlogical, since it can be felicitously DEFEATED in the context. In addition, 2b shows that this inference can be REINFORCED.

- (2) a. Kim ate some of the cookies, but Kim didn’t eat all of them.
b. Kim ate some of the cookies, and in fact Kim ate all of them.

These two tests, DEFEASIBILITY and REINFORCEABILITY, are diagnostics for distinguishing conversational implicatures from entailments (Grice, 1967; Horn, 1972; Sadock, 1978; Horn, 1991). We can see the distinction from the anomaly of examples such as 3a and 3b.

- (3) a. # My sister is older than I am and I am younger than my sister.
b. # My sister is older than I am but I’m not younger than my sister.

Example 3a conjoins two clauses where the second is entailed by the first. The reinforcement of the entailment of the first clause is anomalous. Similarly example 3b conjoins two clauses where the second one attempts to defeat an entailment of the first clause. Because entailments are not defeasible, example 3b is contradictory. The anomaly in both of these cases occurs independently of the order in which these clauses are stated.

Clearly, in order for these diagnostics to serve their purpose, it must always be the case that entailments are neither defeasible nor reinforceable without anomalous redundancy. However, consider example 4, asserted by a passenger in a vehicle in response to the driver's comment that the heavy traffic was unexpected.

- (4) *There's something on fire* up there.
I can't see *what's on fire*,
but SOMETHING IS. (LW 6/12/92)

In the first clause of 4, the speaker asserts a proposition P, namely that *something is on fire*. In the second clause, the speaker presupposes P, and finally the speaker affirms P in the third clause. The affirmation (reinforcement) of P in the third clause contradicts the assumptions of the Gricean program; it appears that some entailments are reinforceable without redundancy (Grice, 1975; Sadock, 1978). I will call clauses like this third one INFORMATIONALLY REDUNDANT UTTERANCES, henceforth IRUs. In the examples given here, IRUs are shown in CAPS. The IRU's ANTECEDENT, the utterance which originally added the IRU's propositional content to the discourse, is shown in *italics*.

IRUs are an especially interesting class of utterances with which to explore the relation between propositional content and what is actually conveyed by an utterance. Pragmatics is typically taken to be the study of the gap between sentence content and what is contributed to the discourse context. However, there are many issues involved with determining how that gap gets filled that have not yet been addressed within pragmatics. In particular, sometimes what is contributed isn't supplied by an implicature, which is a function of content, but by a function of content and information structure or by a function of content and speaker attitude. Furthermore, despite the fact that IRUs have no new information content of their own, they are not infrequent in some types of dialogue; an analysis of a large corpus of naturally occurring problem solving dialogues shows that about 12% of the utterances are informationally redundant.¹ Thus these contributions to context appear to be an important aspect of context incrementation.

One subclass of IRUs, PROPOSITION AFFIRMATION, was first analyzed by Ward (Ward, 1985; Ward, 1990). PROPOSITION AFFIRMATION (PA) is a type of verb preposing construction such as that shown in 5 (Ward's 96):

- (5) Tchaikovsky was one of the most tormented men in musical history. In fact, *one wonders how he managed to produce any music at all. BUT PRODUCE MUSIC HE DID.* [WFLN Radio, Philadelphia]

Ward's analysis is that these cases of informational redundancy are felicitous because the affirmed proposition is doubtful or contrary to expectation. He says 'from a semantic point of view utterances of this type are, strictly speaking, redundant in that they simply repeat a proposition recently asserted in the discourse. However on the pragmatic level,

¹This paper only discusses one subclass of IRUs found in the corpus. For an overview of all the types and an analysis of the communicative functions of IRUs, see (Walker, 1993).

this type of PA is not so uninformative - it can convey a particular propositional attitude on the part of the speaker, one of *surprise* or *unexpectedness*'.

In extending Ward's analysis, Horn points out that this 'surprise' condition is not exactly correct, since 6 is perfectly felicitous(Horn, 1991):

- (6) It's unfortunate that *it's cloudy in San Francisco this week*, but CLOUDY IT IS – so we might as well go listen to the LSA papers.

Since everyone knows what San Francisco weather is like, there can be nothing surprising or unexpected about this weather report.

