LYING WITH PRESUPPOSITIONS

Emanuel Viebahn

University of Zurich and Humboldt University of Berlin

1. Introduction

It is widely held that all lies are assertions: the traditional definition of lying entails that, in order to lie, speakers have to assert something they believe to be false. It is also widely held that assertion contrasts with presupposition and, in particular, that one cannot assert something by presupposing it. Together, these views imply that speakers cannot lie with presuppositions—a view that Andreas Stokke (2016, 2017, 2018) has recently explicitly defended. The aim of this paper is to argue that speakers can lie with presuppositions, and to discuss some of the implications this outcome has for current research on lying, assertion and presupposition.

To begin with, I will introduce lying and misleading as two forms of linguistic insincerity, and I will point to a criterion that can help to distinguish lies from misleading utterances (Section 2). Then, I will present examples of speakers lying with presuppositions (Section 3). The main examples involve questions carrying presuppositions the speakers believe to be false but intend to convey. I will show that there are good reasons to hold that the speakers in these examples are lying, and I will argue that their utterances are lies *because* of the disbelieved presuppositions in play. In the remaining sections, I will consider some implications of such presuppositional lies. In the debate on how to define lying, presuppositional lies speak against certain definitions of lying that are based on the notion of what is said, and in favour of a commitment-based definition of lying (Section 4). Presuppositional lies also support a commitment-based view of assertion, and they go against views that require assertion to be explicit (Section 5). Finally, presuppositional lies fit well with a view of presuppositional content as content that is not at-issue and that falls within a broader class of projective content (Section 6).

2. Lying and misleading

Lying is a form of linguistic insincerity, but not the only one: an utterance can be intentionally misleading without being a lie. The distinction between lying and misleading is important in everyday life. Many people hold that, at least in some cases, lying is worse than misleading; and speakers often try to mislead rather than lie. Theorists working on lying have also paid close attention to the lying/misleading-distinction: a main concern in providing an adequate definition of lying is to ensure that it will neither count merely misleading utterances as lies (and thus be too broad) nor classify lies as merely misleading (and thus be too narrow).[1]

The distinction between lying and misleading is of interest here because it matters for the question of whether speakers can lie with presuppositions. Those who answer this question negatively do not deny that speakers can *deceive* or *mislead* with presuppositions. Rather, they deny that speakers can *lie* with presuppositions: in their view, what may appear to be a presuppositional lie is in fact a misleading utterance. Let us therefore consider a few clear examples of lies and of misleading utterances and then look at a criterion that can help to distinguish lies from misleading utterances.

Our first example is the well-known case of the dying woman who asks about her son, which is discussed e.g. by Saul (2012: 70):

> *The dying woman*
> A dying woman asks the doctor whether her son is well. The doctor saw him yesterday, when he was well, but knows that he was later killed in an accident.
>
> *Version A:*
> (1)   Doctor: Your son is fine.
> *Version B:*
> (2)   Doctor: I saw your son yesterday and he was fine.
>
> The dying woman comes to believe that her son is fine.

In both versions of the example, the doctor conveys that the dying woman's son is fine, and thus both utterances are deceptive. But only utterance (1) is a lie; while utterance (2) is strongly misleading, it is clearly not a lie. As a second and less dramatic case, consider the following example introduced by Stokke (2016: 85):

> *Paul's party*
> Dennis is going to Paul's party tonight. He has a long day of work ahead of him before that, but he is very excited and can't wait to get there. Dennis's annoying friend Rebecca comes up to him and starts talking about the party. Dennis is fairly sure that Rebecca won't go unless she thinks he's going, too. Rebecca asks Dennis: "Are you going to Paul's party?"

Version A:
(3)   Dennis: No, I'm not going to Paul's party.
Version B:
(4)   Dennis: I have to work.

Rebecca comes to believe that Dennis is not going to Paul's party.

Again, both utterances are deceptive: they both convey that Dennis is not going to Paul's party, although he is planning on going. But only (3) is a lie, while (4) is merely misleading.

How do the A- and B-versions of these examples differ? Of course, the A-versions are intuitively better candidates for being lies than the B-versions. But intuitions about utterances may not always be so clear, so I want to point to another difference between the two versions of the examples: the misleading utterances (2) and (4) allow the speakers to offer sincere denials in response to accusations of lying that are not possible following the lies (1) and (3). If Rebecca finds out that Dennis went to the party (and that he was planning on going all along), she might accuse him of lying. Following his misleading utterance (4), he can offer the following sincere (albeit pedantic) response to such an accusation:

(5)   I didn't lie. I didn't claim that I wasn't going to go to Paul's party. I merely claimed that I had to work, which I did.

By contrast, Dennis cannot sincerely reply in this way if he lies by uttering (3). Similarly, if the doctor is subsequently accused of lying (e.g. by a colleague who knows that the woman's son is dead), she can sincerely deny having lied following her utterance of (2) but not following her utterance of (1). This difference in deniability can be used to decide whether an utterance is a lie or merely misleading. If in doubt about a certain case, we can consider whether the speaker could offer a sincere denial to accusations of lying. Sincere deniability indicates that the utterance is misleading, but not a lie, while a lack of sincere deniability supports the view that the utterance is indeed a lie.[2] Together with intuitive judgements about utterances, this criterion can provide robust evidence as to whether or not an utterance is a lie or merely misleading.

