

## Presuppositions in the Salish Language Family

### General Issue:

To the extent that it's been explored, languages in the Salishan family don't seem to linguistically encode 'presuppositions' in the way languages like English do.

- This is a relatively uncontroversial (and long-recognized) observation regarding these language's determiner systems and 'cleft'(-like) constructions.
- Recently, however, Davis (2008) and Matthewson (2008) have extended it to even the system of pronouns and discourse particles in (one of) these languages.

### 1. Background

*What is a 'presupposition'?*

#### The 'Stalnakerian' Picture (A Massively Simplified Version):<sup>1</sup>

A conversation takes place against a 'common ground' of assumptions. This 'common ground' (CG) is the network of shared beliefs holding between the speaker and the hearer.

We can model the CG, then, as a set of propositions:  $CG = \{ p_1, p_2, p_3, p_4, \dots \}$

#### (1) Presupposition (of a Linguistic Item X)

A 'presupposition' of a given linguistic item X (word, phrase, sentence, etc.), *a condition that the CG must satisfy before you can use X in a conversation.*

#### (2) Example: The 'Existence Presupposition' of the Definite Article

"the dog" = (traditional, pre-theoretic verbiage)  
This phrase 'presupposes' that there exists a single (salient) dog

( 'quasi-Stalnakerian' verbiage)  
Use of this phrase requires that the CG *entails the existence* of a single (salient) dog.

If the common ground doesn't satisfy the above condition, this expression cannot be used.

<sup>1</sup> Note that, for our purposes here, the background theory of presuppositions has been simplified to the point of distortion. It would technically be incorrect to ascribe to Robert Stalnaker many of things said here. However, for our purposes here today, this somewhat distorted picture will suffice...

(3) **Illustrative Example**

Conversation 1:

P1: I saw **a dog** the other day. (CG now entails existence of a dog)  
P2: What color was **the dog**? (CG satisfies (2), “the dog” is licit)

Conversation 2:

P1: I saw **a man** the other day. (CG doesn't entail existence of a dog)  
P2: # What color was **the dog**? (CG doesn't satisfy (2); “the dog” is illicit)

**Responses to ‘Presupposition Failure’:**

When the presuppositions of a speaker's utterance *fail* to be satisfied by the CG, we call this ‘presupposition failure’.

(In English), when ‘presupposition failure occurs’, the hearer can do one of two things:

- (i) they can challenge the utterance (‘wait-a-minute’ challenges/responses)
- (ii) they can ‘accommodate’ the failed presupposition.

Option 1: Challenge (‘Wait-a-Minute’ Responses)

The hearer can object to the utterance, and explicitly note that the CG doesn't license it.

(4) **Illustrative Example (Adapted from Matthewson 2008)**

(Context: P2 doesn't know that any call had yet been made by their friend Mark.)

P1: Mark phoned **again**.  
P2: Again? **I didn't know that he phoned in the first place!**

*Essential Property of the ‘Wait-a-Minute’ Response:*

It is a **correction** by the hearer of the **speaker's beliefs about the hearer's beliefs**.

Consider What's Going on Here:

- By assumption, the CG contains the beliefs of the *hearer* (as well as the speaker).
- So, if the speaker makes an assertion that is not licensed by the CG, *it must be because that speaker believes that the hearer believes something that the hearer actually doesn't*.
- Therefore, in cases of presupposition failure, the hearer is *justified* in correcting the speaker about what they (the hearer) believe.

Option 2: Accommodation

The hearer can tacitly (retroactively) adjust their beliefs so that CG *does* license the utterance.

(5) **Illustrative Example**

“my sister”    *Use of this phrase requires the CG to entail that the speaker has a sister.*

*(Context: P1 and P2 are acquaintances at work. P1 knows nothing about P2’s family.)*

P1:    Good morning! How was your weekend?  
          (CG doesn’t entail that P2 has a sister)

P2:    Not bad... Hey! **My sister** has the same necklace.  
          (CG doesn’t satisfy condition above; P2’s use of “my sister” is illicit)

P1:    Oh, how nice!  
          (Rather than object to P2’s utterance, P1 simply adjusts their beliefs to include the fact that P2 has a sister)

What’s Going on Here:

*The Hearer (P1 above) reasons as follows:*

*‘Well, since the speaker said X, he must assume I believe/know p.’*

*‘P is something I’m willing to accept (for the purposes of our conversation).’*

*‘So, I’ll just add that to our shared set of knowledge.’*

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**2. The Lack of ‘Existence Presuppositions’ in Salish Determiners (Matthewson 1998)**

<b>Overarching Generalization:</b> <i>Salish languages do not have <u>definite</u> determiners.</i>
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*History of Generalization:*

- First focused defense of the above generalization was by Matthewson (1998).
- However, prior to Matthewson, already a part of shared, informal Salishanist ‘lore’.
- As noted by Matthewson (1998), published grammars for Salish languages occasionally remark upon the absence of a ‘definite / indefinite’ distinction in the determiner system.

