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# PRESUPPOSITIONS AND APPROPRIATENESS OF ASSERTIONS

**Abstract**

In this paper I aim to compare and evaluate two theoretic approaches to pragmatic presuppositions: the Common Ground account and Propositional Context account. According to the Common Ground account proposed by Stalnaker (2002), it is appropriate to assert a sentence *p* that requires a presupposition *q* only if *q* is mutually believed as accepted as true and taken for granted by the interlocutors. Otherwise, Gauker (2002, 2008) claims that the ground of propositions taken for granted coincides with what he calls the *objective propositional context*, that is the set of objectively relevant propositional elements that speakers ought to share in order to evaluate the appropriateness of utterances so as to reach the goal of a conversation.

The main purpose of my paper is to show that, according to the Propositional Context account, a theory of presupposition has to take into account a normative-objective notion of context. Secondly, I aim to develop a criticism of Gauker's point of view claiming that the Propositional Context account does not account for the number of ways in which a proposition can be taken for granted by the speakers depending on the context. Finally, I propose to integrate Gauker's account with a further condition for appropriateness of assertion which states that: in order to appropriately assert a sentence *p* that requires a presupposition *q*, speakers ought to recognize how they should justify *q* in a specific communicative context.

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper I aim to compare and evaluate two theoretic approaches to pragmatic presuppositions: Common Ground account and Propositional Context account. According to the Common Ground account proposed by Stalnaker (2002), the common ground of presuppositions in a conversation at a particular time corresponds to the *cognitive context* given by the set of propositions that participants in that conversation at that time mutually believe as accepted as true and, for that reason, they take for granted. In this perspective, an assertion of a sentence $p$ is appropriate only if at the time $t$ the common ground includes the presupposition $q$ required by $p$. Otherwise, Gauker (2002, 2008) claims that Stalnaker's cognitive account is not satisfactory in order to explain the phenomenon of presupposition. In Gauker's framework, presuppositions cannot be defined in terms of speakers' beliefs on the common ground. Rather, the ground of propositions taken for granted coincides with what he calls the *objective propositional context*, that is the set of objectively relevant propositional elements that speakers ought to share in order to evaluate the appropriateness of assertions so as to reach the goal of a conversation.

The first purpose of my paper is to argue that, according to Gauker's picture, a theory of presupposition has to take into account a normative-objective notion of context. Afterwards, I aim to develop a criticism and enrichment of Gauker's point of view. My critique is that even if the Propositional Context account identifies an objective criterion that fixes what speakers ought to share, there is no developed explanation of the number of ways in which a proposition can be taken for granted by the speakers depending on the context. A normative framework should take into account different ways of sharing presuppositions because the choice of a way of sharing is a condition for appropriateness of assertions. By an appeal to epistemic contextualism about justification, my proposal is that the proper way in which a propositional element of the propositional context ought to be taken for granted depends on the level of justifications required by the context. Finally, I propose to enrich Gauker's account with a further condition for appropriateness of assertions which states that: in order to appropriately assert a sentence $p$ that requires a presupposition $q$, speakers ought to recognize how $q$ should be justified in a specific communicative context.

## 2. Presuppositions and cognitive context

With Stalnaker (1974) analytic philosophy abandoned the notion of semantic presupposition to treat presuppositions as propositional attitudes. The focus of the theory shifted from the semantic level of sentences to the pragmatic level of utterances, therefore including the *cognitive context* of the speaker's background of beliefs. In this view, *common ground* coincides with the background of assumptions that are shared by the interlocutors that take part in a conversation. According to Stalnaker, common ground represents a condition for appropriateness of assertions: a sentence *p* presupposes *q* if the use of *p* would for some reason normally be inappropriate unless *q* is common ground.[1]

To explain what kinds of propositions do belong to the common ground, Stalnaker (2002) proposes that speakers' pragmatic presuppositions do not coincide only with their actual shared beliefs. Rather, common ground should be characterized in terms of *acceptance*.

