

# BSML and Left-to-right Interpretation of Natural Language

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# Aloni's BSML

- ★ Aloni (2022) introduces a **bilateral state-based modal logic (BSML)** as a vehicle to study **free choice phenomena** in natural language.
- ★ BSML contains what it says on the tin:
  - The logic is **bilateral**, with acceptance and rejection conditions for each construct.
  - The logic contains **modal** operators, but
  - these are not evaluated just on possible worlds, but on sets of them—**states**.
- ★ Crucial elements in Aloni's analysis of free choice phenomena are her use of **bilateral negation** and the **split (tensor) disjunction** of Cresswell (2004) and Väänänen (2007). The latter (but not the former) was also used in Hawke and Steinert-Threlkeld (2018)'s treatment of free choice.

## Additional Support for Aloni's View?

- ★ If Aloni's analysis is right, her insight has far-reaching implications for the logical analysis of natural language. For example
  - disjunction is not what we thought it was, and
  - the ontology underlying natural language is one of states, not just of worlds or situations.
- ★ I will argue that there is **additional support** for her view that comes from considerations about semantic and pragmatic **processing**.
- ★ In particular, I will argue that a semantics based on bilateral negation and split disjunction makes it possible to model the idea that **the order in which expressions are evaluated by and large is the order in which they are produced**. Evaluation follows the linguistic precedence order—"from left to right" given our writing system.

# Moving to Classical Type Logic

- ★ Natural language semantics is best studied with the help of a logic in which expressions are **typed** and that comes with  **$\lambda$ -abstraction** and **application**.
- ★ The classical type logic  $TY_2$  (Church, 1940; Gallin, 1975) offers such an environment and will be the logic I will work with.
- ★ But BSMML can be **embedded** within the *stt* domain of this logic, essentially by **transcribing** its semantic clauses.
- ★ While we won't formally have a bilateral state-based modal **logic** we will still have the possibility of a bilateral state-based modal **semantics** for natural language expressions.
- ★ In order to make this work I must first explain how to transcribe logics with a bilateral semantics in the  $TY_2$  setting and I also need to say a few words about populating domains  $D_s$  with state-like entities.

# Paired Meanings

- ★ A bilateral semantics gives verification and falsification (acceptance/rejection) conditions to each logical sentence. The meaning of a sentence in bilateral set-ups can therefore be characterised as a **pair** of classical meanings (see also Cooper, 1983).
- ★ Define  $\star$  as  $\lambda\theta''_t\theta'_t\theta_t.(\theta \rightarrow \theta'') \wedge (\neg\theta \rightarrow \theta')$  and write  $\varphi \star \psi$  for  $\star\varphi\psi$ . Then the  $tt$  term  $\varphi \star \psi$  is equivalent with  $\lambda\theta.(\theta \rightarrow \varphi) \wedge (\neg\theta \rightarrow \psi)$  and we have that  $(\varphi \star \psi)\top \equiv \varphi$ , while  $(\varphi \star \psi)\perp \equiv \psi$ .
- ★ So we can form pairs  $\varphi \star \psi$  in type  $tt$  and also have projections to retrieve their components of type  $t$ . An alternative would be to have a type logic with arbitrary pairing and projection.

# Transcribing Bilateral Logics

- ★ We can now emulate the operators of the Mother of All Bilateral Logics, FDE (see Anderson and Belnap (1975), Dunn (1976), Belnap (1976, 1977)). Here are its negation, conjunction, and disjunction:
  - $\lambda Z_{tt}. Z \perp \star Z \top$
  - $\lambda Z_1 Z_2. (Z_1 \top \wedge Z_2 \top) \star (Z_1 \perp \vee Z_2 \perp)$
  - $\lambda Z_1 Z_2. (Z_1 \top \vee Z_2 \top) \star (Z_1 \perp \wedge Z_2 \perp)$
- ★ Start with expressions  $p \star q$ , where  $p$  and  $q$  are distinct constants of type  $t$ , close off under the operations above, then FDE entailment will correspond to  $\Phi \top \models \Psi \top$  and also to  $\Psi \perp \models \Phi \perp$ , if  $\Phi$  and  $\Psi$  belong to the sublanguage of  $tt$  expressions generated.
- ★ Other bilateral logics can be emulated in similar ways, but for BSML we also obviously need **states**.

