

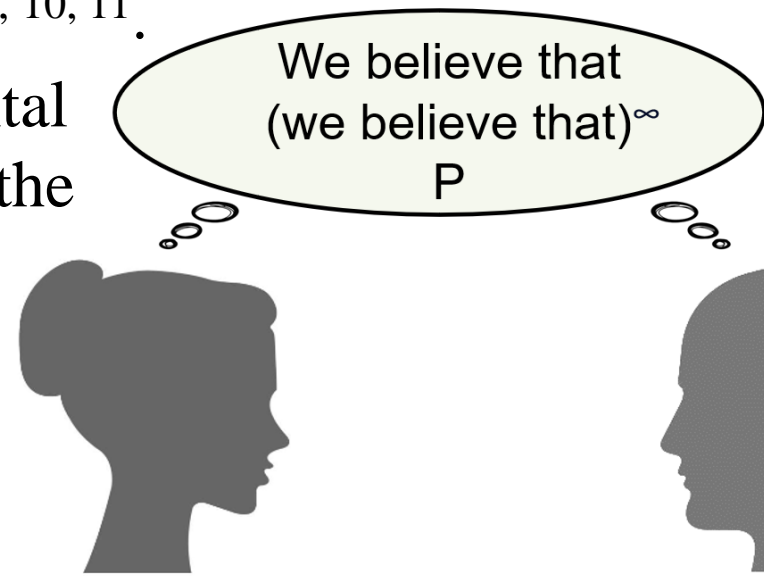
# Two common grounds are better than one

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## Common ground

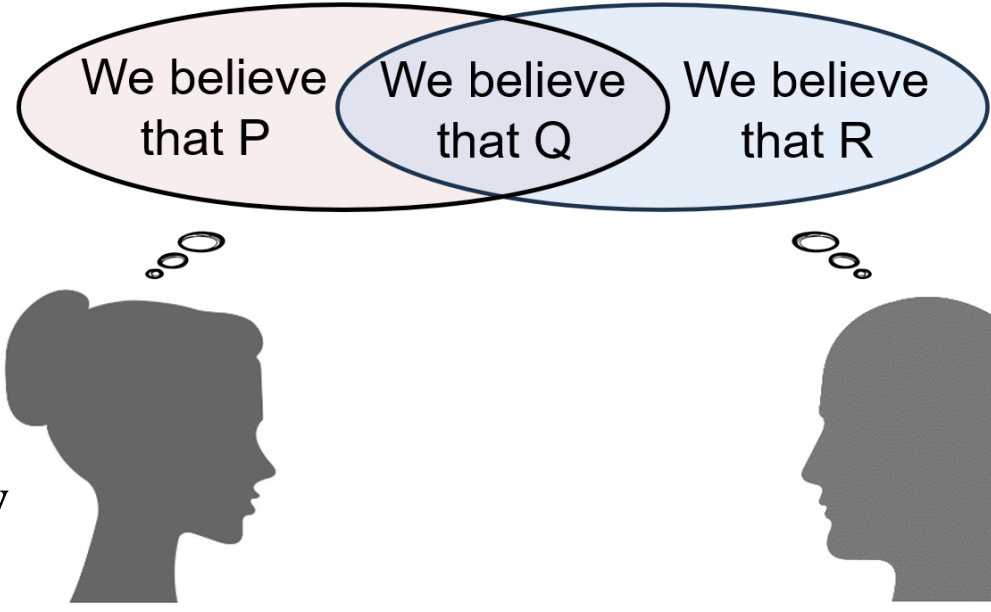
- The simplest view on the common ground is that it is like a glass container (i.e., available to all interlocutors) filled with information<sup>8, 9</sup>. Presupposition triggers appeal to this information:

- 1) *Mary knows that [John bought a new car]<sub>P</sub>*
- This view is problematic<sup>2, 5</sup>, and it does not distinguish between shared and mutual information. Unless the speaker believes that the listener also believes that P, the speaker would not present P as a presupposition.
- A more advanced view treats common ground as mutual beliefs of the interlocutors<sup>1, 10, 11</sup>.
- It pays attention to the mental states, but still depends on the actual situation.
- They must *actually* have mutual beliefs.



## My proposal

- I propose to make one step further and define common ground as the information that interlocutors *believe to be shared* between them.
  - Based on a more general principle that only beliefs of the interlocutors (and not the actual situation) are relevant for a linguistic exchange.
- This naturally splits common ground into two potentially different ones – one for the speaker and one for the listener.
- Is it a problem?
- I argue that this is not a problem, but rather a solution.
- It is a generalization of the traditional view that explains not only cases of successful communication, but (some forms) of miscommunication too.



