

International Journal of Social Science Exceptional Research

File-Change Semantics and definiteness

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2583-8261

Volume: 03

Issue: 06

Novembar-December 2024

Received: 10-09-2024

Accepted: 12-10-2024

Page No: 01-03

Abstract

This review examines the file-change theory of semantics by Heim. It focuses on the failure of logical interpretation for "Donkey sentences". Founded that this theory has its origins in cognitive linguistics, since it deals with the change in the state of people's mind during the course of a conversation. This study attempts to discuss the file-change semantics and familiarity of definiteness with relation to formation structuring. The problem is, therefore, this topic has not received an adequate analysis and it is a problematic since it is difficult to interpret NPs in what is called "Donkey sentences". This study attempts to model file change semantics and its close relation to information structuring. Therefore, this study concerns with two important concepts: a listener's mind in file change semantics is just like an empty file. Therefore, two important theories are utilized to analyze the information structuring of NPs which are (File-change semantic by Heim and Familiarity of definiteness) Hence, it aims at showing how these theories are employed in analyzing and identifying the logical interpretation of information structure. It also reveals how the listener has only old information while the speaker utters new sentences and updates the original information by adding new information and this will become old by adding new information. Hence, this appears the continuity process of file change.

Keywords: File-change, Semantics, Definiteness, information structuring, NP

Introduction

File change semantics is a theory introduced by Heim. The original motivation for this theory is the failure to find logical interpretation for what is called "Donkey Sentences". Donkey Sentence has been introduced by Geach, what makes these sentences problematic is the difficulty to interpret NP's. When Heim proposed the theory of file-change semantics, he metaphorically compares the listener's mind to the file of the clerk; how is that? Of course this is simply because the listener's mind, before any utterance in the discourse has been introduced is empty of information "zero file". The speaker's role here is to put card's in this file, so as the speaker makes his first utterance, the listener then has a first card file. There is an important thing is to be noted here, that is each card in the file is capable of updating as soon as the speaker continues his utterances.

This study attempts to model file change semantics and its close relation to information structuring. Lambrecht in 1994 connects these two concepts together, as he assumes; a listener's mind in file change semantics is just like an empty file, but in reality, the listener has only old information. Moreover, he adds; as the speaker utters new sentence, he updates the original information by adding new information and this new information will also become old by adding new information, a continuous process of file changing

Literature review

Horn and Ward (2006:133) ^[6] indicate that file change semantics was introduced by Heim as a solution to the problem of what is called "Donkey Sentences", this problem arises in an example used by Peter Geach to introduce the problem of modern readers.

(1) Any man who owns a donkey beats it. (Geach, 1962:117) [1]

The problem of the above sentence is how to interpret the phrase (a donkey). However, there are logical problems arises as when one is trying to interpret this sentence logically. The ambiguity that is centered on the (NP), which at the first sight may not be felt, has been overcome by Heim who introduced novel approaches to semantic interpretation known as "file change semantics". He illustrates his concept by an example:

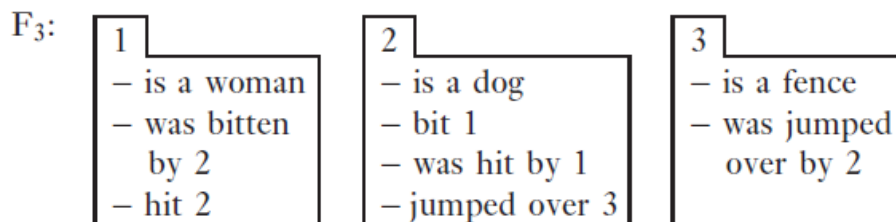
(2) A woman sat with a cat on her lap. She stroked the cat and it purred

As it is known that indefinite noun phrases function to introduce new entities (first discourse mention), whereas the definite noun phrases serve as another referent for a prior one. Furthermore, he calls the definite and indefinite as (non-qualificational), their interpretation involves an entity plus whatever descriptive content that might establish in the remainder of the noun phrase. (Horn&Ward, 2006:133) [6] To this end the "Donkey Sentences", can now be interpreted appropriately by saying: "if the indefinite NPs fall within the scope of a quantified NP, as happens in "Donkey Sentences", the variable they introduced is automatically bounded by dominant NP's quantifier". (Horn & Ward, 2006:133) [6].

According to Heim's in theory of file change semantics the widely held assumption is that the metaphor of filling system controls the identifiability of referents. It is supposed that an addressee has an empty file. "A collection of zero file cards". However, this file will soon be filled as the speaker make his/her utterance. The addressee's roles here are putting one card into the file for each entity (whether it is a real world or a discourse referent), if the speaker makes the utterance "a man delivered a box", the addressee then would prefer to write "is a man "and" delivered 2 "on card 1 and " is a box "and "delivered "1 on card 2. As this illustration suggests: a new card started for every indefinite (unfamiliar to the addressee), old card updating for every definite (familiar to the addressee). (Roberts, *et al*, 2009:37) [7]. The difference between identifiable and non-identifiable is related to the difference between pragmatically presupposed and asserted propositions. The former refers to the proposition about which the speaker and the hearer have a shared knowledge at the utterance time. The latter on the other hand, only the speaker has a knowledge representation at the utterance time. (ibid).