# States

- ★ There are at least two ways to have states in our type logic.
- ★ One easy way is to assume a primitive type  $\omega$  of worlds and to let the type  $s$  of states be  $\omega t$ .
- ★ Another way is to impose axioms that require  $D_s$  to be an **atomic boolean algebra**. We then also typically want this algebra to be **definably complete**—every definable set of states has a join. The atoms of the algebra will function as **worlds**.
- ★ The second method will be chosen here. It allows avoiding unnecessary quantification over functions ( $s$  is now a basic type) and also makes it easier to adapt (weaken) the axioms if doing so should turn out to fit the facts in a better way.

## Axioms and Definitions for States

ABA1	$\forall ij(i \geq j \wedge j \geq i \rightarrow i = j)$	(Antisymm.)
ABA2	$\forall i (i \geq 0 \wedge 1 \geq i) \wedge 0 \not\geq 1$	(Zero/One)
ABA3	$\forall w(Ww \leftrightarrow (0 \not\geq w \wedge \forall i(w \geq i \rightarrow i \geq w \vee 0 \geq i)))$	(Atoms)
ABA4	$\forall ij(i \geq j \leftrightarrow \forall w(Ww \wedge j \geq w \rightarrow i \geq w))$	(Inclusion)
ABA5	$\forall \vec{u} \exists k \forall w(Ww \rightarrow (k \geq w \leftrightarrow \varphi))$	(Suprema)
ABA6	$\forall ijw(Ww \rightarrow (i - j \geq w \leftrightarrow i \geq w \wedge j \not\geq w))$	(Difference)
ABA7	$\forall ijw(Ww \rightarrow (i + j \geq w \leftrightarrow i \geq w \vee j \geq w))$	(Sum)
ABA8	$\forall ijw(Ww \rightarrow (i \times j \geq w \leftrightarrow i \geq w \wedge j \geq w))$	(Product)

Axioms and definitions for definably complete atomic Boolean algebras. In ABA5 the variable  $k$  may not be free in  $\varphi$ .

Note that  $\geq$  corresponds to  $\supseteq$  in the set theoretic approach,  $+$  to  $\cup$ ,  $\times$  to  $\cap$ , and  $-$  to  $\setminus$ .

I'll write  $\lambda w.\varphi$  for  $\lambda w.Ww \wedge \varphi$ ,  $\forall w\varphi$  for  $\forall w(Ww \rightarrow \varphi)$  etc.



# Transcribing BSML

- ★ Now that we have pairing and projection, but also states, the BSML operators can be emulated. Here are negation, conjunction, disjunction, and  $\diamond$  (the  $Z$  are of type *stt*,  $i$  and  $j$  of type  $s$ , read  $R[w]$  for  $\Sigma w' Rww'$ ):
  - $\lambda Zi. Zi \perp \star Zi \top$
  - $\lambda Z_1 Z_2 i. (Z_1 i \top \wedge Z_2 i \top) \star \exists j_1 j_2 (i = j_1 + j_2 \wedge Z_1 j_1 \perp \wedge Z_2 j_2 \perp)$
  - $\lambda Z_1 Z_2 i. \exists j_1 j_2 (i = j_1 + j_2 \wedge Z_1 j_1 \top \wedge Z_2 j_2 \top) \star (Z_1 i \perp \wedge Z_2 i \perp)$
  - $\lambda Zi. \forall w (i \geq w \rightarrow \exists j (j \neq 0 \wedge \Sigma w' Rww' \geq j \wedge Zj \top))$   
 $\star \forall w (i \geq w \rightarrow Z(\Sigma w' Rww') \perp)$
- ★ This time, in order to get a BSML-like fragment, start with expressions of the form  $\lambda i. \forall w (i \geq w \rightarrow pw) \star \forall w (i \geq w \rightarrow \neg pw)$ , where  $p$  is a constant of type *st*, add  $\lambda i. i \neq 0 \star i = 0$  (i.e.  $\text{NE}$ ), and close off under the operations above. BSML entailment should correspond to  $\Phi i \top \models \Psi i \top$  ( $i$  an arbitrary constant of type  $s$ ), if  $\Phi$  and  $\Psi$  belong to the sublanguage of *stt* expressions generated.