> Acceptance […] is a category of propositional attitudes and methodological stances toward a proposition, a category that includes belief, but also some attitudes (presumption, assumption, acceptance for the purposes of an argument or an inquiry) that contrast with belief, and with each other. To accept a proposition is to treat it as true for some reason. One ignores, at least temporarily, and perhaps in a limited context, the possibility that it is false. Belief is the most basic acceptance concept: the simplest reason to treat a proposition as true is that one believes that it *is* true. (Stalnaker 2002:716)

From this point of view, a propositional element *φ* belongs to the common ground if "in a group […] all members *accept* (for the purpose of the conversation) that *φ*, and all *believe* that all accept that *φ*, and all *believe* that all *believe* that all accept that *φ*, etc" (Stalnaker 2002:716).

Stalnaker provides therefore a definition of common ground as the set of propositional elements that interlocutors in a specific moment of a conversation mutually believe to be accepted as taken for granted. Hence, from this point of view, a speaker may appropriately assert a sentence *p* only if at time *t* speakers accept as true a presupposition *q* induced by a presupposition trigger in the sentence *p*. For example, the assertion of a sentence such as:

(1) It was Marie who broke the old Chinese vase.

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[1] Many contemporary perspectives on presuppositions adopt a definition of the context of presupposition in terms of cognitive context, namely the context of common beliefs and assumptions of the participant in a verbal interaction (Stalnaker 1999, von Fintel 2000, Beaver and Zeevat 2007, Heim 1992, Thomason 1990).

is appropriate only if it is mutually believed as accepted as true and therefore taken for granted by the participants that

(1p)  Someone broke the old Chinese vase.

Stalnaker's account gives a theoretical assessment of the ground of presuppositions considering that participants in a talk exchange usually have different kinds of attitudes towards the propositions that they take for granted. To be exact, the Common Ground account is devised to grasp the idea that when speakers speak they "make *assumptions*, and what is assumed may become part of the common ground, temporarily. One may *presume* that things are mutually believed without being sure that they are. That something is common belief may be a *pretense* – even a mutually recognized pretense" (Stalnaker 2002: 705). For example, in the case of sentence (1), interlocutors may presuppose the required presupposition (1p) in a number of different ways depending on the context. The presupposition (1p) could be taken for granted by the participants because they actually believe that someone broke the old Chinese vase. In another conversational context, speakers may simply assume or presume that (1p) because, for example, they have inadequate reasons to believe that someone broke the vase. Moreover, in certain situations even if a speaker has reasons to believe that (1p) could be false she may decide to accept it as true, simply for the sake of the argument or to take it for granted in order to preserve cooperative behavior with her interlocutors. So, by the notion of *acceptance*, Stalnaker's cognitive framework takes into account the number of ways in which speakers may presuppose a proposition. In this view, the ground of shared presuppositions does not coincide only with common beliefs but it is characterized by a large set of different propositional attitudes.

There are mainly three problems connected with the Common Ground account that suggest abandoning the received framework. The first problem stems from cases of informative presupposition. Consider, for example, the traditional case from Kartunnen (1974):

(2)  We regret that children cannot accompany their parents to the commencement exercises.

The speaker who utters (2) informs the parents that children have to stay outside the auditorium where the commencement exercises take place. This information is given as if it would be part of the common ground, namely as if this unshared belief would be already presupposed by the audience. According to Stalnaker, the assertion (2) sounds appropriate even if the presupposition

> (2p) Children cannot accompany their parents to the commencement
> exercises.

required by (2) is not already part of the common ground before the time of the utterance. The reason is that (2p) becomes part of the common ground at what Stalnaker calls the *relevant time*, to be exact, "a point after the utterance event has taken place, but before it has been accepted or rejected" (Stalnaker 2002: 709n). Hence, at the time of appropriateness evaluation, the presupposition (2p) is already part of the common ground and once the hearers understand the content communicated by (2) the conditions for appropriateness of assertion (2) are already satisfied.

