FACTIVE VERBS AND PRESUPPOSITIONS
FOR 'REGRET' AND 'KNOW'

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Abstract: In this paper I am formulating some hypotheses about why the verbs 'regret' and 'know' behave differently relatively to the presupposed truth of their complement sentences. It would seem that the verb 'regret' presupposes the truth of its complement sentences much more often than the verb 'know'. I am formulating three hypotheses explaining this state of affairs, and I am analyzing the weaknesses in each of the three.

In this paper I will explore the difference between the behaviour of verbs like 'regret' and the behaviour of verbs like 'know' in respect to the presuppositions they usually generate. In a nutshell, verbs like 'regret' seem to presuppose more stubbornly and in many more circumstances the truth of the following 'that' clause than the resembling kind of verbs behaving like 'know'. Famously, both kinds of verbs resemble in this peculiarity, that they presuppose the truth of their complement sentence:

> Whatever a sentence with a factive predicate presupposes, the presupposition ought to remain no matter whether the main sentence is a negative assertion, an interrogative sentence or the antecedent of a conditional construction. (Karttunen, 1971: 62-63)

> Consider, for example, the following group:

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a) She regrets that she made him sad.
   She does not regret that she made him sad
   Does she regret that she made him sad?
   If she regrets that she made him sad, then she will not say
   anything next time they meet.

Verbs like 'know', 'realize', 'discover' seem to resemble 'regret' only in their affirmative and negative form, the interrogative and the conditional appearing to be problematic from the point of view of facticity. Karttunen (1971) famously gives this example to illustrate the difference:

If I regret later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone
If I realize later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone
If I discover later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone.

His conclusion is that verbs like 'know', 'discover', 'realize' are semi-factives because they permit both a factive and a non-factive interpretation. I will accept this verdict, of a possible double interpretation for some factives as working hypothesis of this essay. Consider, for example, the following group of examples constructed such as to mirror the group a) above:

a) She knows that she made him sad.
   She does not know that she made him sad.
   Does she know that she made him sad?
   If she knows that she made him sad, then she will not say
   anything next time they meet.

One may interpret the interrogation in group b) as expressing an incertitude about the existence of "his sadness" and then the facticity would be lost, but one may also interpret it as expressing incertitude about the 'her knowledge' of an established fact.

I am going to approach this phenomenon of the 'weaker facticity' of 'know' from another point of view that the one presented above. The examples I will try to analyze and explain will be the ones in which the presupposition of a factive is confronted in the same sentence with its negation, like in the famous example of Klein (1975):

> Falsely believing that he had inflicted a fatal wound, Oedipus regretted killing the stranger on the road to Thebes.

The puzzle here seems to be that even when confronted with the negation of its presupposition the verb 'regret' still makes perfect sense in a statement (i.e. even though we know its presupposition is not true). Not the same thing happens, I will argue, for the verb 'know'.

First, I will have a couple of observations regarding terminological issues. Then I will try to clarify the sense in which I will approach the above problem as I have the impression there are many of them.

One might be tempted to use the more technical expression 'factive verbs' with an easy heart to designate both verbs that behave like 'regret' and verbs that behave like 'know' (taking these verbs as paradigmatic examples seems the best way of keeping the discussion on neutral grounds), but this not an entirely uncontroversial move if taking into account the literature dedicated to them. There are issues regarding the mere labeling:

> Among philosophers and logicians, a predicate is generally called factive if it is simply *veridical*, namely if it *entails* the truth of its complement (see e.g. Williamson 2000). Among linguists, a predicate is usually called factive if it *presupposes* the truth of its complement (Kiparsky & Kiparsky 1970, Karttunen 1971). (Egré, 2008:86)

There are also deeper issues regarding the relation of these kinds of verbs with the notion of facticity. For example, Egré

(2008) considers that a verb like 'regret' is not factive at all, but Abrusán (2012) gives arguments against Egré trying to restore the lost title for 'regret'; on the other side, Karttunen (1971) considers that the title of 'factive' is fully deserved only by verbs like 'regret' while the less stubborn 'know' is only semi-factive. It is not clear how clear cut this distinction is supposed to be for Karttunen (he explicitly maintains that factives are less uniform than it is usually believed), and he does speak about "verbs that lose their facticity" in conditional clauses. Stalnaker (1974) seems to have a different approach to this label and instead of dropping it sometimes he only applies it moderately, in that he thinks there are degrees of facticity. Therefore, one may have a classical problem for a label: how many and how significant counter-examples have to be in order to be tempted to give up the name 'factive' in some cases? For example, if the presupposition of truth of the complement statement holds under negation but not under conditional, is this still a 'factive'? Or, if the presupposition appears only sometimes under conditional, but some other times not, is this a 'factive'?