# What I Will Actually Use 1

The following are **meaning postulate schemes** for constants **not**, **or**, and **and**. Any universal closure of an instantiation of the metavariables  $p$ ,  $q$ , and  $i$  is a meaning postulate.

- (1)    a.    $\text{not } pi \top \leftrightarrow pi \perp$   
      b.    $\text{not } pi \perp \leftrightarrow pi \top$
- (2)    a.    $\text{or } pqi \top \leftrightarrow \exists jj' (j' + j = i \wedge pj' \top \wedge pj \perp \wedge qj \top)$   
      b.    $\text{or } pqi \perp \leftrightarrow pi \perp \wedge qi \perp$
- (3)    a.    $\text{and } pqi \top \leftrightarrow pi \top \wedge qi \top$   
      b.    $\text{and } pqi \perp \leftrightarrow \exists jj' (j' + j = i \wedge pj' \perp \wedge pj \top \wedge qj \perp)$

Note that (2a) and (3b) are strengthened here (but if it is assumed that  $p$  and  $q$  are **flat** these clauses are still equivalent with the original ones).

## What I Will Actually Use 2

Here is a preliminary meaning postulate scheme for **may**.  $Owj$  is short for  $\forall w'(j \geq w' \rightarrow Ow'w')$ , where  $O$  is the **deontic accessibility relation**.

(4) (to be revised)

- a.  $\text{may } pi \top \leftrightarrow \forall w(i \geq w \rightarrow \exists j(j \neq 0 \wedge Owj \wedge pj \top))$
- b.  $\text{may } pi \perp \leftrightarrow \forall w(i \geq w \rightarrow \forall j(Owj \rightarrow pj \perp))$

Note that the treatment in terms of  $O[w]$  has been replaced by one that is a bit more direct.

# Left-to-right Evaluation and Presupposition

- ★ Let's get back to my motivation for stealing ideas from BSMML: left-to-right evaluation of natural language. Why is it important?
- ★ Answer: because evaluation has side-effects. Evaluation of an item always is relative to context but also updates that context. A next item is then evaluated relative to the increased context.
- ★ The semantic presuppositions of an item must be entailed by the context (the pragmatic presupposition) in which the item is evaluated.
- ★ John has a sister and he will drive his sister to the airport.
- ★ The central role of left-to-right processing and its influence on the local context and the satisfaction conditions of semantic presuppositions was already stressed in Stalnaker's and Karttunen's pivotal early work (Stalnaker 1973; Karttunen 1973, 1974), and more recently has again been emphasised by Schlenker (2009, 2010) and Barker (2022).

# Presupposition and Abduction

- ★ But left-to-right evaluation cannot be the whole story behind presuppositional phenomena. A second piece of the puzzle that seems essential is **accommodation** (Lewis, 1979).
- ★ Roughly, if the context in which an item is evaluated does **not** entail a semantic presupposition triggered by that item the context will, if possible, be enriched before that evaluation takes place, in such a way that the enriched context **does** entail the presupposition.
- ★ But the enrichment need not be minimal. It may be **ampliative** and in fact accommodation bears all the hallmarks of **abduction**.

# Interpretation as Abduction

- ★ You observe that the pavement is wet (C). You know that whenever it has rained the pavement is wet (P1). In order to explain C, you **abductively infer** that it has rained (P2).
- ★ Hobbs et al. (1993): “[...] to interpret a text, one must prove the logical form of the text from what is already mutually known, [...] making assumptions where necessary.”
- ★ This is an important insight that explains a lot about the interaction of “given” and “new” information.
- ★ I will build upon Hobbs’s insight, but will deviate technically from his approach. In particular, I’ll use **tableau abduction** (see Mayer and Pirri 1993; Aliseda-Llera 1997; D’Agostino et al. 2008; Kohlhase 1995) to formalise things.