However, a problem for the Common Ground account lies in the idea that in order to presuppose a proposition speakers actually have to accept that as true. There are, in fact, many ordinary cases where participants in a conversation recognize an assertion as appropriate even if they are not prepared to accept as true the presupposition required or to add it to the common ground of presuppositions without objections.[2] For example, in the case of (2) it may happen that parents recognize the assertion as appropriate even if they are not disposed to accept the presupposition as true because they reject the idea of keeping the children outside the auditorium and therefore insist to bring them inside whether the organizers permit it or not (Gauker 1998: 162). Consider even the case of a teacher who says to her students:

> (3) Of course, you already *know that* this year you will not have school
> holidays!

The teacher informs the students that they will not have their school holidays giving this unshared belief as presupposed (thanks to the use of the factive verb *to know* that is a presupposition inducer). In this case, students are constrained to accommodate the content of the proposition presupposed and the assertion of the teacher sounds appropriate. Nevertheless, it may happen that they are not disposed to accept the presupposition as true or to accommodate that without objections because they refuse the idea of staying at school during the holidays.

The second problem connected with Stalnaker's proposal is that in the received account there is not a neat criterion to distinguish between propositions that are assumed and presupposed (Sbisà 2002). Since common ground coincides with propositional elements that are mutually accepted as true, it does not account for the distinction between propositions that speakers actually believe true, from those that they accept as true for the purpose of the conversation (even if they are

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[2] See Soames (1984: 486).

believed to be false). Without a precise criterion for this distinction, the Common Ground account does not make difference between the level of what is actually shared by the speakers and the level of those propositions that are simply considered shared by the participants in verbal interaction. For example, considering (1) again, Stalnaker's picture does not make difference between a hearer that recognizes the appropriateness of assertion (1) because she actually believes as true that someone broke the old Chinese vase and the cases in which (1) sounds appropriate because the speaker simply accepts (1p) as true for the purpose of the conversation even if she believes it to be false that someone broke the old Chinese vase.

Finally, the Common Ground account entails the *presupposition coordination problem*. That is the problem of how speakers coordinate presuppositions in determining the ground of propositions taken for granted in the course of a verbal interaction. For example, if I say to Daniela

(4)  See you later near the school.

and while I go to our high school she goes in front of our music school, we fail in coordinating our presuppositions because we have a different perspective on the same situation. How can we decide what is the right interpretation of my assertion? How can we coordinate to converge towards a common ground? Since Stalnaker's account characterizes presuppositions in terms of speakers' beliefs on common ground, from this point of view, participants have to recognize what their interlocutors are presupposing in order to determine what is the common ground of the conversation. To be exact, if a speaker's aim is to talk in a way that the hearer will understand, "the speaker's part is to presuppose only what the hearer will recognize him or her to be presupposing, and the hearer's part is to attribute to the speaker only those presuppositions that the speaker really is making" (Gauker 1998: 163). From this perspective, the only solution available to the speakers to coordinate them is the abyss of reflexive thinking (I presuppose what my interlocutors think I think they presuppose, and so on) but this recourse clearly is not a solution because speakers are constrained in thinking reflexively to infinity without converging towards a precise common ground.

## 3. Presuppositions and normative objective context

Gauker (1998, 2002) claims that the received cognitive account is not suitable to explain the phenomenon of presupposition. In his perspective, a theory of presuppositions should take into account the *objective propositional context*, to be exact, the set of objectively relevant propositional elements that speakers *ought* to

share in order to evaluate an assertion as appropriate so as to reach the goal of a conversation. Consider for example the case of a conversation about a very difficult academic examination. An assertion of the sentence:

(5) Allison went away *again.*

is appropriate only if speakers take for granted a propositional element such as:

(5p) Last examination Allison went away.

In this context (5p) is a propositional element that belongs to the propositional context. That is to say that the appropriateness of assertion (5) is satisfied only if speakers recognize that they *ought* to take for granted the propositional element (5p).

