

Modeling the context-sensitivity of *But*

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Plan

- 1 **The issue**
- 2 *But, and* and abduction
- 3 Context sensitivity

But: contrastive vs. adversative

Assuming that there is only one **but**, is it relevant to suppose it has a prototypical use: either contrastive/semantic opposition (1-a) or argumentative/denial of expectation (1-b) (Lakoff, 1971)?

- (1)
- a. Lemmy is tall, but Ritchie is short.
 - b. Lemmy smokes a lot, but he's in good health.

- (Sæbø, 2003; Umbach, 2005): **but** is intrinsically contrastive, adversative uses can be derived by pragmatic interpretation.
- (Anscombe and Ducrot, 1977; Blakemore, 2002; Winterstein, 2010): **but** is argumentative at heart, there is no such thing as a specific contrastive use.

Contrastive *but*

- **But** marks that one of its conjuncts confirms a question and the other denies it.
- Alternatively: “based on information structure, take a distinguished element of the right conjunct, place it in the first: the resulting proposition must be false”.
- (2) a. Lemmy is tall, but Ritchie is short.
b. \rightsquigarrow Ritchie is not tall ✓

Argumentative *but*

- There must be a proposition that is debated by **but**'s conjuncts: the argumentative goal.
- In probabilistic terms (Merin, 1999), the probability of the goal H must be raised by the first conjunct, and lowered by the second.
- (3)
 - a. Lemmy smokes a lot, but he's in good health.
 - b. **Goal:** Lemmy is not in good health / Lemmy will die soon. . .

Issues for the contrastive approach

- If **but** just marks formal contrast, why isn't it mandatory when compared to **and** and when such a contrast is explicit?
 - (4)
 - a. Lemmy is tall, but Ritchie is short.
 - b. Lemmy is tall, and Ritchie is short.
- Why is **but** “innocuous/preferred” when the contrast is not “semantic”?
 - (5) Lemmy smokes a lot, but/?and he's in good health.
- What about denials of expectation?

Issues for the argumentative approach

- What is the denied expectation/disputed goal in contrastive cases?
 - (6)
 - a. Lemmy is tall, but Ritchie short.
 - b. **Goal:** ?? (Ritchie is not tall?)

- How to account for information structure effects? (Umbach, 2005)
 - (7)
 - a. ...but JOHN washed the dishes. \neq
 - b. ...but John washed THE DISHES.

Questions addressed in this talk

- The difference between **but** and **and**.
- The sensitivity of **but**:
 - to world-knowledge and context
 - (to information structure)

Intended conclusions

- Both approaches are actually quite similar in a way.
- There is something to be gained with the argumentative one.

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And, but and formal contrast

What is the difference between *and* and *but*?

- (8) a. Lemmy plays the bass, and Ritchie the guitar.
 b. Lemmy plays the bass, but Ritchie the guitar.

- The difference is at the level of the question answered by the utterance.

	(8-a)	(8-b)
<i>Which instruments do Lemmy and Ritchie play?</i>	✓	?
<i>Do both Lemmy and Ritchie play the bass?</i>	??	✓

And, but and formal contrast (cont.)

- Which exact question is to be abduced?
 - (9)
 - a. Which instruments do Lemmy and Ritchie play? Do they play the same?
 - b. Do both Ritchie and Lemmy play the bass?
- **Note:** Playing the bass is **not** contradictory with playing the guitar (\neq **tall/short**). The contrast here is not purely semantic.

Adbucing the question again

- Which question for (10)?

- (10)
- a. This ring is nice but it's expensive.
 - b. **Question v1**: Should we buy this ring?
 - c. **Question v2**: Is this ring nice and cheap?

- **v1** is good, but supposes a lot of world-knowledge.
- **v2** is based on (10-a)'s content only, but we lose the intuition of **v1**, and it means we should also change the previous questions to *Does Lemmy play the bass and Ritchie not play the guitar?*

On the argumentative perspective

- **And** asks for two arguments for the same conclusion, **but** asks for arguments for opposite conclusions.
- For (11), possible goal: *Lemmy and Ritchie both play the bass.*

(11) Lemmy plays the bass but Ritchie the guitar. ✓
- How do you get that goal?
- (Winterstein, 2010):
 - Probabilities give us a clue: every strengthening of a proposition is a potential argumentative goal (i.e. its probability is raised by assertion).
 - Focus activates some propositions among those strengthenings.
 - **Problem:** this gives too much goals.

Taking stock

- On both accounts some element needs to be abduced.
 - A question of the proper form on the contrastive approach.
 - A goal for the argumentative approach.
- These elements are not that different, arguing for a goal can be construed as an indirect answer to a question.

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Now, problems

- (12)
- a. #Lemmy is tall, but he's taller than his brother.
 - b. #Lemmy solved all problems, but Ritchie some of them.
- On the formal contrast approach, everything should be fine, the following questions should be abduced:
 - *Is Lemmy tall and is he shorter than his brother?*
 - *Did Lemmy solve all problems and Ritchie none of them?*
 - The observation is also valid for the argumentative approach.
 - It seems we are not allowed to reconstruct these questions. Why?

Argumentation and abduction

Some answers (I)

- Argumentation theory has a ready-made answer for (13):

(13) #Lemmy is tall, but he's taller than his brother.

- By default, *being tall* and *being taller than someone* will affect the same set of propositions in the same way, i.e. they will be argumentatively co-oriented.
- Therefore, out of the blue, the two predicates cannot be construed as opposite.

Some answers (II)

- For (14), the answer is less evident:

(14) #Lemmy solved all problems, but Ritchie some of them.

- By default, asserting the first conjunct of (14) activates the following goal:

- H_{other} = Lemmy is not the only one to have solved all problems.
- H_{unique} = Lemmy is the only one to have solved all problems.
- H_{best} = Lemmy is the best.

- Because of the default scalar properties of $\langle \text{all, some} \rangle$, none of these previous goals is compatible with (14), the proper versions should be:

- (15)
- a. Lemmy solved all problems, but he's the only one.
 - b. Lemmy solved all problems, but Ritchie too.
 - c. Lemmy solved all problems, but Ritchie solved just about everything in the test.

Some answers (III)

Why these goals and no others by default?

- These goals are all strengthenings of the content of the utterance, so they all are, technically, argumentative goals.
- Empirically, they correspond to the major usages of **but**:
 - (16) a. Lemmy plays the bass, but he's the only one.
 - b. Lemmy plays the bass, but Ritchie plays it too.
 - c. Lemmy drives a Porsche, but Ritchie drives a Bugatti.
- But a proper answer is still lacking.

Conclusions

- Any approach to the semantics and pragmatics of **but** needs to take context into account.
- This is not a trivial matter
 - Argumentation offers a way to approach context
 - There remains the question of why some goals are more accessible than others

Thanks

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