Horn proposes replacing Ward's 'surprising' or 'unexpected' condition with a constraint of RHETORICAL OPPOSITION, noting that rhetorical contrast is in general sufficient to license the assertion of a previously entailed clause(Horn, 1991). And while Ward restricts his analysis to affirmation within preposing constructions, Horn suggests that as long as the IRU contrasts rhetorically with its antecedent, the affirmatum can occur either preposed or not. According to Horn, RHETORICAL OPPOSITION (henceforth RO) is partially characterized via the condition of ARGUMENTATIVE DISTINCTNESS(Anscombe and Ducrot, 1983):

An informationally redundant affirmation Q will be discourse acceptable if it counts as ARGUMENTATIVELY DISTINCT from P in the sense that where P counts as an argument for a conclusion R, Q represents or argues for an opposite conclusion R'.

Note that what is required to meet the condition of argumentative distinctness is that the hearer be able to ACCOMMODATE some R, R' such that P counts as an argument for R and Q counts as an argument for R'(Lewis, 1979; Thomason, 1990). These affirmations are felicitous then because R, R' may be added to the context as a result of the affirmation. Horn doesn't specify more precisely what it means for P to 'count as an argument for' R,² nor what type of restrictions there might be on which R, R' can be accommodated. In order to simplify and clarify the notion of argumentative distinctiveness, I will model the relation of P 'counting as an argument for a conclusion' R as an entailment relation between P and R.

Horn's RO condition motivates the acceptability of the IRUs in 8 (Horn's (19) and Ward's (405))³:

- (8) a. It's odd that *dogs eat cheese*, but THEY DO (eat cheese)

²Horn apparently does not intend this to be a solely logical relation since two utterances that denote the same 'objective reality' can support different arguments(Horn, 1989). For example 7a below can be used to argue for *we should order another one* whereas 7b can be used to argue that *we should finish it*.

- (7) a. The glass is half empty.
b. The glass is half full.

³Note that the embedding verbs here are factives(Gazdar, 1979).

- b. I don't know why *I love you*, but I DO.
- c. He regrets that *he said it*, but HE DID SAY IT.
- d. *He won by a small margin*, but WIN HE DID.

For example, 8d meets the condition of argumentative distinctness since P, *He won by a small margin*, motivates the hearer to accommodate an R such as the relative lack of a popular mandate for Mr. X, while the Q of his winning per se, *win he did* argues for the opposite conclusion (Horn, 1991). The potential argument structures of 8a, b and c will be discussed below.

RO also motivates the lack of acceptability of the IRUs in 9 (Horn's (20) and Ward's (405)):

- (9) a. #It isn't odd that *dogs eat cheese*, {and/but} THEY DO (eat cheese)
- b. #I know why *I love you*, {and/but} I DO.
- c. #He doesn't regret that *he said it*, {and/but} HE DID SAY IT.
- d. #*He won by a large margin*, {and/but} WIN HE DID.

The RO condition is also supported by the observation that 'both presuppositions and entailments, may be felicitously, though redundantly affirmed, if the affirmatum can be introduced with *but* rather than *and*' (Horn, 1991). The lexical item *but* supports the conventional implicature that there is some contrast between P and the informationally redundant affirmation Q. I will follow Horn and Ward in taking the occurrence of *but* as a cue to the presence of 'rhetorical contrast'.

Horn takes pains to point out that the condition of argumentative distinctness only captures a subset of the full range of cases involving rhetorical contrast, since 10 involves rhetorical opposition, yet it is not possible to support a contrast by invoking either notions of surprise or of argumentative distinctness (Horns 31 and 32):

- (10) a. I'm {unhappy/#happy} *they fired him*, but FIRE HIM THEY DID.
- b. I'm {sorry/#glad} *I said it*, but SAY IT I DID.
- c. It's unfortunate that *you failed*, but FAIL YOU DID.

Horn claims that examples like 10a,b and c support rhetorical opposition through the sociolinguistic edict that the speaker must try to avoid negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

While politeness may indeed explain why it is that the speaker says the utterance in this way, another explanation is possible. If we acknowledge the fact that the reasoning process of human beings is affected by their desires and by the desire to maintain coherence among all their beliefs, then we can analyse these cases as motivated by argumentation as

well(Harman, 1986; Galliers, 1990). A speaker's or hearer's attitude toward a proposition can be a reason not to accept or believe a proposition, even when this attitude has a nonlogical basis. I will return to this point below in section 2.