The set of propositions that constitute the objective propositional context consists of all the propositional elements describing facts that are *relevant* with respect to the goal of the conversation. For example, the assertion (5) cannot sound appropriate if interlocutors simply share any propositional element of the form "At a previous time *t* Allison went away from a place *l*". In fact, it would not be appropriate to assert (5) if speakers simply take for granted that

(5a) Yesterday Allison went away from the pub.

or

(5b) Allison one month ago went away from England.

because the goal of the conversation is to get information about the difficult academic examination. Rather, the necessary condition for appropriateness induced by the iterative expression *again* is satisfied if speaker and hearers recognize that there is a propositional element that is relevant to the topic of the conversation. To be exact, assertion (5) is appropriate only if there is some other time and place than the ones referred in (5) that are relevant in the conversation so that the propositional context contains the proposition that Allison went away from that place at that previous time – for example, such as the time and the place referred in (5p).

Gauker proposes therefore what we may describe as a *fictional* approach to presuppositions, where propositions taken for granted by the speakers do not coincide necessarily with what they actually believe, assume or presume, but with what they recognize as something that they ought to take for granted even if they do not actually believe, assume or presume that. In this sense, the propositional

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context is normative and objective. It is normative; in fact, since there is a unique propositional context that is coherent and relevant in the course of the conversation, to make a verbal interaction successful, speakers *ought* to share the set of propositional elements of the unique relevant propositional context. Moreover, the context is objective because the content of the propositional context is factually constrained and related to the goal of verbal interaction; therefore, it is mind-transcendent, that is it is independent of the psychological states of the speakers.

In Gauker's framework, as opposed to the Common Ground account, the appeal to a normative objective notion of context[3] allows to provide a proper explanation to the phenomenon of informative presupposition. In the propositional context account Gauker distinguishes between, on the one hand, the *objective propositional context*, and, on the other hand, what speakers *take as the context*. While the former corresponds to the set of propositional elements that speakers ought to share in order to reach the goal of a conversation, the latter represents the propositional elements that speakers believe as belonging to the propositional context proper, namely, their presuppositions. So, in the case of informative presupposition (2), what the hearer considers as belonging to the objective propositional context is different from what the speaker takes as the propositional context. That is because, while the speaker already presupposes (2p), the hearer does not consider that as part of the objective propositional context and, therefore, at the time of understanding the utterance she recognizes (2p) as new content. Despite this difference, the hearer assumes by default that the speaker is making appropriate assertions. Since assertions are appropriate only if the propositional elements required by the propositions uttered are part of the propositional context, at the time of appropriate evaluation the hearer considers propositional element (2p) as if it actually belongs to the objective propositional context. When the hearer realizes that the speaker considers *children cannot accompany their parents to the commencement exercises* as belonging to the objective propositional context, he or she may come to recognize that (2p) belongs to the propositional context, too, whether or not the hearer presupposed (2p) before assertion (2). In this way, Gauker tackles the problem connected with the explanation of the cases of informative presupposition provided by the Common Ground account. In fact, since the hearer recognizes (2p) as a proposition that ought to be shared, (2p) becomes part of the set of propositions taken for granted independently of the psychological state of the hearer, namely without the hearer having to accept (2p) as true or to accept that without objections.

With the Propositional Context account Gauker explains the general norms of discourse in terms of external norms, namely, norms that fix what a speaker should

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[3] Other normative perspectives are proposed by Ducrot (1972) and Sbisà (1999).

think or do given that the world is in fact a certain way (Gauker 1998: 154-157). Since features of the world such as the relevant facts connected to the goal of a conversation fix the norms of discourse, the criterion for the appropriateness of a speaker's assertion is not subjective but objective. Hence, the propositional context account is devised to grasp the distinction between what is actually shared by the interlocutors and the level of propositions that are considered as shared for the purpose of verbal interaction. In fact, the appropriateness of an assertion is independent of what propositions interlocutors actually share (such as in the case of (5a) and (5b) for assertion (5)). Rather, the condition that has to be met in order for an assertion of a sentence containing a presupposition inducer to be appropriate is satisfied only if speakers recognize what propositional elements they ought to take for granted and share with the interlocutors since they are relevant for the goal of the conversation, i.e. those belonging to the objective propositional context.

