

COURSE: SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

LECTURE 12: PRESUPPOSITION AND ENTAILMENT

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Introduction

- ▶ We discussed reference
- ▶ We determined that speakers assume certain information as already known by the listener,
- ▶ Since it is treated as known, it will not be generally stated.
- ▶ Consequently, it will count as what is communicated but not said.
- ▶ Technical terms are:
- ▶ Presupposition
- ▶ Entailment.

Senses of presupposition

- (1) Effects presuppose causes
- (2) John wrote Harry a letter, presupposing he could read
- (3) John said “Harry is *so* competent”, presupposing that we knew Harry had fouled things up – in fact we didn’t know and so failed to realize that he was being ironic
- (4) Harry asked Bill to close the door, presupposing that Bill had left it open as usual; he hadn’t so he threw a chair at Harry
- (5) Adolph addressed the butler as “sir”, presupposing that he was the host Sir Ansel himself
- (6) The theory of evolution presupposes a vast time-scale
- (7) The article by Jackendoff presupposes Chomsky’s theory of nominalizations

Levinson, Stephen (1983). *Pragmatics*. Britain: Cambridge. Pg. 168

Senses of presupposition

- ▶ What these statements have in common is they use the ordinary language notion of presupposition to describe any kind of background assumption against which an action, theory, expression or utterance makes sense or is rational

Presupposition and entailment

- ▶ *Presupposition* -what the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance.
- ▶ *Entailment*-is what logically follows from what is asserted in the utterance.
- ▶ Speakers have presuppositions while sentences, not speakers, have entailments. Take a look at the example below:
- ▶ *Jane's brother bought two apartments.*

- ▶ This sentence presupposes that Jane exists and that she has a brother.
- ▶ The speaker may also hold the more specific *presupposition* that she has only a brother and her brother has a lot of money.
- ▶ All these *presuppositions* are held by the speaker and all of them can be right / wrong.

Presupposition and entailment

- ▶ In pragmatics *entailment*- relationship between two sentences where the truth of one
- ▶ (A) requires the truth of the other (B).
- ▶ For example, the sentence
- ▶ (A) *The president was assassinated.* entails (B) *The president is dead.*

Types of presuppositions

- ▶ In the analysis of how speakers' assumptions are typically expressed, presupposition has been associated with the use of a large number of words, phrases and structures.
- ▶ These linguistic forms are considered as indicators of potential presupposition, which can only become actual presupposition in contexts with speakers.
- ▶ The types of presupposition are:

Existential presupposition

- ▶ Possessive construction is associated with a presupposition of existence.
- ▶ ***Existential presupposition***: *it* is the assumption of the existence of the entities named by the speaker.
- ▶ For example, when a speaker says "Tom's car is new", we can presuppose that Tom exists and that he has a car.
- ▶ Kenya is a country in East Africa.
- ▶ The speaker is assumed to be committed to the existence of a particular entity.

Factive presupposition

- ▶ *Factive presupposition:*
- ▶ *It* is the assumption that something is true due to the presence of some verbs such as "know" and "realize" and of phrases involving glad, for example.
- ▶ Thus, when a speaker says that she didn't realize someone was ill, we can presuppose that someone is ill.
- ▶ Also, when she says "I'm glad it's over", we can presuppose that it's over.
- ▶ I am aware that he arrived yesterday.

Factive presupposition

- ▶ More examples:
- ▶ She didn't realize he was watching her. (He was watching)
- ▶ It isn't odd that he left early. (He left)
- ▶ We regret visiting her. (We visited)

Lexical presupposition

- ▶ *Lexical presupposition: it is the assumption that, in using one word, the speaker can act as if another meaning (word) will be understood. For instance:*
- ▶ It is the assumption associated with the use of certain words and phrases.
- ▶ Andrew stopped running. (>>He used to run.)
- ▶ You are late again. (>> You were late before.)

Lexical presupposition

- ▶ They started complaining. (They were not complaining).
- ▶ Bahati is being mean again. (He has been mean before)
- ▶ In this case, the use of the expressions "*stop*" and "*again*" are taken to presuppose another (unstated) concept.

Structural presupposition

- ▶ In this case, certain sentence structures have been analyzed as conventionally and regularly presupposing that part of the structure is already assumed to be true.
- ▶ We might say that speakers can use such structures to treat information as presupposed (i.e. assumed to be true),
- ▶ And hence, be accepted as true by the listener.

Structural presupposition

- ▶ For example, wh-questions in English are conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that the information after the wh-form (e.g. when and where) is already known to be the case.
- ▶ When did she travel to the USA? (>> she traveled)
- ▶ Where did you buy the book? (>> you bought the book)

Structural presupposition

- ▶ The listener perceives that the information presented is necessarily true rather than just the presupposition of the person asking the question.
- ▶ How fast was the car moving before the crash?
- ▶ If you are required to respond to this question, then the person asking believes that there was a crash and you witnessed.

