

UNDERSTANDING PRESUPPOSITION AND ENTAILMENT

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Abstract: *The term, 'presupposition' was initiated by the British philosopher, Peter Strawson around 1950. It deals with the knowledge of world and situations in which the speakers engage in conversation. The interlocutors produce and understand the utterances in a given context because they assume the background knowledge that controls the language when it is used. So far, the concern of linguist with presupposition is more recent than that of logicians and philosophers. However, the term is discussed in relation to certain specialized problems, whose connection with the wider aspects of language is not entirely clear. Similarly, entailment is logical or truthful consequence 'It is something that necessarily follows from what is asserted. The present paper attempts to explain what the logicians or philosophers have said regarding presupposition and entailment in the domain of semantics and pragmatics.*

Key words: *Linguistics, semantics, pragmatics, presupposition, entailment, contexts, presupposition triggers, potential, factive, existential, nonverbal, lexical presuppositions*

INTRODUCTION

The British philosopher, Peter Strawson introduced the term *presupposition* in around 1950. In late 1960's, this term was made very popular. It is nothing but one of the aspects of meaning that concerns the knowledge of the world and situation that the participants have. Presupposition contributes to the production and comprehension of the speech. Simply speaking, presuppositions are assumptions that control the language.

RESEARCH METHODS

In communication, interlocutors build their messages on the background assumptions that the hearers already share. When the speaker uses any referring expression in normal circumstances, the hearer, on the basis of assumption, infer which referent is intended. Let us consider the following example, in the sentence "Mr. Page's brother stopped smoking," the speaker presupposes that a person called Mr. Page exists and he has a brother who used to smoke. Levinson (1983) considers a presupposition as the relationship between propositions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In other words, a presupposition is something that the speaker assumes to be the case before making an utterance. This presupposition means background assumption or shared knowledge of communication. For example, read the statement:

A: What about inviting Lena tonight?

B: Fine, then she can give Monica a lift.

Presupposition is:

1. A and B know Lena and Monica.
2. Lena has a vehicle or a car.
3. Monica does not have a vehicle or a car.

Presupposition plays an important role in communication. Communication would have been impossible if everything had to be defined or explained every time when we speak. In other words, whatever a speaker or a writer assumes that the receiver of message already knows is called presupposition. According to Frye, *"If anything is asserted, there is always an obvious presupposition."* Thus, the speaker always designs his/her linguistic messages based on the assumption that his/her listener knows. Of course, these assumptions may be sometimes wrong.

Presupposition is treated as a relation between two propositions. For example, the proposition, *'Mary's dog is cute'* presupposes that *'Mary has a dog'*. Presupposition is a particular sort of inference. Let us consider the sentence, *'John is married'*. This is an example of presupposition that a particular sort of inference considering the sentence, *'John's wife runs a boutique'* when we hear this, we are immediately expected to draw the following inference: *'John is married'*. This is an example of presupposition. We say that the first sentence is presupposed by the second.

In a wide spread view, introduced by the British philosopher, Peter Strawson around 1950, we say that presupposition can be neither true nor false. It simply has no truth value at all so if *'John likes bachelor'* then *'John's wife runs a boutique'* is not false nor is it true; it is simply devoid of the truth-value.

Types of Presupposition: According to George Yule (1985:132) *"presupposition is something that the speaker assumes to be prior to making an utterance"* or *"what a speaker assumes to be known by the hearer"*. Interlocutors use any references in communication assuming that the hearers know it and build their messages. Therefore, to understand this complex phenomenon of the nature of presupposition, let us study the types of presupposition in detail.

1. Potential Presupposition: The speaker's assumptions are typically expressed with the use of a large number of words, phrases, and structures. These linguistic forms are indicators of potential presuppositions, which can only become actual presuppositions in context with speakers.

2. Existential Presupposition: The possessive construction is associated with presupposition of existence. The existential presupposition is not only assumed to be present in possessive constructions (for example, *'your car'* the presupposition is *'you have a car'*) but

more generally in any definite noun phrase.