# A Tableau Calculus I

- ★ On a following slide the rules of a certain tableau calculus for first-order logic are presented.
- ★ Tableaux will be **ordered**. They can be drawn as trees, in the usual way, but, formally, **branches** will be **lists** (finite sequences) of formulas and **tableaux** will be **lists** of branches.
- ★ The basic idea here is that an **order of evaluation** is imposed that must essentially follow the linguistic precedence order.

# A Tableau Calculus II

- ★ The tableau calculus is **not** intended to characterise first-order entailment and it doesn't. It's intended to enable abduction.
- ★ The expansion rules for propositional connectives will be standard ones (modulo the imposition of order).
- ★ The expansion rules for the quantifiers make tableaux into a **free variable** tableaux, but they are dual to the ones in the usual free variable tableaux.
- ★ **Repetition** of rule applications is not allowed and there is no general rule that allows for applying **substitutions** to tableaux (as in standard free variable calculi).
- ★ I'll present the rules first and then give a characterisation of what they do.



# Tableau Rules

$$\varphi \wedge \psi$$

$$|$$

$$\varphi$$

$$\psi$$

$$\neg(\varphi \wedge \psi)$$

$$\wedge$$

$$\neg\varphi$$

$$\neg\psi$$

$$\varphi \vee \psi$$

$$\wedge$$

$$\varphi$$

$$\psi$$

$$\neg(\varphi \vee \psi)$$

$$|$$

$$\neg\varphi$$

$$\neg\psi$$

$$\varphi \rightarrow \psi$$

$$\wedge$$

$$\neg\varphi$$

$$\psi$$

$$\neg(\varphi \rightarrow \psi)$$

$$|$$

$$\varphi$$

$$\neg\psi$$

$$\neg\neg\varphi$$

$$|$$

$$\varphi$$

$$\exists u \varphi$$

$$|$$

$$\varphi\{u := v\}$$

$$\forall u \varphi$$

$$|$$

$$\varphi\{u := \gamma\vec{v}\}$$

$$\neg\exists u \varphi$$

$$|$$

$$\neg\varphi\{u := \gamma\vec{v}\}$$

$$\neg\forall u \varphi$$

$$|$$

$$\neg\varphi\{u := v\}$$

## Side Conditions, Closure, and Characterising Property

- ★ The  $v$  that is created in the rule for  $\exists$  must be fresh to the branch and will be called an **independent variable**.
- ★ The **Skolem variable** (or **dependent variable**)  $\gamma$  in the rule for  $\forall$  must be fresh to the tree. The  $\vec{v}$  in that rule must be the independent variables that were created on the branch that far (in the order they were created).
- ★ Rule applications **erase** their input formula.
- ★ A branch that contains literals  $\alpha$  and  $\neg\alpha$  is **closed**.
- ★ Branches can also be closed by the context, as will be seen shortly.
- ★ Let  $\mathcal{T}$  be a completed tableau for  $\varphi$ , let  $\mathcal{B}_1, \dots, \mathcal{B}_n$  be the branches of  $\mathcal{T}$ , and let, for each  $i$ ,  $L_i$  be the conjunction of literals on  $\mathcal{B}_i$ . Then  $\varphi$  is equivalent with  $\forall \vec{\gamma} \exists \vec{v} (L_1 \vee \dots \vee L_n)$ , where the  $\vec{\gamma}$  are the Skolem variables and the  $\vec{v}$  the independent variables in  $\mathcal{T}$ .

# Abductive Inference

- ★ In order to abductively infer  $\varphi$  from context (and increase the context as a result), develop a tableau for  $\neg\varphi$ .
- ★ Some branches may close, for example if they conflict with a clause in the context.
- ★ Each remaining open branch of the tableau corresponds with a way  $\varphi$  **may** be false in the context. (It's not guaranteed. If it isn't, a redundant update of context will follow.)
- ★ For each such open branch a **clause** must be added to the context to close it. We generalise the **branch-driven abduction** of D'Agostino et al. (2008).