(6) **Definite Determiner**

The core property of a definite determiner is that it carries an existence presupposition:

[ Def-D NP ] = *Use of this phrase requires the CG to entail the existence of 'NP'*  
(cf. (2))

(7) **Characteristic Behavior of Definite Ds in English**

*(Context: Nothing has been said about a dog yet.)*

P1: I saw \*the / a dog yesterday.

P2: What color was the / \*a dog?

*Note:*

- The presupposition in (6) accounts for the impossibility of “the” in P1’s utterance.
- The *necessity* of “the” in P2’s utterance follows from something called ‘Maximize Presuppositions’

(8) **Maximize Presuppositions (Maximally Simplified)**

If you *can* use a definite D (in a given context CG), then you *must* use a definite D.

Central Empirical Assumption (Matthewson 1998):

- If a language has two determiners, D1 and D2, that display the distributional contrast seen in (7), then we can say that the language ‘encodes (in)definiteness in their determiner system.’
- *However, if no such pair of Ds exist, then the language does not encode (in)definiteness in their determiner system.*

**Central Empirical Generalization (Matthewson 1998):**

**No Salish language has determiners that exhibit the contrast seen in (7)!**

(9) **No Definite Contrast in Sechelt (Northern Coast Salish)**<sup>2</sup>

*Example (a) is the first mention of a snake woman in the text.*

*Example (b) is a subsequent mention of the same creature.*

a. t'i súxst-as [l<sup>h</sup>e 7úl<sup>h</sup>k<sup>a</sup>7 slhánay ].  
FACT saw-3ERG DET snake woman  
*He saw **a snake woman**.*

b. t'i tl'um s-kwal-s [ l<sup>h</sup>e slhánay ].  
FACT then NOM-speak-3POSS [DET woman]  
*Then **the woman** said...* (Matthewson 1998; p. 33)

(10) **No Definite Contrast in Lushootseed (Southern Coast Salish)**

“The distinction in English between *the* and *a* does not exist in Lushootseed.”  
(Hess 1995; Quoted by Matthewson 1998; p. 33)

*Example (a) is the first mention of the whale.*

*Example (b) occurs two lines later and refers to the same whale.*

a. Huy, súdxwexw [ t<sup>i</sup>7il<sup>h</sup> cxwelu7 ]  
COMPL see DET whale  
*They saw **a whale**.*

b. bapadaxw elgwa7 [ t<sup>i</sup>7il<sup>h</sup> cxwelu7 ]  
pester PL DET whale  
*The pestered **the whale**.* (Matthewson 1998; p. 34)

(11) **No Definite Contrast in St'át'imcets (Northern Interior Salish)**

a. húy'-lhkan ptakwlh, ptákwlhmin lts7a [ t<sup>i</sup> smém'lhats-a ]  
going.to-1sS tell.story tell.story here [ DET woman-DET  
*I am going to tell a legend, a legend about **a girl**...*

b. wa7 ku7 ilal láti7 [ t<sup>i</sup> smém'lhats-a ]  
PROG EVID cry there DET woman-DET  
***The girl** was crying there...* (Matthewson 1998; p. 34)

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<sup>2</sup> For purposes of time, I will be simplifying some of the orthographic symbols used by authors in the original source material. Thus, the Salishan data throughout are not necessarily transcribed faithfully. Please refer to the cited reference for the original, faithfully transcribed data.