Labels also vary between the two groups under discussion: for example Beaver (2002) calls them 'emotive' (regret-like) *versus* 'cognitive' (know-like) verbs but I guess this just a broad line distinction and there is no guarantee that we will not find verbs expressing emotions that behave rather like 'know' or the other way around, maybe also due to the fact that we might find verbs expressing both emotional attitudes and information intake.

Complications also appear when one takes into account the relation between the explicit statement and the presupposition it carries: is the presupposition of the speaker or of the statement? And what is a 'presupposition' as opposed to 'implicature'[2] or 'conversational implication'? 'Presupposition' itself seems to be among those indispensable, venerable concepts about which if we

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[2] Stalnaker (1974) describes one possible way of seeing the relation between presupposition and implicature. It is not at all mysterious, but one may wonder what other possibilities of describing such relations might be there as well as what kind of relation should we accept between presupposition and implicature themselves.

do not ask questions, then we know what they are about, but if we do ask questions, then we are lost.

For the purposes of such a short expedition like this one in the land of factive verbs prudence seems to indicate that just using 'presupposition' with its usual (albeit mysterious) sense is the path to take. Also, in order not to express myself with useless complications, I will use the expression 'factive verbs' when referring to verbs like 'know' and 'regret' (i.e. when vaguely pointing at other verbs resembling in behavior to these two) and I will use the terms 'emotive' and 'cognitive' to refer roughly to the two groups taken into discussion. But these terms are meant to be here just useful short labels, their usage not being meant as an implicit choice between various positions presented above.

1. Problems to be set aside

The main aim of the essay is to present a possible underlying reason for the above illustrated difference between cognitive and emotive factive verbs. Consequently, I will follow the line of several scattered suggestions and observations found in the literature, all indicating but not fully pursuing the line I am taking. In other words, what I am doing is to take a couple of suggestions and to develop them into a more coherent picture, presenting the reader with something that a Popperian might call a "bold conjecture"[3]. Of course, the claim is not that the problem is solved without appeal, the claim is only that what I present might be a line worthy of future careful consideration.

However, before proceeding, several delimitations restricting the domain of the present research must be made.

First, I will limit myself at discussing little else but the two paradigm-verbs, 'regret' and 'know'. Therefore, all conclusions, explanations or proposals can be only hypothetically extended to

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[3]   As we all know, they are usually boldly refuted from which the glory of science promptly follows.

verbs from the same group; if it can indeed be made or not, if other verbs are sufficiently similar in their behavior or not, will be left aside here as a separate matter.

Then the area is again narrowed by the fact that I am interested in a particular kind of difference between the two verbs, namely the difference we can notice when the statement containing the factive verb is confronted with the negation of the presupposition. This difference may be related or relevant to other observable differences, but these other differences will not constitute here the focus of discussion.

Third, I will not take into discussion the first person issue in respect to factive verbs and how using the first or the third person might affect their presuppositions, as this discussion tends to multiply cases and further complicate the issue without seeming particularly illuminating for the present problem.

Finally, I will not take a stand regarding the semantic *versus* pragmatic treatment of such problems mainly because my treatment of the problem seems to have traits combining both approaches (insofar as one is able to clearly distinguish them).

As the present essay is not meant to be a comprehensive survey of relevant cases, the main method adopted in accepting or rejecting hypotheses and explanations is the appeal to common intuitions about using natural language.

2. The problem

It was mentioned earlier that the focus of the essay is constituted by a specific kind of difference in behaviour between 'regret' and 'know', namely when each of these verbs is confronted in a statement with the negation of their presupposition.

The classical example presented above had the form

1) Falsely believing that x (happened), he regrets that x.

One may notice that the fact that x is false, usually brings no problem for the truth of 'he regrets that x". I think it is not the same for 'know':

2) Falsely believing that x (happened), he knows that x.