Conversation and file keeping

Heim wrote a chapter in a book about file change semantics and the familiarity theory of definiteness. He illustrates the

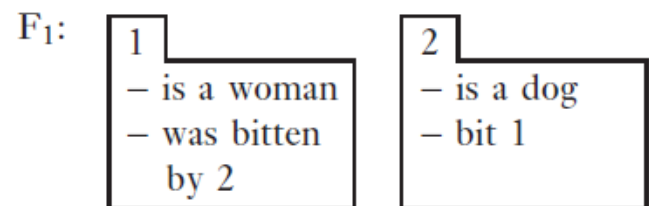


To illustrate how conversation and file keeping work, it is important to quote Heim's statement: "for every indefinite, start a new card, for every definite, update an old card". Heim's statement that is mentioned earlier provides enough

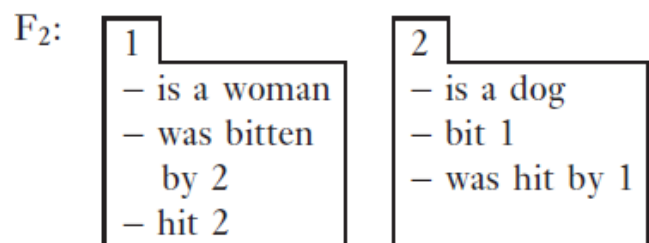
concept of file change semantics by comparing it with the file of the clerk's task. He states that understanding an utterance demand the keeping of a file, Heim assumes that the file contains all the information that are conveyed every time by uttering a particular utterance. If someone was listening to an utterance of these three sentence-text:

**(3) A. A woman was bitten by a dog
B. She hit it
C. It jumped over a fence**

Before uttering any of the above sentences, the listener has an empty file, symbolized as "F0", as the speaker utters the first sentence(a), the listener puts two cards into the file, these two cards represent two different kinds of information. These card are numbered as (card1) and(card2), on card one "there is a woman" and "was bitten by 2", and on card 2, "there is a dog" and "bit1". Till this moment the listener has a two cards file, represented by "F1", which looks like this:



As the second utterance (b) was uttered by the speaker, there will be an updating for the two card file, by adding the entry "hit", this entry will result in updating "card1" and updating "card2" by addition of the entry "was hit by1". As a result, the listener has "file2" and it is also a two card file, but it is different from the first file:



When the last utterance initiated, there will be another card that was taken by the listener numbered as "3", on this card there are: "is a fence" and "was jumped over by2". In addition to that there is updating to card2 by adding "jumped over3". So now the listener is left with a third card, a three card file:

information concerning file changing or file keeping. This means what change a conversation is the (indefiniteness), recall the above example (3a), in which card1 and card2 (woman) and (dog) are new items introduced into the

conversation. The definite on the other hand occurred in (3b), (she) and (it), caused a change of file, so (3a) contains information similar to (3b), but it is updated.

2.3. File change semantics and information structuring

Information Structure is a "Sentence Internal partition of the information in an utterance according to its relation to the discourse context under dichotomies such as topic/comment, theme/rheme, given/new, focus/background, etc. Such categories are essentially **Referential** in nature" (Korbyova & Steedman, 2001:1) ^[2] Lambrecht (1994) ^[3], cited in (Roberts *et al.*, 2009: 37) ^[7] assumes that the idea of file change semantics is related basically to information structuring domain, since the presupposed proposition represents the topic, the theme or focus, and the asserted proposition on the other hand related to the notion of comment, rheme or new information, because it represents something new in the discourse, about which only the speaker has a knowledge and the hearer will later know about it. Various approaches to focus existence assume its valuable effect to be its "coded meaning". As far as this statement is concerned, one can infer that focus divides the sentence into two parts, one is the focused part and the other is the background part. (Wedgwood, 2005:99) ^[9]. The focus is the new information in the sentence, whereas the background represents the information. The result of this division is questionable: the question is "what is meant by new and given? And in which ways these ideas are incorporated into a wider sense of formal analysis, concerning both encoded semantics and its relationship to pragmatic inference (Wedgwood, 2005:99) ^[9]. Scholars of different orientations deal with this idea, for instance Vallduvis' formalize this idea into his idea of "information packaging analysis". His formalization uses file change semantics to model manipulation of mental database. Informational structuring primitives like focus are given procedural semantics, in terms of operations to be performed on this mental database. A topic or a link as it is called in Vallduvis' terminology opens up an entrance in the database, whereas a focused expression is responsible for writing some information. In doing so under the suitable headings, this approach models unsuspectingly a very important aspect of information structuring phenomenon. (Wedgwood, 2005:99) ^[9].

Conclusion

This study has surveyed the theory of file-change semantics. After all it has been founded that this theory has its origins in cognitive linguistics because it deals with the change in the state of people's mind during the course of a conversation. Furthermore, it is noticed that this theory is considered as the original motivation for information structuring. Scholars who are working on the concept of structuring information confess that what paved the way for information structuring is file-change semantics because both lexical change and grammatical construction are demanded in the domain of information structuring and both has received a special attention in file change semantics. The importance of file-change semantics for information structuring cannot be overwhelmed.

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