3. Lying with presuppositions

In this section, I will use several examples to argue that speakers can lie with presuppositions. My aim is not merely to show that lies can carry presuppositions the speakers believe to be false. Rather, I want to show that certain utterances are lies *because* they carry presuppositions the speakers believe to be false. Henceforth, I will call lies of this latter kind *presuppositional lies*.

To begin with, let me briefly introduce the notion of a presupposition. A presupposition (or presuppositional content) is a piece of information (or proposition) a speaker takes for granted in making an utterance. For example, if Anne utters (6), then she presupposes that she has a brother:

(6)   I am meeting my brother at the station.

In other words: Anne's utterance of (6) carries the presupposition that she has a brother. While presuppositions are often accepted by both the speakers and their addressees at the time of the utterance, presuppositions can also be *informative*, i.e. they can be used to convey pieces of information that were not previously accepted by the addressee. To return to the previously example, Anne might use (6) to let the addressee know (among other things) that she has a brother. The process by which information is conveyed in such cases is known as *presupposition accommodation*: the addressee notices that the speaker is presupposing something she (the addressee) does not accept and accommodates that piece of information (unless she has reasons not to do so, e.g. if she has evidence to the contrary or she takes the speaker to be unreliable or insincere). Presupposition accommodation is a key feature of the examples to follow.[3]

As a first candidate for a presuppositional lie, consider the following case:

> Anne wants Bert to think she has a brother, although she knows that this is not the case. When Bert asks Anne what she is up to after work, she replies:
>
> (6)   I am meeting my brother at the station.
>
> Bert comes to believe that Anne has a brother.

Is Anne's utterance of (6) a presuppositional lie? The utterance carries a presupposition Anne believes to be false, namely that Anne has a brother. This presupposition is not shared by Bert prior to the utterance, and it is part of what is conveyed by Anne's utterance of (6). Furthermore, the utterance is clearly a lie, and this lie seems to have something to do with the presupposition just mentioned. Note that it would be very natural to report Anne's utterance as follows:

(7)   Anne lied about having a brother.[4]

The naturalness of this report suggests not only that Anne did lie by uttering (6), but also that she did so by presupposing that she has a brother. Finally, this verdict is confirmed by the criterion introduced above. Should Anne be accused of lying, she could not sincerely deny having claimed that she has a brother. A later utterance along the following lines would be insincere:

(8)   I didn't lie. I didn't claim that I have a brother.

Thus, (6) appears to be an example of a presuppositional lie.

But although it is (in my view) plausible that (6) is a lie due to its presupposition, this conclusion may not be unavoidable. In particular, one might argue that although (6) is a lie, this is so because of its *non*-presuppositional content. After all, there are several things Anne conveys by uttering (6): apart from conveying the presuppositional content that she has a brother, she also conveys the non-presuppositional content that she is meeting her brother at the station. One might hold that this

non-presuppositional content suffices to make (6) a lie, and that it is thus doubtful whether the utterance should be counted as a *presuppositional* lie.

I agree that it is somewhat difficult to pin down the lie to the presuppositional content of (6). Because Anne knows that the presupposition is unfulfilled, she presumably holds that it is neither true nor false that she is meeting her brother at the station. If this is indeed the case, and if speakers have to communicate something they believe to be false in order to lie, it cannot be the non-pre-suppositional content of (6) that makes the utterance a lie. But, of course, one may hold that lies do not require speakers to communicate something they believe to be *false*. Instead, one may think that communicating something believed to be *untrue* suffices (where believing that something is neither true nor false is one way of believing that something is untrue). Or one might be willing to deny that Diana believes that it is neither true nor false that she is meeting her brother at the station. It is therefore quite possible to hold that (6) is a lie because of its non-presuppositional content.

I am inclined to hold on to the view that (6) is a presuppositional lie. Even if one accepts that Diana is lying about meeting her brother at the station, it seems right to say that she is (in addition) lying about having a brother, and thus that she is lying with a presupposition. Nonetheless, I do not wish to rely on this view of the example, which is why I will now turn to examples that do not run into complications of this kind.

Here is a second candidate for a presuppositional lie:

> Harry wants Rosa to think that his friend John is wealthy. In fact, John is not wealthy and does not own a car, as Harry knows very well. Harry asks Rosa:
>
> (9)   Did you know that John owns a Mercedes?
>
> Rosa comes to believe that John owns a Mercedes.

Harry's question carries the informative presupposition that John owns a Mercedes, and Harry conveys this presupposition to Rosa. Now, by uttering (9), Harry seems to be lying to Rosa, and his lie is connected to the presupposition he conveys. To begin with, it would be natural to report Harry as follows:

(10)   Harry lied about John owning a Mercedes.

This verdict is confirmed by the deniability-criterion: Harry does not retain deniability with respect to the presupposition. He could not respond to accusations of lying along the following lines:

(11)   I didn't lie. I didn't claim that John owns a Mercedes.

And this result can be further strengthened by the following three considerations:

Firstly, there appears to be no relevant difference between Harry's utterance of (9) and the following alternative utterance (12) he could have made:

(9)   Did you know that John owns a Mercedes?