Of course, we might say such a thing, but 'know' in such a statement has an awkward position as if being placed under scare-quotes. Abrusan (2012) gives two examples that is supposed to show that 'know' may be regarded as very similar to 'regret' in such circumstances:

3) John suffers from paranoia. He falsely believes that the police is spying on him and what is more he knows they are listening to his phone calls.
4) The keys were not in the drawer, but she knew that they were there, so she foolishly kept on searching.

I think that these examples are not more convincing: in the first one the knowledge represented by 'know' is discredited by the paranoia, in the second by a "foolish" mistake such that they are still calling for the warning brought by scare-quotes as if saying "do not take this word in its usual meaning". What the speaker obviously means by uttering such statements as in 3) or 4) is that the person referred to in the statement *believes that she or he knows*, not that she or he simply knows. I will come back to this point. For the time being, in order to clearly see the contrast between the two situations, let us consider the natural answers given by a competent speaker of English when presented with a situation of the type 1) and then with 3) and 4). When asked 'Do you think he can really regret x (even if it did not happen)?" The answer is naturally 'yes'. But if we ask 'Do you think that she or he really knows this (even if it is not true/it did not happen)?'. If the question is understood to be about the *sincerity* of the person then the answer might be 'yes' on the condition to understand by it that the person really believes to be true something that is actually

false. If the question is understood to have the accent falling on the word "knows" then the answer is 'no' because those persons simply do not fulfill the criteria we use to say that someone *knows* something. Moreover, if we formulate the question in such manner as to mirror perfectly the first one (i.e. if we add "can"), even if it is not a very natural question, it is more clear now that we are not questioning the sincerity of the characters involved in 3) and 4): 'Do you think that she or he can really know this (even if it is not true/it did not happen)?' The answer might be quite naturally: 'one cannot know something if it did not happen' while it is also quite natural that someone can regret something even if it did not happen. The competent speaker seems to think that there is nothing strange about regrets under the above conditions but there is something strange about knowledge.

I think it is quite visible that 'regret' may withstand such attacks of its presupposition while 'know' cannot without seriously altering its sense and normal usage. The present task is to try and give an explanation for this.

A first suggestion for approaching the problem comes from Stalnaker (1974):

> Further, if we assume that with the so-called semi-factives like discover and realize, there is always a presumption that the speaker presupposes the truth of the proposition expressed in the complement, we can still explain why the presumption is defeated in Karttunen's particular example. The explanation goes like this: *if a speaker explicitly supposes something, he thereby indicates that he is not presupposing it, or taking it for granted*[4]. So, when the speaker says "if I realize later that P," he indicates that he is not presupposing that he will realize later that P. But if it is an open question for a speaker whether or not he will at some future time have come to realize that P, he can't be assuming that he already knows that P. And if he is not assuming that he himself

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[4]   My emphasis.

knows that P, he can't be assuming that P. Hence P cannot be presupposed. A roughly parallel explanation will work for discover but not for regret. (Stalnaker, 1974: 744)

Stalnaker is referring here to Karttunen's (1971) examples previously presented:

If I regret later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone.
If I realize later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone.
If I discover later that I have not told the truth, I will confess it to everyone.

I will not argue for or against his explanation here. I will just notice the subtle but somehow commonsensical observation that when something is explicitly *supposed*, it is not *presupposed* (i.e. implicit) anymore. Something that is not said by Stalnaker here but may be deduced is that a presupposition made explicit may change the whole economy of the phrase for which was previously only implicit. I think that the kind of example here in discussion, namely

1) Falsely believing that x (happened), he regrets that x.

is an example where a presupposition is actually made explicit, revealing that the presuppositions behind something seemingly simple like 'He regrets x' are a much more complicated problem than the stubborn truth of x. Because we do not bother to make thing explicit when they are going well, i.e. when they are going according to the rules or "as designed", we almost never meet the formulation:

5) Correctly believing that x (happened), he regrets that x.

When everything is as it is supposed to be in communication, the statement 'he regrets that x' is enough to do the job therefore the first part almost never appears.

