

(Reverse) Sobel Sequences: Dynamic World Orderings and the Effect of Causality

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Abstract

Sobel sequences (conditional sequences in the pattern of ‘If ϕ , then χ ; but if $\phi \wedge \psi$, then not χ ’) and reverse Sobel sequences sit at the nexus of the debate between strict and variably-strict conditional analyses. This phenomenon was recently split into two independent phenomena that required two independent analyses by Klecha (2014, 2015): The reversible acausal Sobel sequences and the irreversible causal Sobel sequences. We show that Klecha’s prediction of unidirectionality for causal Sobel sequences proved too strong. To this effect, we propose an alternate analysis using a variably-strict analysis making use of a relevance-based dynamic world ordering (Lewis, 2016, 2018) for conditionals. From this, a weaker version of Klecha’s analysis can be derived, if we accept Bennett (2003) and Arregui’s (2009) view on how causality affects world similarity. In doing so, we reunify causal and acausal Sobel sequences into a single phenomenon, making use of a single analysis that accounts for their difference in behaviour. We then further develop said model to provide an explanation for infelicitous reverse acausal Sobel sequences that is more in line with the experimental and introspective data we have gathered, showing that counterfactuality and contrastive stress in the antecedent play a bigger role in felicity than previously expected.

References

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