Finally, Gauker's picture seems to properly account for the presupposition coordination problem, avoiding the recourse to abyss of reflexive thinking. Consider again the context of assertion (4). The lack of coordination in this situation (the fact that while I go to high school, Daniela goes to our music school) is explained again by Gauker as a disparity between what the objective propositional context really does contain and what the take on the context of one of the participants to the conversation. Since the propositional element that ought to be taken for granted to appropriately assert (4) is objectively determined by the goal of the conversation, one of the two interlocutors has a wrong, mistaken presupposition. Hence, coordination is guaranteed if both speakers converge towards what is objectively relevant, namely the propositional elements belonging to the objective propositional context that is independent of speakers' intentions or beliefs and is instead determined by some objective relevant feature of the communicative situation.

## 4. A critique and enrichment of the Propositional Context Account

In the previous sections, I have provided reasons to claim that, according to Gauker's proposal, a theory of presupposition has to take into account a normative-objective notion of context. In the following, I present a criticism and enrichment of the propositional context account.

My critique is that Gauker's picture does not account for the different ways in which speakers may take for granted a proposition. As explained before, this point is explicitly treated in Stalnaker's picture. In fact, according to the Common Ground account, speakers may presuppose a proposition in a number of ways: beliefs, assumptions, hypothesis or presumptions. However, I have claimed that

this treatment of different ways of sharing presuppositions entails objections that suggest abandoning Stalnaker's picture to adopt the Propositional Context Account. The core of the critiques lies in the idea that pragmatic presuppositions do not coincide with the psychological states of the speakers. Rather, the propositions taken for granted correspond to propositional elements that speakers ought to share even if they do not actually believe, assume or presume them.

I describe here two stereotypical communicative situations to claim that a normative framework should take into account different ways of sharing presuppositions because the choice of a way of sharing is a condition for appropriateness of assertions. Moreover, I propose an explanation of the ways of sharing that is independent of speakers' psychological states but is connected with the epistemic standard that is an objective feature of the context. As first approximation, I suggest that to appropriately assert a sentence $p$ that requires a propositional element $q$, interlocutors should be able to properly justify $q$. In the last paragraph, I will put forward a weaker claim: speakers are not supposed to actually have the right justifications for $q$, but they have to recognize the *kind* of justification required for $q$ by the specific goal of the conversation.

First of all, consider the case of a hearing at a tribunal where B is the judge and she is questioning A, who is the main eye-witness of a bloody murder. During the direct examination A makes the assertion:

(6) Bob is a butcher *too*.

Many elements indicate the possibility that the murderer is a butcher. So, by asserting (6) A is communicating that Bob could be suspected of being the murderer. The necessary condition for appropriateness triggered by the presupposition inducer *too* is satisfied only if either there is in the context a "other" relevant butcher $x \neq Bob$ so that a proposition of the form "x is a butcher" belongs to the objective propositional context or Bob has a relevant property $P \neq butcher$ so that "Bob is a P" belongs to the objective propositional context. Let us assume that in this specific communicative context Max is a butcher already suspected of being the murderer by the trial jury. In this context,

(6p) Max is a butcher.

is the relevant propositional element of the objective propositional context that speakers ought to take for granted and share with the participants in order to evaluate the assertion (6) as appropriate.