(12) **No Definite Contrast in Secwepemtsín (Northern Interior Salish)**

*Example (a) is the first mention of the boy.*

*Example (b) occurs a few lines later, and refers to the same boy.*

- a. w7éx-ekwe [ **gh** twwiwt ], n7én n-sq'wmcíns [ gh Fraser River ]...  
be-EVID DET boy DEIC P-shore-3POSS DET Fraser River  
*There was a boy, who lived over on the bank of the Fraser River...*
- b. w7éx-ekwe [ **gh** twwiwt ] wléxmns 7st'iqwcns yghiy7éne [gh sqexqxe7éy'e]  
be-EVID DET boy think.pity drown DEIC DET puppy  
*The boy thought it a pity to kill those puppies.* (Matthewson 1998; p. 35)

(13) **No Definite Contrast in Straits [Saanich] (Southern Coast Salish)**

- a. 7i7 xwálhkwteŋ [ **tse** ceq qwlhéy' ]  
ACCOMP drift DET big log-wood  
*There was a big log floating in the water.*
- b. 7áalh 7e [ **tse** qwlhéy' ]  
go.aboard P DET log-wood  
*Go aboard the log.* (Matthewson 1998; p. 35)

... and Matthewson extends the list further by considering data from Nuxalk (Nuxalk) and Upper Chehalis (Tsamosan) ...

QUESTION 1: All these data directly show is that the definite/indefinite contrast is not overtly, phonologically 'signaled' in these languages...

How do we know that these languages really, deeply *lack* definite determiners?

*Maybe their definite determiners are simply homophonous with their indefinites!*

**Matthewson's Reply (Demirdache's Reply):**

In the languages that we're familiar with (e.g. English), definite DPs have so-called 'individual concept readings'.

*Under these readings, the DP doesn't refer to a particular individual, but any past/present/future individuals that satisfy the description:*

**(14) Individual Concept Reading of a DP in English**

The goalie can touch the ball with his hands.

*Referential Reading:* 'Whoever is the goalie *now* can touch the ball with his hands.'

*IC Reading:* 'For any time *t*, whoever is the goalie at *t* can touch the ball at *t*.'

Argument:

If St'át'imcets (e.g.) DPs were homophonous between definite and indefinite interpretations (i.e., if they had an interpretation as real, definite DPs), *then those DPs should admit of 'individual concept readings'....*

... BUT THEY DON'T

**(15) No Individual Concept Reading of a DP in St'át'imcets**

á7xa7 [ **ti** kel7áqstensa ti United.States-a ]

powerful DET leader.POSS DET United.States

*The president of the United States now is powerful.*

(can't mean: *For any time t, whoever is the PUSA at t is powerful at t.*)

Rebuttal:

How much faith should we place in the premise that definite DPs *always in every language* allow 'individual concept readings'?

QUESTION 2:

The use of these determiners in the (a)-examples, which involve 'novel contexts' is evidence against their being definites...

... so does that mean that these DPs are *indefinites*?...

... *if so, how do we understand their behavior in the (b)-examples, which involve 'familiar contexts'* (cf. the behavior of English indefinites in (7))

**Matthewson's Answer:** YES! These DPs are all indefinites.

Evidence that the determiners in St'át'imcets (cf. (11)) are indefinite (Matthewson 1999):

(16) **Determiner Can Appear in Existential Sentences**

- a. wa7 [ **ti** míxalh-a ] [ láku7 sqwém-a ]  
be DET bear-DT DEIC mountain-DET  
*There is a bear on that mountain.*
- b. wa7 [ **i** cwe7ít-a míxalh ] [ láku7 sqwém-a ]  
be DET many-DET bear DEIC mountain-DET  
*There are many bears on that mountain.*
- c. \* wa7 [ tákem **i** míxalh-a ] [ láku7 sqwém-a ]  
be all DET bear-DET DEIC mountain-DET  
\* *There are all the bears on the mountain.* (Matthewson 1999; p. 106)

(17) **Determiner Doesn't Carry a Uniqueness/Maximality Entailment**

*Context: There are five puppies, and only one of them is sleeping.*

- a. English  
Be quiet! \*The / a puppy is sleeping!
- b. St'át'imcets  
cw7áoz-as kwásu wenácwts! wa7 guy't [ **ta** sqéqx7-a ]  
be.quiet PROG sleep DET puppy-DET  
*Be quiet! A puppy is sleeping!*

(18) **Determiner Doesn't Force Anaphoric Reference**

wa7 lts7a pankúph-a [ **ti** swúw'h-a ]  
be here Vancouver DET cougar-DET

múta7 wa7 lílwat-a [ **ti** swúw'h-a ] t'it  
and be Mount.Currie DET cougar-DET also  
*There is a cougar here in Vancouver, and there is also a cougar there in Mt. Currie.*  
(Consultant's comment: "There are two different cougars.") (Matthewson 1999; p. 106)

(19) **Determiner Phrase is Possible Licenser of Sluicing**

- a. English  
I know that Henry's looking for a / \*the book, but I don't know which!
- b. St'át'imcets  
wa7 cwílenas k Henry [ **ti** púkwa-a ],  
PROG look.for DET Henry DET book-DET
- t'u7 aoz kwens zwáten stám-as!  
but NEG DET.1sPOSS know what-3S  
*I know that Henry is looking for **a book**, but I don't know which!*  
(Matthewson 1999; p. 108)

