

# **Limits for Accommodation for Presupposition: Mutual Assumptions, Mutual Knowledge and Politeness**

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# Presuppositions

- The usages of some linguistic forms are constrained such that certain contextual conditions must be present at the time of usage.
  - The conditions are requirements on speaker's presupposition (Stalnaker 1999).

Cf. The conditions are requirements on the common ground (von Stechow 2008).

# Presuppositions

- What happens if a speaker uses a presupposition-trigger when its condition is not satisfied?

# Accommodation for presupposition

- What is presupposed will be inferred by the hearer.
- Lewis (1979) calls this phenomenon ‘accommodation for presupposition:

“If at time *t* something is said that requires presupposition *P* to be acceptable, and if *P* is not presupposed just before *t*, then –*ceteris paribus* and within certain limits– presupposition *P* comes into existence at *t*.” (1979: 340)

# Accommodation for presupposition

Questions: What are **the certain limits**? What will happen when what is presupposed, but not satisfied by the context, is beyond certain limits?

# Accommodation for presuppositions

Example (1): I am sorry that I am late. I had to take my daughter to the doctor.

(from von Stechow 2008, my underline)

- If the hearer does not know that the speaker has a daughter, what will happen?
- Will it be accommodated if the speaker is, for example, a middle school student?

# What “my daughter” presupposes

Q: What is the condition required in order for the speaker to use the expression “my daughter”?

- The speaker does **not** have to assume that **the hearer knows** that the speaker has a daughter.
- The speaker needs only to assume that the hearer can go along with a referent referred by “my daughter.”

Why can't most middle school students use the "my daughter" excuse with the hope that the hearer will accommodate?

- The hearer most likely cannot go along with a referent referred to by "my daughter."
- The speaker has to assume that the hearer can go along with a referent referred to by "my daughter."
  - The middle-school-student speaker cannot assume that the hearer can go along with a referent referred to by "my daughter."



## Accommodation for presuppositions

(2) I can't come to the meeting—I have to pick up my cat at the veterinarian.

(from Stalnaker 1999, my underline)

(3) ?? I can't come to the meeting—my snails are sick.

- Even when the hearer does not know that the speaker has a cat, it is most likely accommodated. Can we expect the same for “my snails”?

# Presupposition and mutually shared knowledge

- While some presuppositional conditions are merely shared assumptions, some other conditions consist of more complex layers of information.
- The usages of some linguistic forms are constrained such that presuppositional conditions are requirements on mutually shared knowledge.

# An examples of presupposition manipulation

The recent usages of the Japanese *yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka* construction

- The presupposition of *yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka* in some recent usages is not satisfied.
- Many hearers find it annoying. Some of them describe on Internet blogs and bulletin board writings how “wrong” the usages were and what can be acceptable.

# Yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka

yoroshii: adjective ‘good’ ‘OK’ ‘desirable’ (for the individual to make a decision)

-katta: usually **past**, but not telic in these usages

-deshou: speculative

-ka: interrogative

“Was it OK with you?”

cf. yoroshii-deshou-ka (“Is it OK with you?”)

# Yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka: traditional usages

- (4) [A customer orders a multiple-course meal including dessert and coffee. When the customer finishes his dinner, the waiter comes to confirm his after-meal beverage.]

Shokugo no onomimono wa koohii de yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka?

“As for your after-meal beverage, was coffee OK?” (=You asked for coffee. Is that correct?)

- ✦ H (=the customer) has previously indicated that he wants coffee.

# Yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka: traditional usages

(5) [At the reception desk of a hotel, an arriving guest declares that he has a reservation. The receptionist finds his name on the computer screen.]

Otomari wa nihaku de yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka?

“Was a stay for two nights good?” (=You have reserved for two nights. Is that correct?)

✳ H (=the guest) has previously indicated that he wishes to stay for two nights.

# Yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka: New usages

(6a) [Upon greeting a customer entering a restaurant]

Waiter: Kinenseki de yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka.

“Was a non-smoking seat OK?”

✦ There has been **no prior exchange** that indicates H wants a non-smoking seat.

Cf. (6b) Kinenseki de **yoroshii**-deshou-ka. “Is a non-smoking seat OK?”

# Yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka: New usages

(7a) [A customer in a restaurant orders a pancake set with coffee.  
Then, the waitress repeats the order and asks:]

Waitress: Gochuumon o kurikaeshimasu. Pankeeki setto ohitotsu,  
koohii ohitotsu. Ijou de yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka.

“I will repeat your order. A pancake set and a cup of coffee. Was  
this OK?”

✳ The prior exchange indicates H wants x, but the waitress’s  
confirmation indicates that the exchange occurred some time ago.

Cf. (7b) ... Ijou de **yoroshii**-deshou-ka. “Is this OK?”



## Reconstructing the presupposition for *yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka*

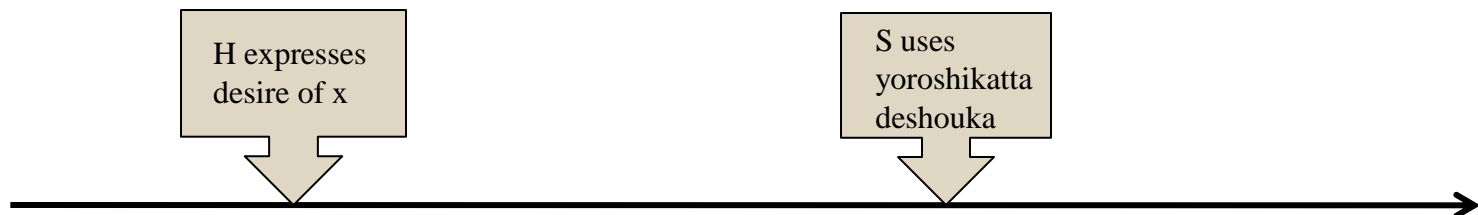
- What is (are) the condition(s) that traditional usages like (4) and (5) satisfy, but new usages like (6a) and (7a) do not satisfy?

Shudo 2007, Shudo and Harada 2009a, 2009b

# Contextual constraints on the traditional usage of *yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka*

The context must satisfy the following two conditions:

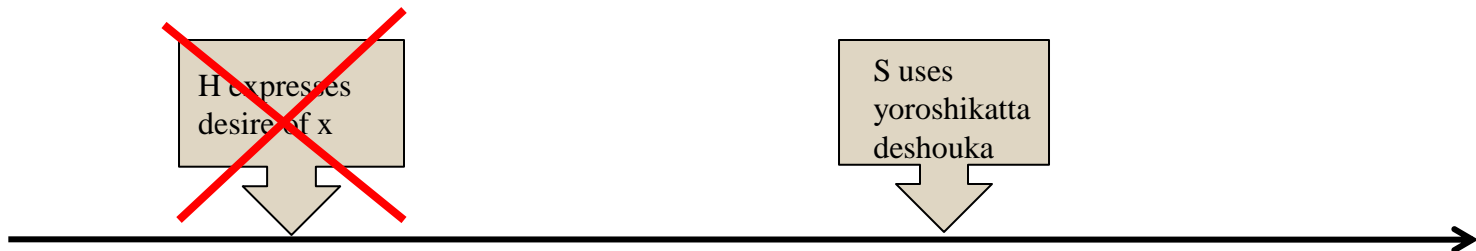
1. [Shared knowledge of H's desire of x]
  - H has previously let it be known that H wants x.
2. [Rationality for S's reconfirmation]
  - There is a rationale behind S's reconfirming H's desire.



# The context of new usage of *yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka* (type I in like (6a))

The context satisfies only the following condition:

- ~~1. [Shared knowledge of H's desire of x]~~
  - ~~• H has previously let it be known that H wants x.~~
2. [Rationality for S's reconfirmation]
  - There is a rationale behind S's reconfirming H's desire.