Furthermore, there are cases that meet the 'negative face' constraint in which affirmation is not felicitous as in 11.

- (11) a. # *You failed* unfortunately but YOU DID.
b. # Unfortunately *you failed*, but YOU DID.

Thus rhetorical contrast is in some cases dependent on constraints that are independent of logical content, entailing that rhetorical contrast is not a sufficient condition for felicitous affirmation.

Finally, as further motivation for a reexamination of the conditions for felicitous affirmation, note that these 'negative face' cases are not the only class of examples that aren't fully characterized by the RO condition. Example 4, repeated here for convenience as 12, provides a further type of counter example to the necessity of the RO condition in supporting IRUs.

- (12) *There's something on fire* up there.
I can't see *what's on fire*,
but SOMETHING IS. (LW 6/12/92)

The fact that the speaker cannot see what is on fire does not argue against there being something on fire. It is also difficult for me, as a prototypical hearer, to imagine what R the assertion of *I can't see what's on fire* could argue for, while the assertion of *something is* argues for the opposite conclusion R'. Since the affirmation is felicitous without requiring the actual accomodation of an R,R', perhaps something else is going on here.

Similarly, in the following example from a radio talk show for financial advice(Pollack, Hirschberg, and Webber, 1982), there doesn't seem to be an argumentation based contrast between (15) and (17). In 13, the participants must have agreed by utterance (9) that the caller Ray (r) cannot claim his mother as a dependent. This proposition is affirmed by Harry (h) in (17).

- (13) (6) r. or uh *does that income from the certificate of deposit rule her out as a dependent*
(7) h. *yes it does*
(8) r. *it does*
(9) h. *yup, that knocks her out.*
now there is something you can do. do you support her in any way?
(discussion about whether r supports his mother)
(15) h. well the medical and dental care you can deduct, provided you can establish that you have provided more than half support.
(16) r. uh huh

(17) h. BUT THE DEPENDENCY YOU CANNOT CLAIM

(18) r. um hm (breath) I see.

ok. uhh, alright, the second question...

This affirmation does seem to contrast with Harry's assertion in (15) that *the medical and dental care can be deducted* (Prince, 1986). This fact does not however strictly argue against Ray's being able to claim the dependency. It is possible that Ray could have both deducted the medical and dental care as well as claim his mother as a dependent.

In sum, affirmation, even in these contrastive environments, is much less constrained than has heretofore been thought. In the following sections, I consider what motivates a speaker to produce an IRU, examine a broader range of IRUs, and propose a characterization of rhetorical contrast that accounts for these examples.

2 Deliberation

A more accurate characterization of the constraints on felicitous affirmation in 'rhetorically contrastive' environments starts from the rather vague hypothesis that the RO type of IRUs are motivated by the speaker's perception that there may be some difficulty constructing the common ground. This characterization depends upon three assumptions:

1. Repeating a proposition is an extremely weak type of evidence of the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition.
2. Hearers do not always accept/believe everything they are told. Thus, speakers often find it incumbent upon them to provide supporting evidence in order to increase the probability that their assertions will be accepted. (SUPPORT)
3. Humans are not overwhelmingly rational. They often do not wish to believe facts that they have rational support for because these facts are in conflict with other beliefs that they prefer to have (Harman, 1986; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky, 1982). (ATTITUDE)

Under assumption (1), the affirmation in example 14 is motivated by the fact that the speaker **cannot** provide support for her claim that she likes Lizzy.

- (14) *I like you* Lizzy.
I don't know *why I like you*.
But I LIKE YOU. (CS, 3/4/92)

The speaker asserts her liking of Lizzy, then states that she cannot in fact produce supportive evidence of her liking, but affirms that she likes Lizzy. The best support that she can provide is her own restatement of the fact. A similar example is given in 15, said by a speaker hiking through the woods.

- (15) *Something has been through here.*
I don't know if it was a deer or what,
but SOMETHING HAS.

Here the speaker asserts that she can tell that something has been through the area, but that she cannot find any evidence that would determine exactly what has been there. Example 4 above in which the speaker asserts that she cannot see what is on fire also fits in this class of examples.