Non- factive presupposition

- ▶ Non- factive presupposition: it is an assumption that something is not true. For example, verbs like "dream", "imagine" and "pretend" are used with the presupposition that what follows is not true.
- ▶ I dreamed that I was rich. (>> I am not rich)
- ▶ We imagined that we were in London. (>> We are not in London)
- ▶ He pretended to be ill. (He was not ill).

Counter-factual presupposition

- ▶ Counterfactual presupposition: it is the assumption that what is presupposed is not only untrue, but is the opposite of what is true, or contrary to facts.
- ▶ For instance, some conditional structures, generally called counterfactual conditionals, presuppose that the information, in the if- clauses, is not true at the time of utterance.
- ▶ If you were my daughter, I would not allow you to do this. (> you are not my daughter)

Summary of the potential presupposition

Type	Example	presupposition
Existential	The X	X Exists
Factive	I regret leaving	I left
Non-factive	He pretended to be happy	He is not happy
Lexical	He managed to escape	He tried to escape
Structural	When did she arrive?	She arrived.
Counter-factual	If I weren't poor	I am poor

The projection problem

- ▶ There is a basic assumption that the presupposition of a simple sentence will continue to be true when the simple sentence becomes part of a complex sentence.
- ▶ This is one version of the general idea that the meaning of a whole sentence is a combination of the meaning of its parts.
- ▶ However, the meaning of some presuppositions (as parts) doesn't survive to become the meaning of some complex sentence as (a whole).
- ▶ Hence, the **projection problem**.

Projection problem

- ▶ I imagined my party leader would win but nobody realized he won.
- ▶ He won
- ▶ Nobody realized he had won.

When it is difficult to communicate using presuppositions alone, entailments become important.

ENTAILMENTS

- ▶ An entailment is treated as a follow up on what is asserted.
- ▶ A: The officer regrets shooting the victim.
- ▶ B: But now we know from evidence that the officer did not fire at the victim.
- ▶ From the first utterance, the presupposition is that the officer maybe killed the victim.
- ▶ The second statement tells us he did not.

ENTAILMENTS

- ▶ The power of entailment can also be used to cancel existential.
- ▶ The king of Uganda exists.
- ▶ The king of Uganda doesn't exist.
- ▶ The first sentence is a presupposition.
- ▶ The second is an entailment and therefore more powerful as it cancels the presupposition.

Consider the following:

Type	Example	presupposition
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Potential presuppositions > actual presuppositions

- ▶ Yule (1996) asserts that it is best to think of these presuppositions as ‘potential presuppositions’ which only become actual presuppositions when intended by speakers to be recognized as such within utterances.
- ▶ Speakers can indeed indicate that the potential presupposition is not presented as a strong assumption.
- ▶ Note that: it is not the word or phrase that has the presupposition. Presuppositions are with the speakers.
- ▶ Yule, George (1996). *Pragmatics*. NY: Oxford University Press, pg. 32

Characteristics of entailment

- ▶ Logical consequences following what is asserted in the utterance.
- ▶ Entailments depend on sentence meaning; not the context in which the sentence is used.
- ▶ It also happens when one set of objects is included in another. It may be seen as a kind of hyponymic relation.

Characteristics of entailments

- ▶ Entailment can also involve the use of determiners (to indicate the relation of inclusion)
- ▶ Every voter loves him.
- ▶ Most voters love him.

Ordered entailment

- ▶ Entailment is not a pragmatic concept (i.e. having to do with speaker meaning) but it is considered purely a logical concept symbolized by \models .
- ▶ He killed four dogs.
- ▶ Someone killed four dogs.
- ▶ He did something to the four dogs
- ▶ Something happened to the four dogs

Foreground VS Background entailment

- ▶ foreground= statements that are important in interpreting a statement
- ▶ Foregrounding is achieved by stress and emphasis.
- ▶ Rover chased three dogs.
- ▶ Three dogs were chased by Rover.
- ▶ Cleft sentences can also be used: It was Rover that chased three dogs.
- ▶ Backgrounding: Someone chased three dogs

summary

- ▶ We have looked at presupposition
- ▶ Types of presupposition
- ▶ Entailment and its importance

References

- ▶ Levinson, Stephen. (1983). *Pragmatics*. UK: Cambridge.
- ▶ Yule, George. (1996). *Pragmatics*. NY: Oxford University Press.

- ▶ End
- ▶ Thank you
- ▶ Next lesson: conversational structure