# The context of new usage of *yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka* (type II like (7a))

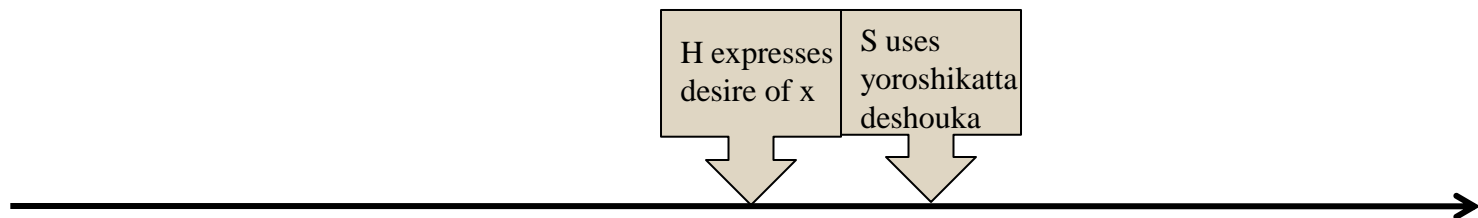
The context satisfies only the following condition:

1. [Shared knowledge of H's desire of x]

- H has previously let it be known that H wants x.

~~2. [Rationality for S's reconfirmation]~~

- ~~• There is a rationale behind S's reconfirming H's desire.~~



# Presupposition manipulation and politeness

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987)

- Presupposition manipulation can be positive-face redress. S may speak as if something were assumed when it is not really mutually assumed so that S will claim common ground for positive politeness.

Politeness strategy:  
Presuppose knowledge of H's wants  
(Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987)

(8) Wouldn't you like a drink?

(9) Don't you want some dinner now?

✦ (8) and (9) indicate that S knows H's wants and thus redress the imposition of face threatening acts.

## New usages and politeness

- New usages of *yoroshi-katta-deshouka* presuppose that S knows H's wants and thus should claim common ground.
- What happens when a presupposition-trigger is used when the context does not satisfy its constraint?

Can Manipulating the presupposition of  
*yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka*  
be a successful politeness strategy?

- Are there successful (=not annoying) usages which do not satisfy the presupposition of *yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka*?
  - [Shared knowledge of H's desire of x] H has previously let it be known that H wants x.
  - [Rationality for S's reconfirmation] There is a rationale behind S's reconfirming H's desire.



# Successful usages with presupposition manipulation

- (10) [There needs an emergency meeting in a workplace. A subordinate was not able to get in touch with his boss for some time and thus scheduled a meeting without his approval. When he finally gets hold of his boss, the subordinate confirms the scheduled time is OK.]

Subordinate: toriaezu 9-ji-han ni kaigi o hiraku youni tehai shite-okimashita ga, sorede yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka.

“For the time being, I made an arrangement for a 9:30 meeting. Was it OK?”

- ✦ If the supervisor thinks 9:30 is good, the subordinate had assumed right when he made the arrangement and thus indicates that S knew H's desire.
- ✦ If the supervisor does not think 9:30 is good, it is easier for the supervisor to express his desire to change the time.

# Successful usages with presupposition manipulation

(11) [Speaker is a door-to-door salesman]

Salesman: Totsuzen ojamashimashita ga, gotsugou wa yoshoshikatta-deshou-ka.

“I came suddenly (=without an appointment), but was this OK?”

- ✦ The salesman did not know that it was going to be a good time for the home-owner (or even may have thought that it was most likely not going to be a good time for her).
- ✦ But coming to someone’s house without thinking it is a good time is more face-threatening.

# Successful usages with presupposition manipulation

- In (10) and (11), presupposed information contributes to redress FTAs.
- The hearers of (10) and (11) know very well that the presupposition is not satisfied.
- The hearers of (10) and (11) see the speakers' intention of presupposition manipulation for politeness.
- In (6a) and (7a), presupposed information does not contribute to redress FTAs.

# Presupposition manipulation

- Presupposition may be manipulated. Speakers may use a linguistic form that requires a certain contextual condition when the condition is not present.

# Conclusive remarks

- Presuppositions for mutual assumptions are accommodated as long as the hearer can go along with the assumption.
- Presuppositions for mutual knowledge cannot be accommodated (or are unhappily accommodated).
- To speak as if something were assumed when it is not really mutually assumed may be face-threatening unless there is a politeness-driven reason. (Requiring excessive accommodation for presupposition is face-threatening.)
- Presupposition manipulation is effective when what is falsely assumed serves positive or negative politeness.

# Additional remarks

- The politeness meaning in *yoroshi-katta-deshou-ka* may be on the way to grammaticalization. But its politeness paradox may counteract this process.

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Thank you for your attention!

I will welcome your comments.

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