*So... how do we understand the appearance of these determiners in environments where, in English, indefinites are infelicitous??*

(20) **Indefinites Can be Anaphoric in St'át'imcets, but not English?**

- a. English  
(i) I saw [ a bear ]<sub>1</sub> by the side of the road.  
(ii) \* [ A bear ]<sub>1</sub> was eating berries from a blackberry bush.
- b. St'át'imcets  
(i) húy'-lhkan ptakwlh, ptákwlhmin lts7a [ **ti** smém'lhats-a ]  
going.to-1sS tell.story tell.story here [ DET woman-DET  
*I am going to tell a legend, a legend about **a girl**...*
- (ii) wa7 ku7 ilal láti7 [ **ti** smém'lhats-a ]  
PROG EVID cry there DET woman-DET  
***The girl** was crying there...* (Matthewson 1998; p. 34)

Well... remember that the impossibility of (20aii) in English is due to the principle of 'Maximize Presuppositions' (repeated below).

(21) **Maximize Presuppositions (Maximally Simplified)**

If you *can* use a definite D (in a given context CG), then you *must* use a definite D.

... since English *has* a definite D, and it's licensed in (20aii), you *have* to use it.

*... but, importantly, because ST' lacks any definite D, nothing rules out the use of the indefinite in (20bii)!!!*

Interim Summary

We've seen that determiner systems in Salish languages do not distinguish between 'definite' and 'indefinite' determiners.

We've seen some evidence that (possibly) across Salish languages, all determiners are indefinite.

*Thus, Salish languages as a whole lack definite determiners.*

*... but recall that being 'definite' is simply encoding an existence presupposition (cf. (6))*

(22) **Broader Generalization**  
Salish determiners never encode 'existence presuppositions'

(23) **Broadest Generalization**  
Salish determiners never encode *presuppositions* (ever)

Potential Evidence for the 'Broadest' Generalization (Matthewson 1998)

**Fact:** No Salish language has 'quantificational determiners' ('every', 'most', 'no', etc.)

**Claim:** Quantificational determiners *presuppose* that their restrictors are non-empty.

(24) **Strong Quantifiers in English Presuppose Non-Emptiness of their Restrictor**

Intuition: None of the Following 'Feel' True or False

# Every unicorn is happy.

# Most leprechauns are worried about healthcare.

(25) **Weak Quantifiers in English ALSO Presuppose Non-Emptiness of Restrictor**

Matthewson's Intuition: None of the Following 'Feel' True or False

# Many UNICORNS are happy.

# Some LEPRECHAUNS are worried about healthcare.

Argument: IF we accept the claim that *all* quantificational Ds possess a presupposition that their restrictors are non-empty,

AND we accept the 'Broadest Generalization' in (23),

**THEN we predict the absence of quantificational Ds across Salish**

### 3. The Lack of ‘Existence Presuppositions’ in Salish Clefts (Davis *et al.* 2004)

This absence of ‘existence presuppositions’ in Salish determiners seems to be paralleled by a similar absence of such presuppositions in the languages’ cleft(-like) constructions.

#### (26) Clefts in English Encode Existence Presuppositions

a. The Existence Presupposition of English Clefts

“it was/is NP that S” =

*Use of this phrase requires the CG to entail that there is some entity for which S is true.*

b. Illustration of the Presupposition

*Context:*

*Speaker has been caring for three children while the hearer was out of the house. While the hearer was gone, one child – Richard – breaks a plate. The hearer has just entered the home, and doesn’t know that a plate has been broken.*

(i) Richard broke a plate.

(ii) # It was Richard who broke a plate.

#### (27) Clefts in St’át’imcets Do Not Encode Existence Presuppositions

*Context: Same as (26b)*

nilh sRichard [ ti sek’wentáliha [ ta lháxc-a ] ]  
be.it Richard DET break DET plate-DET

*It was Richard who broke a plate.*

(Consultant’s Comment: A fine thing to say in imagined context.)

(Davis *et al.* 2004)

#### (28) Clefts in Straits Salish (Samish) Do Not Encode Existence Presuppositions

*Context:*

*Speaker has been caring for three children while the hearer was out of the house. While the hearer was gone, two children – Mary and Jill – got hurt when playing. The hearer has just entered the home, and doesn’t know that anyone has been hurt.*

nilh kwse Mary 7i7 Jill [ te mé7kwlh ]  
be.it DET Mary and Jill DET get.hurt

*It was Mary and Jill who got hurt.*

(Consultant Comment: Makes sense to say in imagined context.)