When, on the other hand something goes wrong, one has to explain what has gone wrong and my hypothesis here is that 'Falsely believing that x (happened), he regrets that x' is such an explanation of something going wrong (e.g. someone regrets something we know it did not happen). But what is important is that this kind of example points at something going wrong with 'he regrets that x', i.e. with its presupposition. Consequently, adding 'falsely believing that x (happened)' in front of 'he regrets that x' is just making explicit a presupposition-went-wrong of 'he regrets that x'. This means that one may choose to either add a new presupposition to the classically accepted one or to replace the old presupposition with a new one. Which path exactly I will take and why, I hope to be able to establish in the following discussion. For now I will only notice that one might talk about a different kind of 'presupposition' here, one that is not obvious from the mere reading of the statement; maybe it should be called by another name, but for the time being this is the only notion available.

In any case, I am not alone in making the claim that some other kind of presupposition than the classical truth of the complement clause is at work when using 'regret'. Egré (2008), for example, affirms that

> On the present account, *x regrets p* presupposes neither *p*, nor *x knows p*, but only *x believes p* (Huddleston & Pullum 2002, Schlenker 2005, Egré 2004). (Egré, 2008:105)

But he affirms that only in passing and admits that further elaboration is needed:

> In particular, if "*x* regrets *p*" only presupposes "*x* believes *p*", what we need to account for is how we get from the semantic presupposition "*x* believes *p*" to the conclusion "*the*

speaker believes *p*". Huddleston and Pullum make a suggestion about this problem, by saying that "just as one cannot regret some proposition *p* unless one believes that *p* is true, so one would not normally ask whether someone else regrets that *p* unless one believes that *p* is true" (2002, 1008). While this intuition seems plausible, it seems clear that some principle about presupposition accommodation is needed more generally to account for this shift of perspective. (Egré, 2008:105)

Abrusán (2012), however, tries to argue against this suggestion. She says she is following Gazdar (1979) in claiming that the person regretting has to have a "feeling of knowledge" while the skeptical report about mere belief belongs to another person reporting the situation. Therefore 'he regrets that x' has knowledge of x (or the feeling of it) as presupposition. I will come back in the last section to the dispute 'belief' versus 'knowledge'. The next section is dedicated to the role of this additional presupposition (whichever it may be) and implicitly to stating my account of the discussed difference between 'regret' and 'know'.

3. My hypothesis

My hypothesis, in short, is that there are at least two parts in a presupposition brought about by the verb 'regret': one is the obvious one, the truth of the complement sentence, the one that I will call 'the objective'[5] part; the other one is the one alluded to earlier by Egré and Abrusán and I will call it 'the subjective part' (mainly to keep the dispute belief *versus* knowledge at bay). By contrast, the verb 'know' does not present such a structure. Let me expand and argue.

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5   Of course, this does not mean that the state of affairs regretted has to be "exterior" or "independent from" the subject committing the regretting. For example, a certain feeling of a person can be regretted and this would be also what I call here "the objective state".

What an example like 1)⁶ brings to light is a certain fracture between the actual state of affairs presupposed and the registration or the taking into account of that state by the agent that regrets. It is not very complicated: of course that in order to be regretted, a state (the objective situation) should be somehow (first) registered or taken into account (i.e. it has to be mirrored in the subjectivity of the agent). But how can we characterize this operation in a clearly stated supposition and what is the relation of the objective (named OBJ from now on) to the subjective (named SUBJ from now on) and of both of them regarding the state of regret- that is less simple. Without claiming to solve all these problems, I think that one might regard the subjective state as a mediator between regret and the state regretted. That is because we cannot regret something without being aware or taking it into account even though we can take something into account without regretting it; consequently the two of them are not independent. On this hypothesis, of the mediator SUBJ, rests the next step of my explanation: *the truth of the main clause employing the verb 'regret' is not affected by the denial of its presupposition because there is another, mediating presupposition (SUBJ) that can serve as an object of regret. This mediator does not exist in the case of the verb 'know' and this accounts for the difference in behavior of the two verbs in this respect.*

For let us consider the rule that we use but this time in an explicitly:

6) If someone regrets that x, then 'that x' is true.

If our competent speaker of English is presented with the information that, however, it is not true that x, then there is no ready Modus Tollens: our competent speaker will *not* draw the conclusion that therefore the person we are speaking about does not regret. Even though this is the rule we are using. But contrast this with 7):

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⁶   That is 'Falsely believing that x, he regrets that x'.

7) If someone knows that x, then 'that x' is true.

