

The Discourse Contribution of Oblique Material

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Recent work in formal semantics makes it clear that it is possible to provide some formal rendering of non truth-conditional (ntc) content (see Potts 2005, McCready 2010, Gutzmann 2012 for various illustrations). By and large, the focus of interest has been more on integrating ntc content in standard compositional mechanisms than relating it to a theory of speech acts, or, more generally, conversational planning. Ntc communicated elements include judgment about mentioned entities (laudative or pejorative expressions), speaker's epistemic and affective states (from standard presuppositions to interjections) and communicative event management (e.g. closure/ending and hesitation signals). Intuitively, these elements are felt as more or less 'oblique', with respect to the QUD or the discourse topic. In the talk, I discuss the following two questions. (1) Is this intuition robust/plausible (to what extent?) or is it just some sort of metalinguistic illusion? (2) When compared to 'traditional' speech acts such as assertion, commands or questions, what is the point of using oblique material? What should we say about strongly deictic particles ('bon', 'eh bien', 'ben', 'voilà', 'tiens' in French, for instance) when it comes to the question whether they are associated with some kind of discourse update or, more generally, DGB management (Ginzburg 2012)?