# Meaning Recipes

We will start with a language of **meaning recipes**— $\lambda$ -terms that encode **how** the meaning of an expression is composed from the meaning of its parts (Bentham, 1988, 1991). The following are examples of meaning recipes of type *stt*. They are very close to syntactic representations.

- (5)    a.    Every man loves a woman  
      b.     $((a\text{ woman})(\lambda y.((\text{every man})(\lambda x.((\text{love } y)x))))))$   
      c.     $((\text{every man})(\lambda x.((a\text{ woman})(\lambda y.((\text{love } y)x))))))$
- (6)    a.    The king is not bald  
      b.     $(\text{not}((\text{the}_1\text{ king})(\text{is bald})))$   
      c.     $((\text{the}_1\text{ king})(\lambda x.(\text{not}((\text{is bald})x))))$
- (7)    a.    Ann believes that Mary knows that the king is not bald  
      b.     $(\text{ann}(\text{believe}(\text{mary}(\text{know}(\text{not}((\text{the}_1\text{ king})(\text{is bald})))))))$

The constants **not**, **and**, **or**, and **may** we have seen before are examples of (“abstract”) constants that may occur in meaning recipes.

# From Meaning Recipes to Clauses

- ★ In order to interpret a meaning recipe like (5c), apply it to a constant @ of type  $s$  (the current state) and  $\top$  (polarity is positive) and negate the result, so that, say,  $\neg(5c)@ \top$  is obtained.
- ★ Each abstract constant comes with two meaning postulate schemes (we have seen those for **not**, **and**, **or**, and **may**). These can be "compiled out" to obtain derived rules, two for each constant, as will be illustrated on the next slides.
- ★ With the help of these develop a tableau (in this case for  $\neg(5c)@ \top$ ) in left-to-right order.
- ★ From left to right, contradict the "concrete" literals on each branch with the help of a suitable clause (there is always a minimal one—the "Least Compromising Hypothesis" of D'Agostino et al. 2008).