When our competent speaker is informed that, nevertheless, x is not true, the conclusion is ready and swift by Modus Tollens: *therefore he does not know that x.*

My explanation for case 6) is that the negation affects one part of the presupposition, namely the OBJ 'that x' leaving the invisible SUBJ to be a meaningful support for regret. In other words, there are two presuppositions, the OBJ and the SUBJ but only the OBJ is negated in 1). To be sure the relation cannot be modeled after the scheme

If someone regrets that x, then (SUBJ x and OBJ x)

because the negation of OBJ would trigger a valid Modus Tollens and therefore the negation for 'regret'. A logical relation other than mere conjunction should be thought for the two. However, this relation would be modeled, there is nothing similar to it in the case of the verb 'know'. There is no mediation, no distance from the truth of 'that x': if OBJ falls, the knowledge falls with it. One cannot say that in order to know something, one first has to find out about that something or to take it into account. This sounds terribly close to 'in order to know something you have to know that something'. This why something like 'Falsely believing that x (happened he knows that x.' sounds awkward, close to a contradiction and 'Correctly believing that x, he knows that x' sounds close to redundancy. When you falsely believe something you may do things in accordance with that false belief but you cannot *know* things in accordance with that false belief.

These considerations bring near the hypothesis that SUBJ is constituted by knowledge itself: 'regret that x' presupposes the existence of the state of affairs x and the knowledge that x (as SUBJ). The whole picture would fit nicely: knowledge would mediate between 'regret' and the state x, because one has first to know that x in order to be able to regret that x. When state x would prove to be inexistent, knowledge would be affected and

decayed to the state of mere belief that x (implied by knowledge), which belief would serve as meaningful support for the state of regret. And this would be why the knowledge is rejected and the regret is not when their presupposition is denied: *there is still something to regret in that situation, but there is nothing to know anymore.* The presupposition generated by the verb 'know' is not mediated or double because the knowledge itself would be the mediator.

The faults of this picture: a lot of it is metaphorical, a lot is highly speculative and several things do not exactly fit. Several problems pertaining to it are sketched in the last section.

4. She believes, she knows and she believes that she knows

As I see it, there are at least three ways to account for my invented SUBJ mediating part of presupposition:

A) 'to regret x' presupposes also 'to believe x' (i.e. besides the truth of 'that x')
B) 'to regret x' presupposes also 'to know x'
C) 'to regret x' presupposes also 'to believe that you know x'

I think each has advantages and disadvantages that will try to present below, but what I have excluded from these is Egré's option of giving up the required truth of 'that x'. I think it is unlikely hypothesis that a presupposition presenting itself with such force in speech is a mere illusion. Therefore, I think that one can only add to this very obvious presupposition.

Hypothesis A) has the advantage of being the one explicitly mentioned in language when the truth of 'that x' is rejected: 1) falsely *believing* that x, he regrets that x. As I was trying to argue in a previous section, 1) can be regarded as making a presupposition explicit. Of course, one may say that the belief is brought into the picture by an external observer, not by the person afflicted with regret. From that person's point of view, 'that x' is knowledge, not

a mere belief. But then the perspective shift is introduced into the explanation and this a new, unaccounted for move.

Hypothesis B) has the advantage to do justice to the perspective underlined above, of the person regretting something. However, how exactly knowledge is transformed into mere belief when 'that x' is deemed false, seems to be a rather mysterious process.

Hypothesis C) has the advantage that it seems sensible to say that the person regretting does not really know that x (as if infallible), but only believes that he knows that x. But when it is not the case that x, then it seems that he simply does not know that x, (even though he regrets that x), he is not in the situation of not believing that he knows that x.

Besides, it would seem that any hypothesis using a cognitive mediator like 'know' or 'belief' is confronted with the objection that the regret does not seem to be about any particular cognitive state. Rather it is much more natural to see it as being about an actual state of affairs, 'that x'. The intermediary cognitive states (whichever we choose) have to manifest a remarkable "transparency" that would allow 'regret' to be about the state of affairs while they themselves are connected with both the state of regret and the state of affair.

These are some thoughts and hypotheses on the matter of the semantical facticity of 'regret' and 'know'. I hope it is clearer now what are the problems involved in their semantical analysis, even if all we are left with (for now) is a dilemma.

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