

Variability in speaker commitment to projective content

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Speakers may sometimes be taken to be committed to an utterance content even when that content is introduced by an expression in the scope of an entailment canceling operator, such as negation, questions, epistemic possibility modals or the antecedent of a conditional. For instance, we may take the author of the naturally occurring example in (1) to be committed to the content of the complement of the *discover*—that Baker was dead—even though this content is introduced by a clause that is embedded under negation.

- (1) A neighbour called 911 to report the commotion, but when police arrived, nothing unusual was found. They didn't discover that Baker was dead.¹

Many analyses of projective content, including, e.g., Heim 1983 and van der Sandt 1992, assume that *discover* lexically specifies that the content of its complement must be entailed by or satisfied in the common ground of the interlocutors prior to interpretation. As a consequence of this requirement, the content of the complement is taken to be a commitment of the speaker and gives the appearance of projecting over entailment canceling operators.

Examples in which the speaker/author is not committed to the content of the complement are not difficult to find (see also Beaver 2010): B in (2) is not necessarily committed to liking stormwater and the author of (3) is not committed to the metabolite of Ketamine having no side effects. Analyses that assume that *discover* lexically specifies that the content of its complement projects to the common ground of the interlocutors have to resort to local accommodation to account for such examples.

- (2) A: When did you discover you liked stormwater?
B: I didn't discover that I liked stormwater, I discovered that I loved fly-fishing for trout.²

¹ <http://www.simcoe.com/news-story/5597964-man-pleads-guilty-to-killing-barrie-rooming-house-tenant>

² <http://science.unctv.org/content/whats-my-story-water-quality-engineer>

- (3) [The scientists] didn't discover that [the metabolite of Ketamine] has NO side effects. They discovered that it has no dissociative or hallucinatory side effects.³

In this talk, I first present the results of a corpus study and an experiment that show that speaker/author commitment to the content of the complement of predicates like *discover*, *know* or *stupid* is highly variable. I argue that this variability is difficult to reconcile with analyses that assume that such content is lexically specified to project. I then provide experimental evidence that suggests that the projectivity of the clausal complement of such predicates is correlated with its information structural status, namely whether it is at issue with respect to the question under discussion. I argue that these findings motivate a question-based analysis of the projection of such content (cf., e.g., Simons et al. to appear).

[Based on joint work with David Beaver, Marie-Catherine de Marneffe, Craig Roberts and Mandy Simons]

References

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³ <http://sciencenewsjournal.com/antidepressant-compound-located-may-come-zero-side-effects>