This SUPPORT subclass of IRUs are characterized by the use of verbs referring to typical sources of supporting information for propositions under deliberation, e.g. *see, hear, know, say, remember*. The affirmations demonstrate that speakers are aware of the fact that hearers do not automatically accept assertions (cf. (Stalnaker, 1978; Walker, 1992)), and that reasoning about beliefs is dependent on the source and type of evidence for beliefs. That the function of affirmation in these examples can be related to deliberation is further supported by example 16. Here, Jennifer, (j), makes her reasoning process about what to believe explicit in (75).

- (16) (74) h. Jennifer I understand what you're saying and I'm sorry I have to tell you that, I really am.
(75) j. well I'm I have more faith in you than what he told me,
HE SAID I DIDN'T HAVE TO FILE,
BUT THEN YOU JUST TOLD ME I DO
(76) h.yes. and I wouldn't want to see you get in trouble.

The antecedents for the IRUs in 75 were much further back in the discourse and are not shown here. In this case Jennifer is making explicit the fact that one source of evidence, the IRS, may not be as reliable as another source of evidence, Harry, when she is reasoning about whose advice to accept on how she should file her tax return.

The 'negative face' examples can also be motivated by deliberation as long as we acknowledge that reasons to believe need not always be logical. Under assumption (2), the affirmation in example 17 is motivated by the fact that the speaker believes that either the hearer or some other relevant person may not want to accept the assertion of P, due to a negative attitude toward P (Horn's 32a).

- (17) It's unfortunate that *you failed*, but FAIL YOU DID.

P may not cohere with the other beliefs that the hearer has. For example, it is possible that P in 17 conflicts with the hearer's view of herself as extremely intelligent, or that the acceptance of P would lead the hearer to infer a number of conclusions which she would prefer not to derive.

3 Set-Supported Contrast

The final class of RO IRUs are cases of set supported contrast. It is possible that these are motivated by a rhetorical schema for conveying contrast. An alternate hypothesis would

be that there is a relationship between the way that these propositions are conveyed and their cognitive representations such that (4) below holds:

4. Propositions must be conveyed in a way that supports the derivation of a number of intended inferences(Prince, 1986). (SET CONSTRUCTION).

For example in 18, Viv is talking about a recent vacation to Mexico where due to a drought, the hotel had trouble supplying water consistently to all the rooms.

- (18) *We always had water* (in that room).
I think we were the only ones.
WE NEVER RAN OUT OF WATER.
hot water, we ran out of.
but WE ALWAYS HAD WATER. (Viv 3/20/92)

Here Viv repeats her main point, that *we always had water*, three times over the course of this turn. In this case, each repetition is supported by a different set. First *We, the others* is enumerated with the affirmation and negation of having water. Then a second set, *hot water, cold water* is enumerated with the affirmation/negation of running out of it.

Under assumption (4), the affirmation in example 19 is motivated by the fact that the speaker wants to ensure that the hearer realizes that there is a set of relevant retirement plans that might be thought to be under consideration, *IRA, Keogh Plan*.

- (19) (30) h. Is he self-employed?
(31) l. Yes
(32) h. I'm sorry, i missed that
(33) l. Yes he is.
(34) h. Ok. Well *why not start for him a Keogh plan?* You can't get an IRA after 70, but YOU CAN GET A KEOGH PLAN

The fact that only one member of this set is relevant may support future inferences. Furthermore examples such as 18 and 19 are classic examples of CONTRAST, defined by Prince as an inference arising under the following conditions(Prince, 1981; Prince, 1986):

- There is an OPEN PROPOSITION (OP) taken to be salient shared knowledge,
- The OP is predicated on the members of a set of entities,
- the variable in the OP is instantiated differently for each member,
- the difference in the instantiation is considered relevant.

In the case of 19, the OP is *you can/can't get a Y*. The set of entities that the proposition is predicated on is *IRAs, Keogh plans*. The variable in the OP, affirmation/negation, is instantiated differently for each member of the set, and the difference in the instantiation is relevant precisely because a way of putting aside money for retirement is what is under discussion.

The excerpt in example 13 is also an example of classic set-based contrast. In this case, the speaker may also want to communicate that *medical and dental care, dependency* are part of a domain defined set of deductions.

In sum, it is clear that Prince's characterization of the conditions for contrast provide an environment for felicitous affirmation that is independent of logical argument and deliberation.

4 Some Further Examples

Remember that for Horn's RO condition to apply, the hearer must be able to construct some R, R' such that P argues for R while Q argues for R'. This should provide a sufficient condition for felicitous affirmation. The reason that 20 is bad, according to Horn, is that no such R is possible.