(Davis *et al.* 2004)

#### 4. The Lack of ‘Existence Presuppositions’ in Salish Pronouns (Davis 2008)

Davis (2008) proposes that there is a relationship between:

- (a) the inability of determiners and clefts in Salish languages to encode (existence) presuppositions (observed above)
- (b) the comparatively extensive freedom for pronouns in (one of) these languages to precede their antecedents (i.e., ‘cataphora’)

##### Background Fact (Davis 2008):

Cataphora in English requires the preceding pronoun to refer to an already mentioned entity. *I.e.*, the full, co-referent NP that follows must already have been introduced into the discourse.

##### (30) Constraints on Cataphora in English

a. Discourse 1:

P1) Did you see **John**<sub>1</sub> yesterday?

P2) Yep! **He**<sub>1</sub> came in to the office, but then **John**<sub>1</sub> had to leave.

b. Discourse 2:

P1) What happened at the office yesterday?

P2) # Well, **he**<sub>1</sub> came in to the office, but then **John**<sub>1</sub> had to leave.

##### Contrast with St’át’imcets:

Davis (2008) claims that cataphora in St’át’imcets is permissible *even when the understood referent of the pronoun has not yet been introduced into the discourse.*

##### (31) No Constraints on Cataphora in St’át’imcets (Davis 2008; p. 32)

*Context: There has been no prior mention of either Coyote or Fox.*

naspála7sa            [IP tayt=**wit**<sub>1</sub> ]  
once.upon.a.time       hungry=them

nilh [IP swa7s cwil’em ku=s7ílhen [ **ta nk’yáp-a múta7 ta sxgwálcs-a** ]<sub>1</sub> ]  
then PROG seek DET=food DET coyote-DET and DET fox-DET  
*Once upon a time they*<sub>1</sub> were hungry, and so [ **coyote and fox** ]<sub>1</sub> were looking for food.

##### Points to Note Here:

- the conjunction *nilh* can only conjoin full clauses, not phrases
- the use of *naspála7sa* ‘once upon a time’ indicates that this is the beginning of a text
- Davis (2008) presents several other examples (with different conjunctions), including ones where the initial pronoun *could* take salient entities as antecedents, *but doesn’t*.

**Davis's Proposal: Pronouns in St'át'imcets Lack 'Existence Presuppositions'**

IDEA 1:

Maybe the impossibility of (30b) in English is directly akin to the impossibility of discourse like the following:

**(32) Violation of the Existence Presupposition in English Definites**

- P1) What happened at the office today?  
P2) # Well, **the guy**<sub>1</sub> came in to the office, but then **John**<sub>1</sub> had to leave.

That is: *Maybe English pronouns have 'Existence Presuppositions' like English definites.*

**(33) The Presuppositions of Pronouns in English**

"him" =  
*Use of this element requires the CG to entail that there exists some entity that is understood to be its referent.*

IDEA 2:

Maybe the inability for Salish pronouns or clefts to encode existence presuppositions is due to an even broader, overarching generalization:

**(34) No Existence Presuppositions in Salish**

Salish languages do not linguistically encode 'existence presuppositions'.  
No lexical item in any Salish language requires the Common Ground to entail the existence of some entity.

CONSEQUENCE:

We predict that pronouns in Salish languages (including ST') will not impose the requirement in (33) upon the CG.

Thus, we predict that Salish languages should be able to introduce pronouns *prior* to the introduction of their antecedents.

That is, we predict that ST' will exhibit *completely unconstrained cataphora* (as it allegedly does).

## 5. The Apparent General Absence of Presuppositions in Salish (Matthewson 2008)

### Interim Summary:

Salish languages (particularly St'át'imcets) exhibit the following properties:

- They fail to linguistically encode (existence) presuppositions in their determiners
- They fail to linguistically encode (existence) presuppositions in their clefts
- They fail to linguistically encode (existence) presuppositions in their nouns

### Question:

Do lexical items / constructions in Salish languages (St'át'imcets) *ever* place *any* requirements on the Common Ground?

*Are there any presuppositions that Salish languages do linguistically encode?*

Matthewson (2008): For St'át'imcets, the answer is **no**.

“St'át'imcets displays no evidence for presuppositions which place constraints on the common ground of discourse.” (Matthewson 2008).