## Miscommunication

- Miscommunication can arise when either the speaker or the listener mistakenly believe something to be shared information between them, i.e., when (what they take to be) their common grounds differ.

### Example 1

- P = *John bought a new car*
- The speaker believes that P is the shared information between her and the listener.
- But the listener does not know P.
  - 2) *Mary knows that [John bought a new car]*
  - 3) *[John bought a new car] and Mary knows it*
- On the traditional view, P is not in the common ground.
  - It should not be presented as a presupposition.
  - 3) should be preferable to 2)
  - Nevertheless, 2) is allowed
  - The listener can accommodate P
- On my view, P is in the speaker's common ground.
  - Presuppositional expression usage is licensed.
  - 2) is preferable to 3)

### Example 2

- P = *The listener has a car*
- The speaker believes that P is the shared information between her and the listener.
- But the listener does not have a car and knows that.
  - 4) *Can I borrow [your car]?*
- On the traditional view, 4) should not be produced.
  - P is not in the common ground.
  - It cannot even be accommodated.
  - As it contradicts the listener's beliefs.
- My view explains the production of 4).
  - P is in the speaker's common ground.

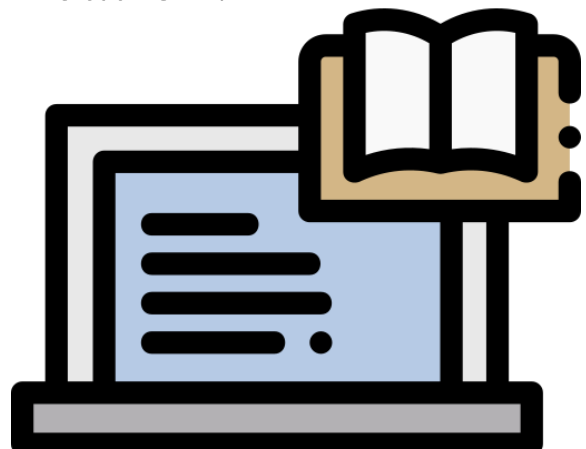


### Example 3

- P = *The speaker's car is a red Porsche*
- Q = *The speaker's car is a gray Tesla*
- The speaker takes P to be the shared information
- The listener takes Q to be the shared information
  - 5) *Put this bag into [my car]*
- The listener would perform request 5) incorrectly.
- On the traditional view, neither P nor Q is in the common ground.
  - The speaker should not produce 5) without explaining which car it is.
  - On the listener's side there must be a presupposition failure.
  - "My car" is not informative enough to be accommodated in the context.
- My split view explains the situation smoothly.
  - P is in the speaker's common ground. That licenses the production of 5).
  - Q is in the listener's common ground. That licenses the interpretation of 5) without a presupposition failure.

## Outside face-to-face

- Apart from the cases of miscommunication, the split common ground view works better in the situations where either the speaker does not know the addressee, or vice versa, or both.
- If I am reading an anonymous pamphlet on the Internet, we do not know each other with the author. Can we have mutual beliefs (i.e., can I believe that they believe that I believe that P)? This is at least controversial.
- But of course, we have some beliefs of what our shared information is. That constitutes our (split) common grounds and facilitates communication.



## Beyond beliefs

- Alternative theories of common ground rely on notions different from belief and knowledge.
- In reasons-to-believe view<sup>6, 7</sup>, proposition P in situation S is in common ground if:
  - Everyone has reason to believe that they are in S.
  - S indicates to everyone that everyone has reason to believe that they are in S.
  - S indicates to everyone that P.
  - (indicates = gives reasons to believe)
- Commitments' view<sup>2, 3, 4</sup> defines common ground as a mutual commitments of the interlocutors to the truth of propositions P.
- As far as I can see, those views have the same problem with the cases of miscommunication as the traditional view of mutual beliefs.

## Discussion

- If we have two separate notions for the speaker and the listener, should we continue to call it common ground?
- I would say, yes
- What matters is not just beliefs of the speaker and the listener, but specifically their beliefs about their shared, common beliefs.
- They continue to perform the work assigned to common ground by the traditional view.
- The speaker's common ground explains production.
- The listener's common ground explains comprehension.
- When they coincide (in a successful communication) we converge to the limiting case of the traditional view.
- But the miscommunication cases highlight the fact that what is actually at work here is the separate sets of beliefs on each side.

## Conclusions

- Instead of a single notion of common ground I proposed a split view of potentially different common grounds for the speaker and the listener.
- When the two common grounds of the interlocutors coincide (to the extent relevant for a specific communication) that collapses to the traditional view of the single common ground.
- But when they differ, taking them into account allows to explain a broader range of cases, such as miscommunication and non-face-to-face settings.
- Thus, the proposed framework is more general than the traditional view of the single common ground.



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