(12)   John owns a Mercedes. Did you know that?

While (9) and (12) differ in some respects, they convey the same information in almost exactly the same way. It is hard to see how Harry could be lying with one of the utterances but not the other. But Harry would clearly be lying if he were to utter (12), so we should hold that he is indeed lying by uttering (9).[5]

Secondly, ordinary speakers actually judge Harry to be lying to Rosa. In Viebahn et al (2018), we document a study investigating whether ordinary speakers accept the possibility of presuppositional lies. The results of that study can be briefly summarised as follows: In the first part of the study, we confronted participants with vignettes featuring utterances of questions carrying presuppositions the speakers believe to be false but intend to convey, such as (9). Participants consistently considered the agents of the examples to be lying: lie-ratings were around 90 % for seven out of eight vignettes tested even if participants were given the chance to classify the utterances as misleading but not as lies. The second part of the study compared judgements about potential cases of presuppositional lies with judgements about clear cases of mere misleading (such as utterances (2) and (4)), with judgements about deceptive behaviour (such as dressing up or speaking with an accent) and with judgements about a clear case of lying (namely (1)). Here, the participants' judgements about the potential cases of presuppositional lies patterned with the clear lie and not with the cases of mere misleading or deceptive behaviour. Finally, the third part of the study compared judgements about questions carrying believed-false presuppositions with their declarative counterparts. Participants considered both the questions and their declarative counterparts to be lies.

These results show that ordinary speakers judge utterances such as (9) to be lies. Now, judgements of ordinary speakers are of importance in the debate on how to define lying, as e.g. Carson (2006: 301), Fallis (2009: 32) and Saul (2012: vii) have argued: an adequate definition of lying must accord with how ordinary speakers employ the term 'lying'. We thus have an additional reason to hold that (9) is a lie.

Finally, if Harry's utterance of (9) is a lie, then it is a lie because of the presupposition in play. Not only does the lie seem to be *about* John owning a Mercedes, this presupposition is also the only (relevant) proposition he conveys with his utterance. After all, standard semantic theories of questions entail that the non-presuppositional content of a question is a set of propositions (see e.g. Cross & Roelofsen 2016), and content of this kind seems unsuited to function as the content of a lie. The example thus avoids the complications that showed up in the previous case, where there was some room to argue that the utterance was a lie due to its non-presuppositional content.

In the example just discussed, the presupposition is triggered by the factive verb 'know'. To illustrate that presuppositional lies are not bound to this particular presupposition trigger, I want to

briefly discuss two further examples featuring different presupposition triggers. The first of these features the possessive 'my' as a presupposition trigger:

> A beggar approaches a passer-by to ask him for money. Although the beggar has no children, he asks the passer-by:
>
> (13)   Could you spare one pound for my ill son?
>
> The passer-by comes to believe that the beggar has an ill son.[6]

Just as in the previous case, this appears to be an example of lying by asking a question that carries a believed-false presupposition. The beggar's question presupposes that he has an ill son, and the beggar intends to get this information across to the passer-by. In doing so, he seems to be lying. It would be natural to say that the beggar lied about having an ill son, and it seems that the beggar does not retain deniability with respect to this piece of information.

Furthermore, all of the three additional considerations apply in this case, too. Firstly, there appears to be no relevant difference between (13) and the clear lie (14):

(14)   I have an ill son. Could you spare a pound for him?

Secondly, ordinary speakers considered a case very similar to this one to be a lie in the aforementioned study (see Viebahn et al (2018: Sections 4 and 5)). And thirdly, because (13) is a question, we have good reasons to hold that it is the presupposition that makes the utterance a lie.

As a final case, here is an example featuring the additive particle 'again' as presupposition trigger:

> Laura knows that Joe failed his driving test this morning and that Ted is aware of this. Laura wants Ted to think that Joe has already failed a previous driving test, although Laura knows that this is not the case. When Laura meets Ted, she says:
>
> (15)   Joe looked so unhappy earlier today. Has he failed his driving test again?
>
> Ted comes to believe that Joe previously failed a driving test.[7]

If the two foregoing examples are instances of presuppositional lies, the same holds for this example: Laura is lying by uttering (15), and she is doing so by presupposing something she believes to be false.

There is thus good evidence that presuppositional lies are possible. Before looking at the implications of this result, I want to respond to two potential objections, which will also help to clarify a few matters. Both of these objections accept that the speakers are lying in the examples just presented, but deny that the speakers are lying *with presuppositions*.[8]

Firstly, there are some theorists who deny that there are informative presuppositions. For example, Tonhauser (2015) argues that what are standardly treated as informative presuppositions are in

fact instances of *informative projective content*, which in turn is characterised as backgrounded content that need not be common ground (i.e. accepted by the speaker and the addressees) at the time of the utterance.[9] From this point of view, it is of course mistaken to classify (9), (13) and (15) as presuppositional lies. Rather, these are instances of *projective lies* or *backgrounded lies*. It might thus be objected that as the examples under discussion are contested, I have failed to provide clear instances of presuppositional lies.