### Preview of the Argument:

*Speakers of St'át'imcets never seem to issue so-called ‘wait-a-minute’ challenges / responses.*

That is, even in cases where you'd expect hearers to ‘challenge’ the putative presuppositions of a speaker's statement, *they never do*.

### (35) English Discourse

*Context: Person 2 arrives, and nothing has been said apart from greetings.*

P1) Would you like some more tea?

P2) What are you talking about? I've not had any tea!

# Sure!

### (36) St'át'imcets Discourse

*Context: (Same as in (30))*

P1) wá7-lhkaew ha xát'min ku **hu7** ku tih?

IMP-2sS Q want DET 'more' DET tea

*Would you like some more tea?*

P2) iy  
Yes.

(Matthewson 2008; p. 2)

## 5.1 Background: How to Test For Presuppositions

*How do we test whether a given word/phrase/sentence carries some 'presupposition'?*

### PROBLEM:

Many of our tests for doing this in languages like English rely upon our native speaker intuitions. (e.g., does some sentence S still 'imply' P even under negation, question-formation, etc...)

*So how do we test for presuppositions in a language for which we lack native-speaker judgments?*

### The 'Wait-a-Minute' Test (von Stechow 2001, Matthewson 2008)

When the presuppositions of a speaker's utterance *fail* to be satisfied by the CG, the hearer can *object* to the speaker's utterance, by *noting that the speaker has made an incorrect assumption about the hearer's beliefs/knowledge*.

#### (37) Illustrative Example (Adapted from Matthewson 2008)

*(Context: P2 doesn't know that any call had yet been made by their friend Mark.)*

P1: Mark phoned **again**.

P2: **I didn't know that he phoned in the first place!**

#### (38) Crucial Thing to Observe 1

The hearer is justified in making these challenges *because the CG contains their beliefs*.

Thus, if the speaker makes an assertion that is not licensed by the CG, *it must be because that speaker believes that the hearer believes something that the hearer doesn't actually believe*.

Thus, these kinds of challenges ('wait-a-minute' challenges) are crucially *corrections*. The hearer is *correcting* the speaker regarding *what beliefs the hearer holds*.

#### (39) Crucial Thing to Observe 2

Consequently, it's quite odd to offer these kinds of 'wait-a-minute' challenges (where the hearer is correcting an assumption about *their beliefs*) in response to **asserted content**.

P1: Mark phoned **earlier**.

P2: **# I didn't know that he phoned earlier!**

### **The Experimental Test (Matthewson 2008)**

If conversational participants can be observed to issue ‘wait-a-minute’ responses in putative situations of ‘presupposition failure’, then it’s clear that the language in question has expressions that place constraints on the CG.

Question 1: How do we identify these ‘wait-a-minute’ responses?

*Answer:* It’s subjective. The criterion is ‘does it look like Person A is correcting something they think Person B thinks about Person A’s beliefs?’

#### **(35) A Naturally Occurring ‘Wait-A-Minute’ Response in English**

P1) And then **the** flat car said to the little red caboose...

P2) **WHICH** flat car? (Matthewson 2008; p. 4)

Question 2: How well does this test work for a language we *know* has presuppositions (e.g., English)?

*Answer:* There’s some preliminary research to suggest that the test works as intended (all done at UMass!)

Conti (1999):

Tested English speakers in real-life, naturalistic discourses.

Intentionally created presupposition failures with “the”.

Got “many” wait-a-minute challenges.

Matthewson, Bryant & Roeper (2001):

Tested 25 adult speakers of English on presupposition failure with ‘the’.

Got ‘wait-a-minute’ challenges 62% of the time.

## **5.2 Probing St’át’imcets for ‘Wait-a-Minute’ Responses**

*So, how do we test whether St’át’imcets speakers can issue these ‘wait-a-minute’ responses?*

Matthewson’s Four Methodologies:

- (a) Intentionally cause presupposition failure in real-life discourses
- (b) Ask consultants to translate English discourses with ‘wait-a-minute’ responses
- (c) Attempt to construct ‘wait-a-minute’ responses in the language, and ask for judgments
- (d) Explicitly discuss the test, using English to illustrate, and ask whether similar facts hold

Items Tested:

<i>múta7</i>	‘again / more’	<i>tsukw</i>	‘stop’
<i>hu7</i>	‘more’	<i>t’it</i>	‘also’

**Result:**      **None of (a) - (d) succeeded in uncovering ‘wait-a-minute’ challenges.**  
***The most interesting is the failure of methodology (a) to achieve any results.***