The goal of the conversation here is to obtain the legal truth about the sequence of the events connected to the bloody murder. Therefore, in this context there is a high epistemic standard, namely, a high level of justification about the content

expressed by the utterances is required. This means that, considering assertion (6), speaker A should be able to give reasons to prove and demonstrate the truth of the sentence *Bob is a butcher too*. Since the appropriateness condition that should be satisfied for asserting (6) is that speakers should recognize that (6p) ought to be shared with their interlocutors, it is necessary that, first of all, the presupposition required satisfies the proper level of justification itself. Hence, the appropriateness condition for (6) should involve strong justifications not only for Bob's job but also for Max's occupation. To be exact, for appropriately asserting (6), there should be strong justifications available for *Max is a butcher* in order for it to be taken for granted (6p). For example, in the context there should be reasons available to the speakers such as: it is proved that Max is the owner of a butcher shop, a lot of people have attested that Max is a butcher, etc. Thus, the appropriateness conditions for asserting that *Bob is a butcher too* in this situation are that: (i) speakers have to recognize that "Max is a butcher" is a relevant propositional element of the objective propositional context that satisfies the requirement of the presupposition trigger in (6) and therefore it ought to be taken for granted; moreover, (ii) speakers have to recognize that *Max is a butcher* should be justified with strong, objective and certified justifications.

Indeed, assertion (6) could sound *inappropriate* for two reasons: either condition (i) or epistemic condition (ii) is not respected. In the first case, as claimed by Gauker, it would be inappropriate to assert (6) if there would be in the context no other relevant x ≠ Bob who is a butcher. Condition (ii) is not respected if A would assert (6) and speakers in the context would have reasons to believe that there are not enough justifications for (6p). Suppose for example that, during the trial, no-one imagined that Max could be a butcher until Max himself claimed that he was a butcher and, successively, witness A uttered that *Bob is a butcher too*. Everybody in the court had heard Max's assertion and thus considered (6p) the relevant propositional element to satisfy (6). Nevertheless, neither A who utters (6), nor the judge, nor the jury, nor anyone else in the court room believe that there are sufficient justifications to prove that *Max is a butcher*. So, the fact that the propositional element "Max is a butcher" is supposed to be not strongly justified makes assertion (6) sound inappropriate. In fact, in this case, the judge could stop A, rejecting his assertion as inappropriate by asking: *Hey, wait a minute! Are there good reasons to believe that Max is a butcher? Can we trust Max's assertion? We are in a court of law and we need to prove and be sure of that.*[4]

Consider now a similar situation where A and B are commuters on the train. They are talking about different matters simply to help pass the time during their boring train journey that they usually make every morning. During this small talk A asserts:

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[4] See the *Hey wait a minute!* test proposed by Kai von Fintel (2004).

(6*)  Bob is a butcher *too.*

The topic of the conversation is about A and B ex-school friends' occupations and in the previous part of the conversation they remembered that Max, an ex-classmate they almost never meet, is a butcher. Once again, the relevant propositional element that ought to be shared by A and B in order to assert and evaluate the assertion of sentence (6*) as appropriate is:

(6p*)  Max is a butcher.

In this conversation, the appropriateness conditions for assertion (6*) are quite different to those of the previous example. On the one hand, as in the context of the court of law, the presupposition trigger *too* induces the requirement that assertion (6*) is appropriate only if, in the communicative situation, either there is some "other" than Bob that is relevant in the conversation so that the propositional context contains the proposition that that person is a butcher or Bob has a relevant property P ≠ butcher so that a proposition of the form "Bob is a P" belongs to the propositional context. Moreover, and again like in the previous case, the relevant propositional element that satisfies (6*) is (6p*), namely, "Max is a butcher". On the other hand, unlike the case of the court of law, the goal of the conversation here is simply to kill time during a boring train journey by talking about mutual friends' jobs. In this situation, there is therefore a low epistemic standard, namely, speakers are not required to provide a high level of justification about the content expressed in their utterances. Hence, the same goes for the level of the presuppositions induced by the propositions uttered which means that a weaker condition is required to take for granted a propositional element of the propositional context. Assertion (6*) is appropriate in the context of the small talk if both A and B recognize that the propositional element (6p*) is properly justified just if, for example, they remember that the last time they met Max he was a butcher, or they may even assume the fact because they simply heard about that. So, to appropriately assert (6*) speakers simply have to recognize that they ought to take for granted and share with their interlocutors (6p*) and they have to recognize that to take for granted (6p*) it is sufficient that there is some weak reason available for the proposition required.

