

Retraction and Quasi-Retraction

In this talk, I will propose a unified analysis of retractions in discourse, motivated by two considerations. First, while prior discussion has predominantly focused on retractions of assertions, as in (1), retractions also apply to questions, as in (2).

- (1) Anna will visit Argentina in May. Wait, I take that back. I misremembered. She will visit Argentina in July.
- (2) Which party did Anna vote for in the last election? Take that back. I no longer want to know.

Second, retractions may occur in embedded environments. In particular, speech act disjunction evokes something that is akin to a retraction. For example consider the following utterances in which a declarative first disjunct is combined with an interrogative second disjunct:

- (3) Anna will visit Argentina in May, or has she changed her travel plans?
- (4) Bo graduated from Harvard, or was it MIT?
- (5) Dave will be here in an hour, or is his train not on time?

These disjunctions have a revisionist flavor: the first disjunct appears to be partially retracted (or *quasi-retracted*) in order to make room for the second.

I will present a slew of puzzles surrounding retractions and quasi-retractions and then offer a unified analysis which borrows elements from the table model of discourse (Farkas & Bruce 2010), inquisitive semantics (Ciardelli et al. 2018; Farkas & Roelofsen 2017), and commitment space semantics (Krifka 2021; Zhang 2025). At the core of my analysis is the idea that, when an utterance is retracted, its semantic content (understood inquisitively) gets *negatively projected* so that no “privileged” future context can come to accept it.