However, I think that this objection misses its mark. My aim is to make plausible that utterances (9), (13) and (15) are lies because of content the respective speakers take for granted in making their utterances, which is also content they intend to convey to their respective addressees. For present purposes, it does not matter whether this content is classified as presuppositional content or as informative projective content. I have chosen the label *presuppositional content*, as this is the most widely used label for such content and also the label employed in the debate on how to define lying. I will continue to use this label in the remainder of this paper, but nothing much hangs on this terminological choice.

Furthermore, it is utterances such as (9), (13) and (15) that Stokke (2016, 2017, 2018) has ruled out as instances of lying, and that are in tension with says-based definitions of lying, as I will argue in the next section. So even if it turns out that what I have called presuppositional lies are better construed as projective or backgrounded lies, the main points of the paper are unaffected.

The second objection is based on the view that the informative presuppositions of (9), (13) and (15) can also be construed as easy entailments of these sentences. For example, it could be argued that (9) not only presupposes, but also obviously entails that John owns a Mercedes, and that it is this easy entailment that makes the utterance a lie. Similar considerations apply to (13) and (15). So, the objection concludes, I have only shown that speakers can lie with easy entailments, but not that they can lie with presuppositions that are not entailed.[10]

In my view, this objection should also be resisted. Firstly, it is possible to lie with presuppositions that are not entailed, as I want to briefly argue with the help of two further examples. One the one hand, there are presuppositional lies featuring arguably non-entailing presupposition *triggers*. For example, Yasutada Sudo (2012: 61–62) argues that sentences featuring gendered pronouns presuppose, but do not entail the gender presupposition. Now, speakers can use gendered pronouns such as 'she' in order to lie with presuppositions, as the following example suggests:

> Gertrude and Mick are colleagues of Jack, whose wife has recently given birth to a baby boy. Gertrude has seen the baby and knows it is a boy. She knows that Mick hasn't seen the baby and wants to trick him into thinking that Jack's baby is a girl. Gertrude says to Mick:

> (16)   Jack's baby is lovely. Have you seen her yet?

Mick comes to believe that Jack's baby is a girl.[11]

By uttering (16), Gertrude appears to be lying, and she does not retain deniability with respect to having claimed that the baby is a girl.[12] But if Sudo is right, then (16) does not entail that Jack's baby is a girl. In that case, the intuition that Gertrude is lying cannot be driven by an easy entailment, and we have an example of a presuppositional lie that does not fall prey to the current objection.

On the other hand, we can turn to presuppositions in non-entailing *contexts*.[13] For example, it is widely held that presuppositions are not entailed if the trigger is embedded in the antecedent of a conditional. Now we can consider the following variant of the first example of this section:

> Anne wants Bert to think she has a brother, although she knows that this is not the case. When Bert asks Anne what she is up to after work, she replies:
>
> (17)   If my brother is out, I'm going to practice the trombone.
>
> Bert comes to believe that Anne has a brother.

Once again, Anne appears to be lying (about having a brother). But as 'my brother' is placed in the antecedent of a conditional, (17) does not entail Anne has a brother. Of course, with declarative presuppositional lies there are the aforementioned uncertainties about what makes the utterance a lie. But, given that we have strong reasons to hold that presuppositional lies are possible, it seems reasonable to hold that (17) (which shares many of the features of the presuppositional lies discussed above) is also a presuppositional lie. Presuppositional lies thus need not feature entailed presuppositions.

Secondly, to echo a point I made in response to the previous objection: even if some of my examples in fact feature believed-false easy entailments, they are nonetheless utterances of the kind that Stokke has treated as presuppositional utterances and ruled out as potential lies. Thus, they are still important in the current context, regardless of whether or not it is possible to lie with non-entailing presuppositions.

All in all, there is thus a strong case to be made for the possibility of lying with presuppositions. Let us now consider some implications of this result.

4. Implications for the debate on lying

In recent years, several theorists have proposed definitions of lying that are based on the notion of what is said. In this section, I will argue that presuppositional lies are a challenge for such says-based definitions of lying. First, I will introduce Andreas Stokke's says-based definition of lying, which

rules out the possibility of presuppositional lies. Then, I will point to difficulties that arise if says-based definitions of lying are to be made compatible with presuppositional lies. Finally, I will introduce a definition of lying that is based on the notion of commitment and that can account for the fact that speakers can lie with presuppositions.

4.1 Stokke's definition of lying

Andreas Stokke (2013, 2016, 2017, 2018) is a prominent proponent of a says-based definition of lying. Stokke's starting point is the traditional definition of lying:

> *The traditional definition of lying*
> A lies to B if and only if there is a proposition p such that:
> (L1)   A asserts that p to B, and
> (L2)   A believes that p is false.[14]

While a definition in this spirit is widely accepted in the debate, theorists disagree about how (L1) should be spelled out. Stokke opts for an account of assertion that includes the following necessary condition:

> *Stokke's account of assertion* (Stokke 2016: 96, 2018: 31)
> In uttering a sentence S, A asserts that p only if:
> (A1)   S says that p, and
> (A2)   by uttering S, A proposes to make it common ground that p.

Stokke's account thus combines the Stalnakerian idea that in asserting the speaker proposes to update the common ground of the conversation (see e.g. Stalnaker 1999) with the requirement that in order to lie that p, the speaker has to say that p. This leads to the following definition of lying:

> *Stokke's definition of lying* (Stokke 2018: 31)
> A lies to B if and only if there is a proposition p such that:
> (L1)   A says that p to B, and
> (L2)   A proposes to make it common ground that p, and
> (L3)   A believes that p is false.