3. Factive Presupposition: In the example *‘Everybody knows that John is gay’*, the verb ‘know’ occurs in a structure with ‘John is gay’ as the presupposition. The presupposed information following a verb like ‘know’ can be treated as fact, and is described as a ‘factive presupposition’. Other verbs such as ‘realize’, ‘regret’, ‘aware’, and ‘glad’ are the examples of this type. Here are some examples for factive presupposition:

	Sentence	Presupposition
1	She did not ‘realize’ that she was ill.	She was ill.
2	We ‘regret’ telling him.	We told him.
3	I was not ‘aware; that she was married.	She was married.
4	I am ‘glad’ that it is over.	It is over.

4. Lexical Presupposition: In lexical presupposition, the use of one form with its asserted meaning is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition of another (non-asserted) meaning. Each time, we say that someone ‘managed’ to do something, the asserted meaning is that the person succeeds in some way. When you say that someone ‘did not manage’, the asserted meaning is that the person did not succeed. In both cases however, there is presupposition (non-asserted) that the person ‘tried’ to do that something. Other examples, involving the lexical items, ‘stop’ start, and ‘again’ are presented with their presupposition in the following examples: You are late again. You were late before.

	Sentence	Presupposition (lexical)
A)	He stopped smoking.	He used to smoke.
B)	They started complaining.	They were not complaining before.
C)	You are late again.	You were late before.

5. Structural Presupposition: In structural presupposition, certain sentence structures have been analyzed as conventionally and regularly presupposing that part of the structure is already assumed true. For example, the wh-question constructor already assumes true. For example, the wh-question construction in English is interpreted with the presupposition that the information after the wh-forms is already known.

For example, in the question *‘When did he leave?’* the presupposition is *‘He left’* which is already known. Similarly, in *‘Where did you buy the car?’* presupposition is *“You bought a car.”*

The presupposition illustrated in the above example can lead listeners to believe that the information presented is necessarily true, rather than just the presupposition of the person,

asking the question such structurally based presupposition may represent subtle ways of making information that the speaker believes to be what the listener should believe.

6. Non- Factive Presupposition: A non- factive presupposition is one that is assumed to be true with verbs like ‘dream’, ‘imagine’ and ‘pretend’, as shown in the following example that what follows is not true. For example,

	Sentence	Presupposition (non-factive)
1.	I dreamed that I was rich.	I was not rich.
2.	We imagine we were in Heaven.	We were not in Heaven.
3.	He pretends to be ill.	He is not ill.

) **Counter- Factual Presupposition:** Counter factual presupposition implies that what is presupposed is not only ‘non true’ but also opposite to what is true or contrary to fact.

Presupposition Triggers: The presupposition generating linguistic items are referred to as presupposition triggers. These following linguistic items (i.e. words, expression, or syntactic structures) may be said to give rise to specific types of presupposition.

1) Simple or compound referring expression (i.e. proper nouns, definite descriptions, qualified noun phrase etc.) gives rise to presupposition of existence. See the example:

	Sentence	Presupposition
1.	<u>Michael</u> is a vegetarian.	Someone called Michael exists.
2.	Arjun’s <u>car</u> is the <u>best</u> in class.	Arjun has a car.

2) Some lexical items such as a factive verb, verb of judgment like blame, approve, realize, etc. presuppose the truth of their complement clauses. For example:

	Sentence	Presupposition
1.	Lee realized that it was a tough topic.	It was a tough topic.
2.	George regrets joining activist network.	George joined activist network.

3) Change of state verbs like start, begin, stop etc. rise to presupposition that presupposes the truth of their complement clause. For example,

	Sentence	Presupposition
1.	Sarah stopped singing.	Sarah used to sing.
2.	Dilip started attending seminars.	Dilip used not to attend seminars.

4) Cleft and pseudo-cleft constructions give rise to presupposition. For example,

	Sentence	Presupposition
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1.	It was his arrogance that irritated me.	Something irritated me.
2.	What irritated me was his arrogance.	Something irritated me.

5) Some subordinate clauses like ‘time adverbial clause’ and ‘comparative clauses’ also generate presupposition. For example,

	Sentence	Presupposition
1.	I was awarded with PhD.	I had registered for PhD.