In both the previous situations the same propositional element of the propositional context satisfies the same proposition as asserted in two different conversational contexts. Nevertheless, on further examination, there is a difference in the conditions for the appropriateness of the assertions and this difference lies in the epistemic context. The reason is that, according to epistemic contextualism about justification, "the standards for justified belief that a subject must meet in order to render true a sentence describing a belief of hers as justified vary with

context" (DeRose 1999: 4).[5] Since the level of justification that a speaker must meet in order to consider a proposition justified varies from one situation to another, the same goes for the presuppositions required by a proposition containing presupposition triggers. This means that if in a specific context a high level of justification is required for the propositions uttered by the speakers, the same epistemic requirement regards the presuppositions induced by the propositions uttered. The previous analysis allows us to acknowledge that the epistemic requirement regarding the level of presuppositions represents a condition for appropriateness of assertions because an assertion sounds appropriate if there are not reasons to believe that the presuppositions required are not properly justified. So, the conditions for the appropriateness of assertion *p* that requires *q* are not satisfied simply if speakers recognize that they ought to share presupposition *q* as a result of belonging to the propositional context. Rather, it is necessary to add another condition to the one given by Gauker's normative account. It is an epistemic condition which establishes that assertion *p* that requires a presupposition *q* is appropriate if:

➢ Speakers recognize that *q* should be justified according to the level of justification required by the goal of a conversation.

The kind of justification of a presupposition fixes the proper way in which a propositional element of the propositional context ought to be taken for granted and shared with the participants in verbal interaction. To be exact, the level of justification represents a *way of sharing* presuppositions that does not depend on the speakers' psychological states (their beliefs, assumptions, presumptions, etc.) but on an objective feature of the communicative situation such as the goal of the conversation.

## 5. Justifications taken for granted

What does it mean that speakers have to recognize how a propositional element of the propositional context *should be justified*? Consider the case of a scientific brain trust. During a conference on the features of chemical elements Prof. A asserts:

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[5] Epistemic contextualism is a thesis about the meaning of the verb *to know*. In this paper, nothing needs to be said about *to know* in order to make the point about conditions on the appropriate use of sentences containing presupposition triggers. What I take from epistemic contextualism is the idea that how much justification may be enough to consider a proposition properly justified varies from one situation to another; that is a central idea in epistemic contextualism about justification (Annis 1978, Sosa and Villanueva 2000).

(7)  Sulphuric acid is a strong acid *too.*

Since a previous part of the conference was focused on the proprieties of strong acids such as hydrochloric acid and nitric acid

(7a)  Hydrochloric acid is a strong acid.

and

(7b)  Nitric acid is a strong acid.

are propositional elements of the propositional context. According to what I have claimed before, given the purpose of this dialogue, the propositional elements that belong to the propositional context should be highly justified. In order to explicitly provide strong justifications for propositional elements (7a) and (7b), speakers in this situation should describe, for example, the particular scientific experiments carried out in the past to prove that *Hydrochloric acid is a strong acid*. Nevertheless, it is not necessary that the whole audience actually possess all the justifications for *Hydrochloric acid is a strong acid* and *Nitric acid is a strong acid* so as to recognize assertion (7) as appropriate. Indeed, a student in the audience may evaluate (7) as appropriate without actually having the proper justifications for (7a) or (7b) but simply deferring to the experts the faculty to provide them. Rather, (7) sounds appropriate if (i) the student (or any other interlocutor) recognizes that, for example, "Hydrochloric acid is a strong acid" is a relevant propositional element that ought to be shared and (ii) he recognizes that it should be justified with strong scientific arguments. In fact, if there were in the context of the conference good reasons to believe that Professor A was be able to strongly justify *Hydrochloric acid is a strong acid* within the current scientific criteria, hearers in the audience could stop him by rejecting assertion (7) as inappropriate and requiring him to provide strong reasons for (7a). Therefore, my claim is not that speakers should properly and directly justify propositional element $q$ that belongs to the propositional context; it would be too strong of a requirement to ask that speakers always possess the right justifications for $q$. A weaker claim is, however, essential for acceptability conditions of a presupposition: speakers ought to recognize the *kind* of justification required by the specific goal of the conversation. An objection to my proposal could be that interlocutors do not need to recognize how a presupposition should be justified but they just have to accept that there is some justification available, deferring to the experts the ability to provide that. Nevertheless, if all this were so, there would be no difference between the high epistemic condition that speakers should respect in order to accept a presupposition in a court of law and the lower one in the context of small talk.