(20) #He won by a large margin, {and/but} win he did.

However if we imagine a situation in which the hearer was part of the competition for a promotion and now must work for the winner, then example 20 is much better. If the R of *he humiliated you* is made explicit in the dialogue as in 21, then the affirmation becomes completely felicitous.

(21) He won by a large margin.
He humiliated you.
But he did win.

Example 2 above also provides evidence that the RO condition is not sufficient. In this case information structure is critical. When this propositional content is realized as in 22,

(22) It's unfortunate that you failed, but you did.

then both lexical items *unfortunate* and *did* receive pitch accents. Thus the hearer is guided in producing a contrastive information structure based on propositional attitudes: BAD(P) but TRUE(P). However the same propositional content can be realized as 23:

(23) You failed unfortunately, but you did.

In this case, it is either impossible or much more difficult to construct the appropriate contrastive information structure. The *you failed* portion of the utterance must get a pitch

accent, rather than being relatively lacking in prominence in contrast with the strong accent on *unfortunate* that surfaces in the most natural way of performing 22.

Further evidence against the sufficiency of the RO condition is provided by the asymmetry in the pairs below:

- (24) a. *John managed to win*, but IT WAS DIFFICULT.
b. #*John managed to win*, but HE DID WIN.

In the case of 24a, hearers apparently can accommodate the appropriate R, R'; namely that the fact that winning was difficult is rhetorically opposed to the fact of his winning. However in 24b, *manage to X* conventionally implicates the difficulty of X'ing. This conventional implicature is clearly part of the context, yet it does not provide the basis for accommodating an R,R' as it does in 24a. Perhaps the difficulty of winning is not sufficiently salient to serve as the basis for the inference of rhetorical contrast.

An additional example that indicates that the account as given so far is not fully general is provided by Schiffrin (Schiffrin, 1982)(example 1):

- (25) (1) See this one right here?
(2) He's smart.
(3) He himself don't think he's smart,
(4) but he's smart.
(5) He came in first in plumbing,
(6) out of a hundred thirty five,
(7) He was the only Jewish kid.
(8) He came in first.

While the affirmation in 25-(4) is motivated by the fact that someone may not want to believe what is being asserted, it is hard to see how the affirmation in (8) is either surprising, rhetorically opposed or hard to believe due to attitude. First of all inserting a *but* in front of (8) completely changes the meaning, and does, as both Ward and Horn suggest seem to indicate that (6) and (7) are somehow concessive. But while (6) and (7) may increase the 'uniqueness' of the accomplishment as Schiffrin suggests, there doesn't seem to be anything to 'concede' here. Alternatively, it is possible that this is a case of set-based contrast in which the one child under discussion is being contrasted with the one hundred and thirty five children in his class. If this analysis is correct, it is interesting that there is no need for *but* as a marker of contrast.

These examples support the conclusion that there is an additional information structure constraint on felicitous affirmation and that it is possible to affirm propositions that are in the background in a previous utterance with appropriate prosody.⁴ The exploration of this effect must be left to future work.

⁴Levinson noted that 'some presuppositions and even entailments may be reinforceable with heavy stress' (Levinson, 1983).

5 Conclusion

I have explored the role of redundant affirmation in constructing the common ground. Redundant affirmation can be motivated by the fact that hearers are autonomous and deliberate about what facts they want to believe and what advice they wish to accept. Repetition of a proposition can be a very weak form of evidence; it demonstrates the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition when the speaker can provide no other support. This fact explains the occurrence of many cases of felicitous affirmation. I have also shown how the cases of negative attitude can be subsumed under a general account of belief change that is sensitive to the role of the hearer's attitudes in reasoning about beliefs (Galliers, 1991; Walker, 1992; Walker, 1993).

The second way in which the notion of rhetorical contrast must be broadened is through Prince's definition of contrast as arising from the interplay of an evoked set and a salient open proposition. Many cases of felicitous affirmation fit this definition and yet are not argumentatively distinct.

Furthermore, there are a number of cases which indicate that the account provided thus far needs to be strengthened by a further information structure constraint. The information structure constraint applies to both syntactic structure and to prosody as a way of indicating information structure. Future work must elucidate the details of this constraint.

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