The final ingredient of this definition is Stokke's account of what is said. This account makes use of the question under discussion (QUD) framework introduced by Roberts (2004, 2012) and entails that what is said by an utterance depends on which QUD the speaker addresses (see Schoubye & Stokke 2016 and Stokke 2018: Chapter 4). For present purposes, it is enough to report one aspect of the account: it entails that presuppositions do not belong to what is said.

The foregoing makes clear that Stokke's definition rules out that speakers can lie with presuppositions: lying requires saying, and presuppositions are not said.[15] This can be illustrated with one of the examples from the previous section: Harry's utterance of (9) is not counted as a lie because

although Harry arguably proposes to make it common ground that John owns a Mercedes, which he believes to be false, this proposition is not (on Stokke's view) part of what is said. And as (9) involves no other proposition that fulfils all three clauses, the utterance is not counted as a lie.

Stokke is aware that his approach is incompatible with presuppositional lies, but does not see this as a defect, as he has different intuitions about potential cases of presuppositional lies.[16] In his view, these cases involve 'a different way of being misleading while avoiding full-blown assertion of disbelieved information' (2016: 119). However, I hope to have made plausible that presuppositional lies *are* possible, and that this view is supported both by the deniability-criterion and the judgements of ordinary speakers. Unless Stokke can provide evidence to the contrary, presuppositional lies thus are a reason not to opt for Stokke's definition.

4.2 Other says-based definitions of lying

As mentioned, Stokke is one of several theorists who have proposed a says-based definition of lying. Another theorist in this camp is Jennifer Saul, who proposes the following definition:

> *Saul's definition of lying* (Saul 2012: 19)
> If the speaker is not the victim of linguistic error/malapropism or using metaphor, hyperbole, or irony, then they lie iff:
> (L1)   they say that p;
> (L2)   they believe p to be false; and
> (L3)   they take themself to be warranting the truth of p.[17]

Is this definition compatible with presuppositional lies? That depends on whether presuppositions are included in what is said. While Stokke is the only proponent of a says-based definitions of lying who has discussed this question, one might think that Saul would agree with his negative answer. After all, says-based definitions of lying have to be based on a *narrow* view of what is said that excludes conversational implicatures, or else they would count merely misleading utterances as lies (see Saul (2012: Chapter 3)). Given this narrow view, one might expect that presuppositions are likewise excluded from what is said. But even if including presuppositions in what is said is not in the spirit of existing says-based approaches, such a manoeuvre should not be ruled out, given that conversational implicatures and presuppositions are quite different linguistic phenomena. So I now want to discuss how Saul's definition fares if presuppositions are included in what is said.

To begin with, let us consider an approach on which *all* presuppositions belong to what is said. On this approach, Saul's definition delivers the right verdict for utterance (9): Harry arguably takes himself to warrant the truth of the presupposition in play, which he believes to be false and which belongs to what he says. But there are other examples for which the current account does not lead to the right result. For speakers need not be lying if they presuppose propositions they believe to be false, as the following example due to Stalnaker illustrates:

> For example, if you are presupposing something false but irrelevant, I may presuppose it as well, just to facilitate communication. (You refer to Mary's partner as "her husband," when I know that they are not married. But I might refer to him in the same way just to avoid diverting the discussion.) (Stalnaker 1999: 100)

One challenge for the current approach is thus to make sure that such utterances are not counted as lies. It may be possible to do so by appealing to (L3): possibly this is a case in which the speaker does not take himself to be warranting the truth of a disbelieved presupposition. But there is certainly some work left to do in spelling out when speakers warrant the truth of something and when they do not. Saul agrees with Carson (2006: 294) that speakers generally warrant the truth of what they say, even if the warranting is not made explicit:

> [I]n at least the overwhelming majority of cultures one warrants the truth of what one says unless one is in some special context—e.g. joke-telling—where the warranty is removed. (Saul 2012: 10)

On this view, the speaker would be warranting the truth of the presuppositions in Stalnaker's example and would thus be lying according to the definition. Saul's view of warranting would thus have to be replaced with a different one to solve the problem at hand.

To avoid this problem, one might opt for an alternative approach on which only *some* presuppositions belong to what is said. In particular, one might adopt a notion of what is said that includes only those presuppositions that are not previously accepted by the addressee (i.e. only informative presuppositions). This would greatly restrict the presuppositions entering into what is said: the informative presupposition carried by utterance (9) would count as part of what is said, but the presupposition that Mary and her partner are married (in Stalnaker's example) would not belong to what is said. As a result, the approach would deliver the right verdicts on the examples discussed, but it is not entirely without problems either.

In particular, adherents of this approach would have to provide an argument for why only informative presuppositions (and not non-informative ones) should belong to what is said. Why should we draw the line here, and not elsewhere? A natural reply appeals to what speakers convey or intend to convey: informative presuppositions are used to convey (or put forward) content, which is not the case for non-informative presuppositions. But it is hard to see why the question of whether a certain content is conveyed matters for the question of whether it belongs to what is said. After all, saying something is one thing and conveying it another: speakers can say something without conveying it (e.g. in practicing a speech) and they can convey something without saying it (e.g. through implicatures). It thus unsurprising that most theorists hold, *pace* Grice (1975), that what speakers say need not coincide with what they convey (or intend to convey).[18] So, a different

argument to count only informative presuppositions as said is required, and it is not obvious how such an argument might go.