Properties of Presupposition:

Presuppositions share certain common feature, which can be used for identifying the phenomena of presupposition. They are as follows:

1) Constancy under Negation and Interrogation:

This property of presupposition is generally described as ‘constancy under negation’. It means that the presupposition of a statement will remain constant (i.e. still true) even when that statement is negated. For example:

	Sentence	Presupposition
1.	Everybody knows that John is gay.	John is gay.
2.	Everybody does not know that John is gay.	John is gay.

In the above stated example, although both speakers disagree about the validity of (a), both assume the truth that *John is gay*. In *John is gay* is presupposed by both (a) and (b), remaining constant under negation. Presuppositions do not change in interrogative sentences also. For example, in the statement *My uncle is coming home from Canada*, has the presuppositions *I have an uncle*. In the same way, the question forms of the sentence that is *Is my uncle coming home from Canada?* have the same presupposition that is, *I have an uncle*.

2) Defeasibility (Context Sensitivity): An inference is said to be defensible if it is possible to cancel it in some situation (or contexts). Presuppositions are defensible in certain discourse contexts, and uncertain intra-sentential context. This property makes any possible semantic theory of presuppositions unacceptable. For example:

- 1) Sue cried before she finished her thesis.
- 2) Sue died before she finished her thesis. Sentence (1) and (2) both have the same syntactic structure but the utterance to each seems to produce a different presupposition.
 - A. Sue finished her thesis.
 - B. Sue did not finish her thesis.

The utterance of (1) and (2) produces presupposition (A), whereas that of (2A) produces presupposition (B). This is so because in (2) the presupposition (1) is blocked or cancelled by our general knowledge of this world. We know that dead people cannot finish thesis. This phenomenon of presupposition failure of presupposing cancellation is known as defeasibility feature.

3) **Detachability:** Presuppositions are apparently tied to particular aspects of the surface structure of utterances. Proper names and definite description, for example, we have the presupposition of existence attached to them; verbs of judgment and factive verbs have presupposition of truth of their complement clauses attached to them etc. There seem to be a conventional association between the surface organization of sentence constituents and particular presupposition.

Forming a proposition by taking the material after the relative clause maker and interesting an appropriate variable or indefinite expression like ‘something etc’ for example, can specify the presupposition of a cleft sentence. In fact, detachability is one of the properties that serve to distinguish presupposition from implicatures. For Implicature, as we shall see unlike presupposition from, are attached to the semantic content and not to the surface form of the expression used.

4) **Potentiality to Survive in a Range of Linguistic Contexts:** Presuppositions survive not only negation, but also systematically survive in a range of other contexts where entailments do not. They survive, for example, in modal contexts (i.e. in embedding under modal operators like ‘possible’, ‘there is a chance that’ etc. Under modalities like those expressed by ‘ought and ‘should’, they also survive in the context of compound sentences formed by the connectives ‘and’ or ‘if’, ‘then’ (and their equivalence) and in complex sentences with certain compliments taking verbs or become presupposition of the ability to survive in various linguistic contexts.

To deal with presupposition properly, it is necessary to distinguish it from other kind of inference, which bears family resemblance to it. The above discussed features shared by presupposition may be used as criteria to distinguish presupposition from entailment on one hand and implicatures on the other hand.

Entailment. The concept of entailment comes from the study of logic and semantics. Entailment is a relation between sentences or propositions given by linguistic structure or logical; there is no need to check any fact in the world to deduce the entailed sentence from the entailing sentence. A Dictionary of Philosophical Terms and Names states “*entailment is a logical relation between propositions such that one of them is strictly implied by other(s); that is, its falsity is logically impossible, given the truth of what it entails it. Thus, the premise of a valid deductive argument entails its conclusion.*” Here, a premise is an idea or theory on which a statement or action is based. Saeed, a renowned linguist, perceives that there are either lexical or syntactic sources for entailment. Let us consider the following examples stated in (1) and (2):

	1	2 (entailment)
(1)	a) The President was assassinated	b) The President <u>died</u>

(2)	a) Rabindranath Tagore painted this picture	b) This picture <u>was painted</u> by Rabindranath Tagore
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In (1) entailment (b) derives from the lexical relationship between the verbs ‘assassinate’ and ‘die’. The meaning of ‘assassinate’ (cause to death) contains the meaning of ‘die’. In (2), the source of entailment is syntactic; here, active and passive versions of the same sentence entail one another. To express the relation between (a) and (b) in another way is to say that they have the same logical form.