(40)    **The Absence of ‘Wait-a-Minute’ Responses in St’át’imcets**

Even when the putative presupposition was (a) not satisfied by the CG, and (b) one that the hearer would reasonably be inclined to challenge, ‘wait-a-minute’ responses were never offered.

a.    Discourse 1:

*Context: All participants know that Henry is not a millionaire.*

P1)    t’cum **múta7** k    Henry l-ta    lottery-ha.  
win ‘again’ DET Henry in-DET lottery-DET  
*Henry won the lottery **again**.*

P2)    o, áma.  
oh good  
*Oh, good.*

(Matthewson 2008; p. 5-6)

b.    Discourse 2:

*Context: Addressee has been a ‘teetotaler’ for several decades.*

P1)    xat’min’-lkhácw ha ku    **hu7**    ku qvl s7úqwa7?  
want-2sS            Q DET ‘more’ DET bad drink  
*Do you want **some more** alcohol?*

P2)    káti7. qyáx-kan kélh t’u7.  
no    drunk-2sS FUT just  
*No way. I’ll get drunk (laughs).*

(Matthewson 2008; p. 6)

c.    Discourse 3:

*Context: No prior discussion of anyone being in jail.*

P1)    wá7 **t’it** l-ti    gélgel-a    tsitcw k    Lisa.  
be ‘also’ in-DET strong-DET house DET Lisa  
*Lisa is **also** in jail*

P2)    stam’ ku    száy tens  
what DET she.do  
*What did she do?*

(Matthewson 2008; p. 6)

**General Skeptical Question:**

*What can we really conclude about the fact that these speakers didn't ever issue 'wait-a-minute' challenges / corrections to these linguists?*

THAT COULD BE FOR A MILLION DIFFERENT REASONS!

*...Maybe these speakers are simply disinclined to correct the linguists for cultural / personal reasons?*

Matthewson's Reply:

What's especially interesting about these speakers' behavior here is that they are actually, in general, *very* inclined towards correcting the linguists!

*... they just never corrected the linguists regarding what the linguists were (putatively) presupposing about their own beliefs!...*

(41) **Corrections of Vague Statements**

P1) wá7 t'it [ ta nsnúk'w7a ] l-ta quenúcwahcwa  
be 'also' DET my.friend in-DET sick.place-DET  
*My friend is **also** in the hospital.*

P2) swat ku snúk'wa7su?  
who DET your.friend  
*Who is your friend?*

(Matthewson 2008; p. 8)

(42) **Corrections of Contradiction**

P1) xwem t'u7 k tsukw kw s-wa7 q'a7, t'u7 cw7aoz kw stsúkwal'ts  
fast just DET finish DET IMP eat but NEG DET finish.food  
*He finished eating fast, but didn't finish eating.*

P2) (laughs) That doesn't make much sense. Sounds impossible. Like I'm  
contradicting myself. (Matthewson 2008; p. 8)

(43) **Corrections of Generally Ridiculous Assertions**

P1) kaléxwa aylh ta núkwa snéqwem.  
appear then DET another sun  
*Another sun appeared.*

P2) NUKWA?! (laughs) Yikes! (laughs a lot). On another planet maybe!  
*another* (Matthewson 2008; p. 11)

**Matthewson's Conclusion:**

The speakers in question will in general challenge and correct 'infelicitous' utterances...

*... they just won't challenge these putative presupposition failures!!*

Some Criticisms:

- (i) The challenges and corrections in (42) and (43) (as well as others cited in the paper) seem to be in the context of 'field interviews', rather than naturalistic conversation.  
**Do the speakers in general stop and correct the linguists in naturalistic conversation?**
- (ii) In an attempt to make 'wait-a-minute responses' more likely, the experimenters introduced (failed) presuppositions that were *obviously false*. *But, this may have had exactly the opposite effect they were looking for:*  
**If the presupposition is obviously false – to the point that the hearer knows that the speaker knows that it's false (cf (40b)) – then there would be no point in correcting the speaker...**  
**In fact, if anything, the hearer might think that**
  - (a) the speaker is playing a game
  - (b) the speaker has simply misspoke / made a 'low-level' speech error
- (iii) This evidence is really quite 'anecdotal' / observational. It's about *what the speakers did in these naturalistic settings when the linguists intentionally introduced (putative) presupposition failures*.  
**How do speakers judge constructed discourses with presupposition failures (i.e, the St'át'imcets translation of a discourse like (35))?**

**5.3 The Apparent Absence of Presuppositions in St'át'imcets**

Summary:

There seems to be a real contrast between:

- (a) the observed tendency of English speakers to offer 'wait-a-minute' challenges to presupposition failure in naturalistic settings [62%], and
- (b) the observed *complete absence* of ST' speakers offering such challenges to putative presupposition failures in naturalistic settings [0%]

*Moreover, this contrast doesn't seem explainable by 'language-external' factors like culture, or personality, or a reluctance to offer corrections.*

Matthewson's Conclusion: We should explore a linguistic account of this contrast.