To this end, consider a further case of informative presupposition, a panel discussion among politicians where one claims:

(8) Chinese economic growth is another cause of the American economic crisis.

Assertion (8) sounds appropriate here if interlocutors identify a "other" relevant cause of the American economic crisis so that a proposition of the form "x ≠ Chinese economic growth is a cause of the American economic crisis" belongs to the objective propositional context, such as, for example:

(8p) The high level of global inflation is a cause of the American economic crisis.

Since (8p) belongs to the propositional context, it is an assumption that the speaker who asserts (8) ought to make, namely, something for which she or he is responsible. Likewise, hearers that accept the appropriateness of assertion (8) by default ought to make the same assumption. In this context to be responsible for (8p) means being able to justify (8p) strongly.[6] Therefore, even those hearers that accept the appropriateness of (8) by default should provide strong justifications sufficient for taking for granted that *The high level of global inflation is a cause of the American economic crisis*. Clearly, most hearers among the television viewers that accept (8) as appropriate actually do not possess a broad set of strong economic reasons to prove (8p). Equally, the politician that asserts (8) actually could possess no proper justifications for (8p); in fact, he or she simply could implicitly defer to the experts the required economic justifications. However, no-one would be disposed to evaluate (8) as appropriate if there would be reasons for believing that the politician is not able to strongly justify (8p). Thus, assertion (8) is not appropriate in this context if the speaker and hearers are actually epistemically justified in accepting proposition (8p). Rather, it is appropriate to assert (8) if both the speaker and hearers identify the propositional element that they ought to share and how this proposition should be justified. Once recognized how a proposition taken for granted should be justified, if in the context there are no reasons to believe that there are not justifications available to properly justify that, the assertion sounds appropriate.

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[6] The level of reliability here is not as strong as the one required in the context of a court of law. In this case, the politician should be able to give reasons about his presuppositions in order to persuade the audience that he has the proper economic preparation to assert (8).

## 4. Conclusion

Even if this paper did not aim to develop a theory of presupposition, my conclusions lead me to draw some considerations on the role of presuppositions in a broader theory of language. In the previous analysis, I have provided criticism and enrichment of Gauker's framework and, for that reason, I have adopted a perspective where presuppositions are a condition for appropriateness of assertions. Within a framework that takes into account an objective-normative notion of context, my claim enforces the idea that pragmatic presuppositions are a prerequisite for the appropriateness of assertions uttered by the speakers during verbal interaction. In fact, my proposal is devised to show that the appropriateness of assertions is not guaranteed simply if the content of a presupposition required by a sentence satisfies the assertion of that sentence. Rather, a theory of presupposition has to take into account also the different ways in which speakers may take for granted a proposition. The reason is that the choice of the right way of sharing is a condition for appropriateness of assertions. As I have shown, the proper way in which speakers ought to take for granted a proposition is independent of their psychological states but is connected with the epistemic standard that is an objective feature of the context. My conclusion is that in addition to Gauker's idea that (i) an assertion is appropriate if speakers recognize that propositional element $q$ induced by sentence $p$ belongs to the propositional context, (ii) an assertion $p$ is appropriate only if speakers recognize how $q$ should be justified with regards to the level of justification required by the conversational context.

If my argument is sound, the next step for Gauker's proposal is to investigate the relation between conditions for appropriateness (i) and (ii), in order to understand if and how the proposed condition (ii) regarding the way of taking for granted propositions may influence and determine (i) what speakers take for granted, namely the determination of the content of the propositions that ought to be shared.

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