# Rules for king, love and not

$\neg \text{king } ti \top$

|

$i \geq w$

$\neg \text{king } tw$

$\neg \text{king } ti \perp$

|

$i \geq w$

$\text{king } tw$

$\neg \text{love } t'ti \top$

|

$i \geq w$

$\neg \text{love } tt'w$

$\neg \text{love } t'ti \perp$

|

$i \geq w$

$\text{love } tt'w$

$\neg \text{not } pi \top$

|

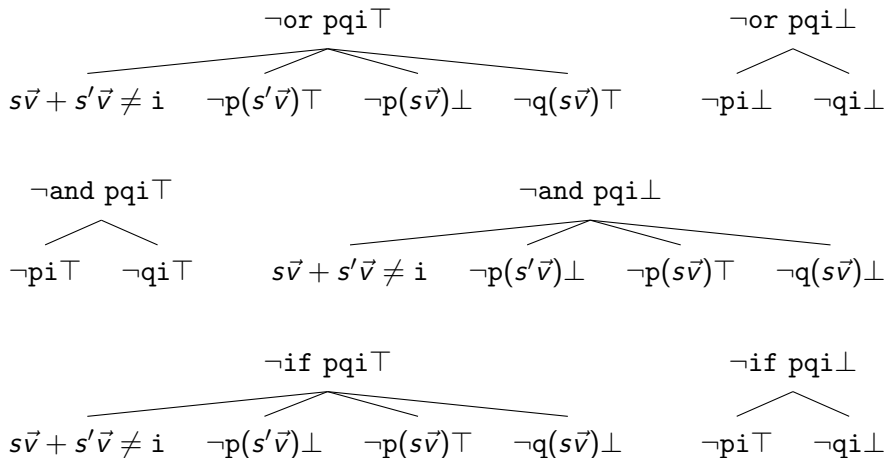
$\neg pi \perp$

$\neg \text{not } pi \perp$

|

$\neg pi \top$

## Rules for or, and, and if



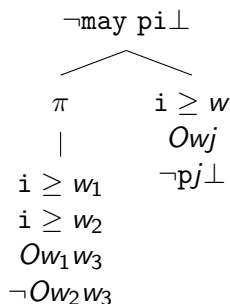
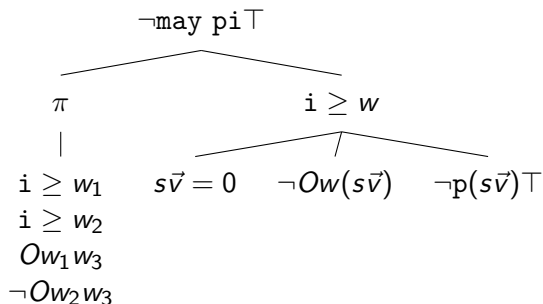
Note how these rules lead to **left-to-right evaluation**!

## Revised Postulates for **may**

- ★ Deontic **may** seems to carry a **presupposition** of **indisputability** (for this notion, see Aloni 2022).
- ★ Presuppositions can be treated as **conditions** on meaning postulates. Here are the revised postulates for **may**:
  - $\forall w_1 w_2 w_3 (i \geq w_1 \wedge i \geq w_2 \wedge Ow_1 w_3 \rightarrow Ow_2 w_3) \rightarrow$   
 $(\text{may } pi \top \leftrightarrow \forall w (i \geq w \rightarrow \exists j (j \neq 0 \wedge Owj \wedge pj \top)))$
  - $\forall w_1 w_2 w_3 (i \geq w_1 \wedge i \geq w_2 \wedge Ow_1 w_3 \rightarrow Ow_2 w_3) \rightarrow$   
 $(\text{may } pi \perp \leftrightarrow \forall w (i \geq w \rightarrow \forall j (Owj \rightarrow pj \perp)))$
- ★ The following slide will show the resulting derived tableau rules for deontic **may**.



## Rules for **may**



(The  $\pi$  entries are not formulas, but markers saying that the material below them is **presupposed**.)

# Rules for every

$$\neg \text{every PP}'i \top$$

$$|$$

$$i \geq w$$

$$E_{xw}$$

$$s\vec{v} + s'\vec{v} \neq i$$

$$\neg P_x(s'\vec{v}) \perp$$

$$\neg P_x(s\vec{v}) \top$$

$$\neg P'_x(s\vec{v}) \top$$

$$\neg \text{every PP}'i \perp$$

$$|$$

$$i \geq w$$

$$\neg E(f\vec{v})w$$

$$\neg P(f\vec{v})w \top$$

$$\neg P'(f\vec{v})w \perp$$

## Some Properties

- ★ Trees starting with a formula  $\neg MR @ \top$ , where MR is a meaning recipe have some special properties.
- ★ Each branch contains at most one formula that is **complex**, i.e. is not a concrete literal (remember that rules erase their input). [The underlying bilateral state-based semantics makes it the case that at no point a classical disjunction of complex formulas is encountered.]
- ★ The **active formula** of a non-finished tableau is the unique complex formula on the first branch that contains one. This is the only formula that can be rewritten.
- ★ Complex formulas always start with  $\neg$ .
- ★ At any stage, the order of complex formulas in the tree reflects a “default” word order. (We may want to give additional rules for marked word orders.)
- ★ The notion of **local context** becomes easily definable.

# Conclusion

- ★ There are reasons to believe that **natural language interpretation by and large follows the order of words**.
- ★ Presuppositional phenomena point in this direction, but they also seem to support the idea that **interpretation is abductive**.
- ★ A third thing that seems to be the case is that **interpretation is compositional**.
- ★ In this talk I have sketched a model that gives an account of this. A **meaning recipe** that encodes how compositional interpretation should take place is found and interpretation in context is then modelled by an abductive tableau procedure that works in tandem with a pragmatic process that closes tree branches and updates context.
- ★ Branches of the interpretation tree are ordered in a way that follows word order. Modelling things in this way makes essential use of the **bilateral state-based** approach and **split disjunction**.

Thank You!

Questions?

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