The way to test entailments is through negation: negating an entailing sentence destroys the entailment. In (1) if proposition (1a) is negated, then (1b) no longer automatically follows from the preceding sentence. Thus, entailment fails. In this sense, an entailment is clearly distinguished from other types of inference. The idea of entailment is used in common speech sometimes but in semantics, it is used very specifically. In other words, we can say that entailment is the most concrete aspect of language. Entailment is the idea that the meaning of a word is entailed by another word. For example, the word ‘navy’ entails ‘blue’, but the word ‘blue’ does not necessarily entail ‘navy’. In other words, when something is understood to be navy, it is also understood to be blue, but when something is blue, it is not necessary that it is to be considered navy.

Entailment or implication is used in propositional logic and predicate logic to describe a relationship between two sentences or sets of sentences. To put it in nutshell, it means something that is inferred or deduced or entailed or implied. In pragmatics (linguistics), entailment is the relationship between two sentences where the truth of one requires the truth the other. For example, the sentence “Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated” entails (||-) “Rajiv Gandhi is dead.” Thus, it becomes clear that the term ‘entailment’ is a very strong kind of implication. Let us try to justify this statement in a simple way. A entails B if and only if whenever A is true, B is also true. There is no idea of causality involved here, just coincidence of true-ness. The sentence “Dr. Jadhav is a linguist and a teacher” entails “Dr. Jadhav is a linguist. Any time the first sentence is true, the second one will always be true as well. “Dr. Jadhav is a linguist and a teacher” does not entail “Dr. Jadhav likes semantics.” Similarly, the sentence “Mary broke the window ||- The window broke.

Entailment differs from implication where the truth of one suggests the truth of the other, but does not require it. For instance, the sentence “Mary had a baby and got married” implicates that she had a baby before the wedding, but this is cancelable by adding- not necessarily in that order. Entailments are not cancelable.

Entailment also differs from presupposition in that in proposition; the truth of what one is presupposing is taken for granted. A presupposition is an assumption about the world whose truth is taken for granted in discourse. The Web Glossary of Linguistic Terms gives a pragmatic definition of presupposition, as “*A presupposition is a background belief, related to the utterance that must be mutually known or assumed by the addresser and addressee for the utterance to be considered appropriate incontext.*” Careful study the following sentences will make this point clear:

1. Do you want to do it again?

2. My wife is pregnant.

In the sentence (1), the presupposition is- ‘you have done it already, at least once’. The sentence (2) contains the presupposition- ‘the speaker has a wife’. It is to be understood here that negation of an expression does not change its presuppositions. The sentences ‘I want to do it again’ and ‘I don’t want to do it again’ both mean that the speaker or the subject has done it already one or more times. Similarly, the sentences ‘My wife is pregnant’ and ‘My wife is not pregnant’ both mean that the subject has a wife.

It is quite clear that presupposition is a basis for an utterance and its meaning stand on. In other words, in saying X, we presuppose Y. For instance, if someone says a sentence like, “Amrita Preetam died in misery,” there is a sufficient reason for us to assume:

- i. that the speaker is speaking the truth and the truth is about something
- ii. that there once lived a person whose name was Amrita Preetam
- iii. that Amrita Preetam was unfortunate to die in a miserable way.

As presupposition often suggests more than what is simply said and associates itself with the speaker’s belief system, it is another component of pragmatic analysis.

CONCLUSION

Theory of presupposition and entailment helps dugout the hidden agenda of every-day communication in which the speakers have a number of presuppositions about the world-knowledge of hearers. For example, when someone addresses you and says, “*Did you know that John and Mary split up?*” means the addresser has the presupposition that you know John and Mary and also you were aware of the fact that they were previously a couple. Thus, the theory of presuppositions lead us to understand the formulated utterances whose meaning can be inferred by listeners (can be deducted) because of assumed knowledge. Presuppositions are discussed in semantics, philosophy, logic etc but the study of presupposition should not be neglected while studying pragmatics. The study of presupposition helps to extend the borders of pragmatics as well as of the other branches.

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