

Two important motivations for dynamic semantics have been intersentential anaphora, as in (1), and donkey anaphora, as in (2):

- (1) There's a cat. The cat is hungry.
- (2) Every child who meets a donkey pets it.

Situation semanticists have provided non-dynamic accounts of donkey anaphora, but intersentential anaphora remain a serious challenge for situation semantics.¹ I suggest that situation semantics can handle intersentential phenomena by relying on a situation-based model of conversational update.

Situation semantics typically assumes that definite descriptions carry an existence and uniqueness presupposition. For example, the sentence (3), evaluated at some situation s , presupposes that there is exactly one cat at s . If the presupposition is satisfied, (3) is true at s just in case the unique cat in s is hungry in s .²

- (3) The cat is hungry.

Consider again the sequence (1) and suppose that the speaker is describing some particular situation s , perhaps a certain park on a sunny afternoon. The sequence as a whole has a reading on which it is true at s just in case there is some hungry cat at s . The sequence as a whole doesn't require, let alone presuppose, that there is only one cat at s . Moreover, if there are several cats in s , the speaker need not have a particular one in mind.³ But can situation semanticists account for this? If s isn't where the presupposition of (3) needs to be satisfied, then where does it have to be satisfied? In response, I suggest that situation semantics should be supplemented with a model of how assertions change the conversational context.

Stalnaker (1978) models conversations in terms of the context set: the set of all possible worlds that are compatible with what the interlocutors take for granted. The worlds in the context set are candidates for being the actual world, and assertions are proposals to exclude some candidates from the set. The presuppositions of an assertion are required to be true at all worlds of the old context set, but in ordinary conversations, the worlds in the context set contain many cats, and so ordinary contexts don't satisfy a uniqueness presupposition that there is only one cat. Therefore, Stalnaker's model doesn't seem well suited to help situation semantics.

Therefore, I suggest we modify Stalnaker's model. Situation semanticists assume that an assertion describes a particular situation, the topic situation. Accordingly, I assume that a context set is a set of situations rather than a set of worlds. Each situation in the context set is a candidate for being the topic situation. But the context set, I assume, doesn't contain *all* candidates for being the topic situation; it only contains the *smallest* candidates: the smallest situations where everything that has been accepted about the topic situation is true. Our attention is on those situations that make true what we have so far accepted and that contain nothing that is irrelevant to the truth of what we have accepted. Those are the situations in the context set. For example, if all we have accepted about the topic situation is that there is a cat, then the context set will be the set of all minimal situations in which there is a cat. If we then accept some

¹See Mandelkern and Rothschild 2020 and Lewis forthcoming

²See e.g. Elbourne 2013

³See e.g. Lewis 2013

further claim p , we expand the situations in the context set just enough so that p is true at the expanded situations, but we expand them no further than that. Situations that can't be expanded in the right way are excluded. An assertion that p is a proposal to accept p . As before, I assume that presuppositions impose a constraint on the old context set: presuppositions are required to be true at all situations in the old set.

Let's return to the case of (1). Assume again that the speaker is describing a certain park, and suppose that all we know so far is that there's a park. Our initial context set c_0 is therefore the set of all minimal situations in which there is a park. When we update c_0 with 'There's a cat', we expand the situations in c_0 minimally so that there is also a cat, arriving at a new context set c_1 . Since we've expanded the situations minimally, there is only one cat in each situation of s_1 . When we now update with 'The cat is hungry', we first have to check whether its existence and uniqueness presupposition is satisfied by c_1 . Since all situations in c_1 contain exactly one cat, it is. We then extend each situation of c_1 minimally in such a way that the cat in this situation is hungry. Update proceeds without presupposition failure, and without postulating that the speaker needs to have a particular cat in mind. The presupposition that there is only one cat merely has to be true at the situations of the context, and these situations are merely the smallest candidates for being the topic situation. Therefore, the topic situation may well be bigger: it may contain more than one cat, as far as we've been told.

There are, however, various variants of (1) that are more difficult to account for. Here is an example of one important type of case:

- (4) There's a cat. The cat is playing with another cat.⁴

This sequence is more tricky, since the second sentence presupposes that there is exactly one cat, but at same time requires that there are at least two cats, in order to be true. Roughly, I suggest that the presupposition merely has to be satisfied by the situations of the old context set but need not be true at the situations in the new context set.

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⁴See 'A dog was in the park. The dog got into a fight with another dog.' (Szabó 2000, p. 46)