

Janet Anderson

A Pragmatic Account of Disjunctive Counterfactuals

People generally use a possible worlds analysis to describe the meaning of counterfactuals, but the mainstream assumptions of how that account works, when coupled with the usual understanding of disjunction leads one to make the wrong predictions regarding the judgements of sentences such as the following:

(1) If we had had good weather or the Cybermen had destroyed the Earth, we would have had a good crop.

The standard assumptions lead one to predict that this sentence is true, when speakers actually judge it false or, at best, bizarre. My paper advocates a pragmatic solution to this problem. I argue that proponents of the semantic views have dismissed the pragmatic issues too quickly, and that in fact, a pragmatic account is sufficient to deal with the phenomenon and the supposed counter-examples that have been discussed in the literature.