While these problems are not insurmountable, I hope to have made plausible that there is still work left to do in making says-based definitions compatible with presuppositional lies. This provides at least some motivation to investigate how presuppositional lies are handled by definitions that are not based on the notion of what is said.

4.3 Defining lying in terms of commitment

The current trend of defining lying in terms of what is said is tied to the idea that lying and misleading differ with respect to what is said: in lying, but not misleading, speakers *say* something they believe to be false. I want to propose a definition that takes its cue from a different difference between lying and misleading: liars commit themselves to something they believe to be false, while misleaders avoid such commitment. This difference in commitment is obvious when clear cases of lying and misleading are compared: for example, while the speakers of (1) and (3) commit themselves to something they believe to be false, no such commitment is taken on through (2) or (4).

Building on the notion of commitment, one might define lying as follows:

> *A commitment-based definition of lying*
> A lies to B if and only if there is a proposition p such that:
> (L1)   A performs a communicative act C addressed to B with the content p;
> (L2)   by performing C, A commits herself to p; and
> (L3)   A believes that p is false.

What is it to commit oneself to a content or a proposition? I cannot give a full answer to this question here, but want to offer three considerations on the matter.

Firstly, I think that the commitment in lying can plausibly be seen as the commitment in asserting, as it has been proposed e.g. by Peirce (1934), Brandom (1983), MacFarlane (2011), Kölbel (2011) and Geurts (forthcoming). For example, it seems plausible that, in lying about p and thereby committing oneself to p, one assumes responsibility to defend p if challenged, as Brandom (1983: 641) argues. This fits with the observation that liars do not retain deniability: faced with accusations of lying about p, they either have to furnish further lies to defend p, or else admit having lied and thus take back their commitment to p.[19]

Secondly, even without settling on an account of commitment, we can make use of our pretheoretical intuitions on communicative commitment to see which verdicts a commitment-based definition of lying delivers. After all, we are good at telling whether speakers are being committal or not. That is not surprising, as commitment matters. For example, we tend to rely to a greater extent on a committal utterance than on a non-committal one (everything else being equal).[20] And if we

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notice a lack of commitment about some important piece of information, we usually ask for a more committal statement ("So are you claiming that…"). A commitment-based definition of lying may thus be applicable, at least to some approximation, even before we have opted for a theoretical account of commitment.

Thirdly, and importantly, there are different ways of committing oneself to a proposition: one can commit to p by saying p, but (in at least some situations) one can also do so by presupposing p, e.g. if p was not previously accepted in the conversation.[21] As a result, commitment-based definitions allow for different ways of lying, and they accept the possibility of presuppositional lies, which means they can deliver the right verdicts for the examples of the previous section. In the examples of presuppositional lies I have presented, the speakers do commit themselves to the presuppositions they intend to convey, which they take to be false. Furthermore, it seems plausible that speakers are not always committed to what they presuppose. For example, if a speaker goes along with a presupposition that is already part of the common ground, then she may not be committing herself to it. The commitment-based definition can thus also account for the fact that Stalnaker's example is not a lie. Finally, the definition does not count clear cases of misleading (such as utterances (2) and (4)) as lies, as in these cases the speakers clearly do not commit themselves to something they believe to be false.

To flesh out the proposed definition, the relevant notion of commitment has to be substantiated—that is an issue I plan to take up in future work. But I hope to already have made plausible that commitment-based definitions fare at least as well as says-based definitions in capturing presuppositional lies and that they are thus worth further investigation.

5. Implications for the debate on assertion

In the remaining part of the paper, I want to look at some implications presuppositional lies have for the debates on assertion and on presupposition—given that we accept the view that the examples of presuppositional lies are assertions.[22] Should we accept this view? I can see two reasons to answer this question positively. Firstly, it follows from the traditional definition of lying, according to which lies are assertions, and the fact (if it is a fact) that the examples in Section 3 are lies. Given that most theorists in the debate on lying accept a definition of this kind, it is certainly of interest what follows *if* the definition is accepted. Secondly, it is plausible that, for instance, Harry is asserting that John owns a Mercedes by uttering (9). Let us once again compare (9) and the alternative utterance (12):

(9)   Did you know that John owns a Mercedes?

(12)   John owns a Mercedes. Did you know that?

There can be no doubt that if Harry were to utter (12), he would assert that John owns a Mercedes. But in that case he surely also asserts this proposition by uttering (9).[23] For these reasons, I will

proceed under the assumption that the presuppositional lies from Section 3 are assertions, focussing on the debate on assertion in this section and on the debate on presupposition in the next.

What do presuppositional lies tell us about assertion? On the one hand, they speak against the popular view that assertion is 'open, explicit and direct' (Pagin 2016: Section 2). For example, consider the following definition by Alston (2000: 120), which requires assertion to be explicit:

> *Alston's account of assertion*
> A asserts that p in uttering S iff
> (A1)   A takes responsibility for its being the case that p
> (A2)   S explicitly presents the proposition that p, or S is uttered as elliptical for a sentence that explicitly presents the proposition that p.