**The Core Idea:**

Recall the following crucial fact about ‘wait-a-minute’ responses in English:

**(44) Crucial Thing to Observe 1**

In a ‘wait-a-minute’ challenges, the hearer is *correcting* the speaker regarding *what beliefs the hearer holds*.

Thus, ultimately, an English speaker is justified in issuing a ‘wait-a-minute’ challenge *because the CG contains their beliefs*.

... so maybe speakers of *St’át’imcets* don’t issue these challenges **because in *St’át’imcets* the CG doesn’t contain the beliefs of the hearer!**

**(40) Presuppositions Without Common Ground**

Gauker’s (1998) Theory of Presupposition (for English)

Gauker argues that ‘informative presuppositions’ like the following just can’t be accounted for under the notion that the CG (in English) contains the beliefs of the hearer.

We regret that parents will not be able to bring children to the event.

“One common notion is that the propositional elements of the context [i.e., ‘common ground’ – SC] are assumptions that the speaker and the hearer in some sense share, or alternately, that the speaker supposes he or she shares with the hearer. I do not think it is obvious that this is how we should think about them.... I will dispute the idea that the propositional elements of the context ought to be identified with the interlocutors shared assumptions...” (Gauker 1998; p. 150)

**PROBLEM:** By removing the hearer’s beliefs from the CG, Gauker predicts that ‘wait-a-minute’ challenges in English should not be possible! (von Stechow 2000)

Matthewson’s Proposal:

- a. The possibility of ‘wait-a-minute’ challenges in English shows that Gauker’s theory of presuppositions *in English* is incorrect (von Stechow 2000), *but*
- b. The *impossibility* of ‘wait-a-minute’ challenges in ST’ suggests that Gauker’s theory might be right for presuppositions in *ST’!*

(41) **Presuppositions Without Common Ground**

a. English

“S again” =

*Use of this phrase requires the CG (beliefs of hearer and speaker) to entail that S already happened at some earlier time.*

b. St’át’imcets

“S *mútaʔ*” =

*Use of this phrase requires (only) that the beliefs of the speaker entail that S already happened at some earlier time.*

**5.4 Some Learning-Theoretic Considerations**

Suppose this idea is right, that there is this typological divide between languages with ‘Gaukerian Presuppositions’ (which reference only the beliefs of the speaker) and ‘Stalnakerian Presuppositions’ (which reference the full CG).

*How could children learn which type their language belongs to?*

Matthewson’s Observation:

- (a) If children start off assuming they are in ‘Stalnakerian languages’ – where one *can* issue ‘wait-a-minute’ corrections – then *only negative evidence* could show if they were actually learning a ‘Gaukerian language’ – where such corrections are not licit.
- (b) However, if children start off assuming that they are in ‘Gaukerian languages’ (and *can’t* make ‘wait-a-minute’ corrections), then *positive evidence* could show if they were actually learning a ‘Stalnakerian language’ (e.g. someone issuing them a ‘wait-a-minute’ correction).

THUS: It would seem that this overall idea might predict that children should start off life as ‘Gaukerians’.

Consequently, children learning ‘Stalnakerian languages’ would be predicted to first seem like they have great difficulty with ‘presuppositions’ in their language:

Specifically, they would seem to ‘over-use’ things like definites, *employing them in contexts where the knowledge of the hearer wouldn’t license them...*

*...hmmm....*

A Criticism:

This proposal treats a ‘wait-a-minute’ response as a piece of *positive* data (as positive instances of a ‘linguistic structure’).

However, if anything, such responses are **negative data** –  
*they are corrections to a speaker that their utterance was not licit!*

Thus, if anything, learning theoretic considerations would favor learners starting life as *Stalnakerians* (which is really the more restrictive language type, in terms of what kinds of structures / discourse are permissible).

In order to acquire a Gaukerian language, such ‘child Stalnakerians’ need only observe that speakers are able to use expressions like ‘the dog’ in contexts where speakers *must know* that the hearer *doesn’t know* of the existence of a dog...