The additivity of concessive still

Hanzhi Zhu
MIT – Massachusetts Institute of Technology
hanzhi@mit.edu

English concessive constructions with although and but convey the truth of both propositions as well as the fact that the combination of the two propositions is odd or unexpected. Little attention has been given to availability of concessive still in the consequent, especially to cases in which although and concessive still are not both available (1b); current accounts do not invoke the additive presupposition and assume an identical distribution of both operators.

(1)  a. Although Ana had a sore throat, she (√still) went to work.
   b. Ana grabbed the wrong bottle of pills. Although Ana had a sore throat, she (#still) took the headache medicine.

I propose to account for the contrast in (1) by an additive presupposition: if not p, then q. Such a presupposition is counterfactual by nature, as the constructions involved convey p; the conditional may need to access worlds in a previous context set in which p was not settled, perhaps sharing theoretical similarity with aspectual still in which its additivity is restricted to a previous point in time. Applied to (1a), this would result in "if Ana didn't have a sore throat, she would go to work", a reasonable presupposition that is met. The infelicity of (1b) is explained as follows: if Ana didn't have a sore throat, it's not the case that she would have taken the headache medicine, since in such cases Ana may be perfectly healthy. This contradicts the additive presupposition as described, resulting in infelicity.

This proposal generates several classes of predictions on the distribution of concessive still within concessive constructions, including classes of examples in which not p logically entails q, in which q entails p, and in which p entails q. For example, in cases in which q entails p, not p entails not q by contraposition, thus contradicting the counterfactual additive presupposition. In such cases, still is always infelicitous as predicted:

(2) Although Bob is a swimmer, he’s (#still) a poor swimmer.