Presuppositional lies are in tension with Alston's account. A speaker can assert a proposition p by presupposing p although she is neither explicitly presenting p nor uttering a sentence that is elliptical for another sentence that explicitly presents p.

While it seems that (9) does not explicitly present the proposition that John owns a Mercedes, it might be objected that (9) is elliptical for sentences that do explicitly present that proposition, namely for the sentences in (12). If that were the case, Alston's account could capture presuppositional assertions after all. But Alston explicitly denies this possibility:

> When, for example, I make a normal utterance of 'Please open the window' I have *not* uttered my sentence as elliptical for 'The window is closed', and hence the account gives the correct judgment that I did not assert that the window is closed. (Alston 2000: 120)

In fact, Alston brings in the notion of explicitness precisely to rule out the possibility of asserting by presupposing, so it is not surprising that he does not want sentences to elliptically express their presuppositions. Presuppositional lies thus do not fit well with views that treat assertion as explicit and direct.[24]

On the other hand, presuppositional lies support certain accounts of assertion, and in particular those accounts that analyse assertion in terms of commitment (see the authors cited in Section 4.3). A commitment-based view of assertion might be put as follows:

> *Assertion and commitment*
> A asserts that p to B if and only if:
> (A1)   A performs a communicative act C addressed to B with the content p;
> (A2)   by performing C, A commits herself to p.

These two clauses are the same as the first two of the definition of lying proposed in Section 4.3, so it is obvious that these approaches fit together well.

6. Implications for the debate on presupposition

Finally, there are implications for the debate on presupposition and projective content more generally.[25] To begin with, presuppositional lies go against the common view that presupposition contrasts with assertion and that one cannot assert something by presupposing it. Here are some representative statements of that view:

> To presuppose something is to take it for granted in a way that contrasts with asserting it. (Soames 1989: 553)

> [O]ne common core in most theories of both implicature and presupposition is that they contrast with assertion. What is asserted is not presupposed and it is not implicated. (Brown & Cappelen 2011: 5)

> [The] nature of the obligation one seems to have to justify a presupposition upon request is different from the nature of the obligation one has in the case of assertion. Asserters […] are personally responsible for having justification. When someone successfully asserts a proposition p, p is not the only proposition that gets added to the score. It is accompanied by, for example, the proposition that that person asserted that p and that that person is responsible for its justification […] Nothing of the sort occurs when someone makes an utterance that requires the presupposition that p, even if p was not already accepted at the time of utterance. […] Also, if a presupposer is challenged, she may just say something like "Oh, I thought this was uncontroversial" (for an asserter such a response would be feeble). (Kölbel 2011: 69–70)

If Harry uses (9) to assert that John owns a Mercedes, the views expressed or reported in these passages cannot be correct. Especially the view Kölbel expresses in the third passage is of interest here, as he is concerned with the question of whether speakers are obliged to justify what they presuppose, which is closely related to the question of whether presuppositions involve speaker commitment. Although Kölbel mentions the possibility of conveying something by presupposing it, he denies that the speakers of such utterances are 'personally responsible for having justification' concerning the presupposition. That may be true in some cases, but presuppositional lies seem to show that it is not universally true. Note that, following his utterance of (9), Harry could not respond to challenges by saying something like 'Oh, I thought it was uncontroversial that John owns a Mercedes'. One of the interesting questions raised by presuppositional lies is thus the following: When are speakers responsible for what they presuppose, and when do they avoid such responsibility?

Presuppositional lies support views that do not entail a contrast between presupposition and assertion. One approach that suggests itself here is that of Simons et al (2010). Simons et al distinguish between presupposed content and *at-issue* content, where presupposed content is content that is backgrounded (and thus not at-issue) in the context of utterance. The notion of at-issueness is

based on Roberts' (2012) question under discussion-theory (QUD-theory): a proposition is at-issue just in case it is relevant (or intended to be relevant) to the current QUD of the conversation. Although Simons et al (2010) do not address this matter, the notion of at-issueness could be used to distinguish between two kinds of assertion: at-issue assertion and backgrounded assertion. And, indeed, a proposal along these lines has been put forward by AnderBois et al (2010), who stress the similarities and interconnections between at-issue content and backgrounded content as means to update the common ground.[26]

If speakers have a choice between at-issue assertion and presuppositional backgrounded assertion, the choice of how a speaker asserts something can make a difference. For one thing, von Fintel (2008: 163) has argued that presuppositions can only be used to convey content that is uncontroversial. An attempt to presuppose and thereby convey something controversial leads to infelicity or appears to be uncooperative. (While von Fintel's observation seems to be on the right track, it relies on a notion of *controversialness* that requires further spelling out). And for another, a speaker who asserts something by presupposing it seems to imply that the content presupposed is not at-issue (and, if von Fintel is right, uncontroversial). So, although (13) and (14) have almost the same communicative upshot, the first utterance differs from the second in that it implies that it is not at-issue that the beggar has an ill son:

(13) Could you spare one pound for my ill son?
(14) I have an ill son. Could you spare a pound for him?

One reason for speakers to lie with presuppositions may thus be their aim to convey disbelieved information while at the same time implying that it is not at-issue. In other words, a speaker may choose to lie with a presupposition in order to push the lie into the background.[27]

Secondly, presuppositional lies matter for the question of whether presuppositions form a subclass of a broader class of projective content. For presupposed content is not the only kind of backgrounded content that can be used to lie: the same is possible with conventional implicatures. Interestingly, this latter view is shared by Stokke. Stokke (2017) discusses the following example of lying by conventionally implicating:

Sue: Lance Armstrong, an Arkansan, won the 2003 Tour de France.
Context: Sue knows that Armstrong won the 2003 tour but that he is a Texan.
(Stokke 2017: 143)

In this case, Stokke observes, the speaker lies by asserting the content conventionally implicated. I think Stokke is right about this matter, and that this brings out a striking parallel between presuppositions and conventional implicatures. A speaker can commit herself to and thus assert a proposition *either* by presupposing it *or* by conventionally implicating it, and both presuppositions and

conventional implicatures can be used to lie. This supports the view that presuppositions and conventional implicatures should be grouped together, as has been argued e.g. by Simons et al (2010) and Potts (2015). At the same time, it lends further support to the main claim of this paper: if it is possible to lie with conventional implicatures, and thus with backgrounded content, then that provides an additional reason to hold that speakers can lie with presuppositions as a different kind of backgrounded content.

Stokke (2017) is responding to Sorensen (2017), who argues that speakers can lie with arguments of the form 'P therefore Q' if they hold that P and Q are true, but do not believe that P supports Q. The idea is that 'therefore' can carry a conventional implicature the speaker believes to be false, namely that the conclusion is entailed by the premises, and thus turn the utterance into a lie. The main point of Stokke's paper is to argue that 'therefore' does not carry a conventional implicature, but rather triggers a presupposition. The (dis)information that the conclusion is entailed by the premises is presupposed, not conventionally implied. Because Stokke takes presuppositional lies to be impossible, he holds that 'therefore' cannot be used to lie. In my view, both Stokke and Sorensen are right, at least partially: Stokke is right about the linguistic analysis of 'therefore', while Sorensen is right that it is possible to lie with arguments—given that they carry informative presuppositions the speaker believes to be false.[28]

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[1] See e.g. Saul (2012: Chapter 1). As Saul (2012: 71) points out, 'mislead' is a success term, while 'lie' is not. The relevant distinctions are thus between lying and *attempting* to misleading, and between *successful* lying and misleading. To keep things simple, I will in what follows be concerned only with *successful* instances of lying and misleading.

[2] Stokke (2016: 89–91) puts forward a similar criterion for distinguishing between lies and misleading utterances. Also see Viebahn (2017: 1370). Of course, liars can sincerely deny having lied if they are *mistaken* about what they claimed. It would thus be more precise to say that misleading, but not lying, allows for sincere *and unmistaken* denials along the lines of (5). I will ignore this complication in what follows.

do not mention an intention to deceive. For discussion of bald-faced lies see Carson (2006) and Sorensen (2007).

[15] The definition does not rule out that lies can carry presuppositions the speaker believes to be false, but it rules out that an utterance can be a lie *because* it carries a presupposition the speaker believes to be false—these are the lies that are at issue in this paper and that I have tried to make plausible in the preceding section.

[16] Stokke considers examples of deceptive utterances involving e.g. the factive verb 'regrets' (2017: 142, 2018: 117–118), the gendered pronoun 'she' (2018: 121) and the additive particle 'too' (2017: 142), and denies that these are examples of presuppositional lies.

[17] Saul puts the third clause slightly differently. I have slightly modified it so as to make clear that Saul holds that speakers have to take themselves to be warranting the truth *of what they say*. On Saul's notion of warranting, see Saul (2012: 10–11). Similar definitions have been proposed by Fallis (2009) and Carson (2006, 2010: 37).

[18] See e.g. Bach (2012) on this matter.

[19] For some further considerations on the relevant notion of commitment, see Viebahn (forthcoming).

[20] See Viebahn (2017: 1379) on this point.

[21] Many theorists working on presupposition have noted that speakers are at least sometimes committed to the presuppositions their utterances carry, see e.g. Soames (1989: 553), Simons (2006: 357–358) and Tonhauser (2015: 77).

[22] Up to this point of the paper, nothing hangs on the view that lies in general and utterances such as (9), (13), (15), (16) and (17) in particular are assertions. Although the definitions I have discussed originate from the view that lies are assertions, one could accept each of the definitions without accepting the traditional definition of lying (according to which lies are assertions).

[23] As mentioned in endnote 5, it may be the case that (9) permits responses to challenges ('I didn't make any claims. I just asked a question.') that (12) does not permit. But I am unsure whether such responses could indeed by sincere, as I also mentioned above.

[24] Garcia-Carpintero (forthcoming) also argues for the possibility of inexplicit assertion.

[25] The following considerations hold under the assumption that the examples in Section 3 indeed feature presuppositions. As previously mentioned, most theorists agree with this assumption.

[26] Though AnderBois et al (2010) do not use the term *backgrounded assertion*. Also see Farkas & Bruce (2010).

[27] Related observations have been made by Stanley (2015: Chapter 4) and Langton (2018), though Stanley and Langton would not say that speakers make an *assertion* in the examples discussed.