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**Presupposition**

**Outcomes of the Tutorial** : *By the end of this tutorial, you will be able to :*

1.Define presupposition

2. Single out its types and scopes

3. Familiarize and use its different triggers

4. Identify its different types.

**Terminology used in this tutorial :** presupposition,presuppose,trigger,constancy,negation,counterfactual,factive,temporal,cleft sentences, iterative temporal.

**1. Historical background**

Presupposition is another pragmatic topic that originates within the tradition of the philosophy of language. The German mathematician and logician Gotlob Frege is generally recognized as the first scholar in modern times who (re)introduced the philosophical study of presupposition, though the notion of presupposition may go back at least as far as the medieval philosopher Petrus Hispanus.

The organization of this lecture is as follows. Section 1. discusses the general phenomenon of presupposition. Section 2 deals with presupposition triggers. Section 3. examines the types of presupposition. Section 4.discusses the properties of presupposition

**2. What is presupposition?**

Presupposition can be defined as an inference or proposition whose truth is taken for granted in the utterance of the sentence. Presupposition is something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to make an utterance. Speakers, not sentences, have presuppositions, symbolized as >> for example, if someone tells you:

1. “Your brother is waiting outside for you”, there is an obvious supposition that you have a brother.

2. a. Kepler died in misery b. Kepler did not die in misery.According to the German mathematician, logician and philosopher, Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), who noted in Frege (1952) that both (2a) and (2b) **presuppose** that Kepler actually existed.

3. The King of France is wise. The English philosopher, Bertrand Russell (1872 – 1970) argued against this view in Russell (1905). He was concerned with the fact that (3) is meaningful, whether or not there actually is a King of France. He proposed that this involves three assertions. There exists an x such that. a) x is a King of France b) there is no other entity that is a King of France c) x is wise.

In fact, presupposition is “what a speaker or writer assumes that the receiver of the message already knows.”(Richards et al, 1987) e.g.: John doesn’t write poems anymore. >> presupposes that John once wrote poetry. In other words, presuppositions are implications that are often felt to be in the background — to be assumed by the speaker to be already known to the addressee.

Presuppositions seem to be tied to particular words or aspects of surface structure in general, as shown in the following examples:

1) I was not able to see *the Side Show*. (**presupposition:** There exists a Side Show).

2) She didn’t *realize* she had a big stain on her dress. (**presupposition**: She had a big stain on her dress).

3) Julia *stopped* smoking. (**Presupposition**: Julia used to smoke).

The definite description *the Side Show* in 1), the factive verb *realiz*e in 2) and the change of state verb *stop* in 3) are the linguistic expressions that trigger the presuppositions, and for that reason they are called *presupposition triggers*

**3. Presupposition triggers**

In any language, there are some expressions or constructions which can act as the sources of presuppositions. This kind of expressions or constructions is called presupposition triggers.In other words presuppositions are generated or triggered by the use of particular lexical items or linguistic constructions. Here are some examples of presupposition triggers

**1. Definitive descriptions**: John saw the man with two heads >> There exists a man with two heads.

**2. Factive verbs:** John realized that he was in debt >> John was in debt.

**3. Change of state verbs**: Joan began to beat her husband >> Joan hadn’t been beating her husband.

I continued/stopped/gave up smoking after the doctor warned me of the bad consequences of smoking. >> that the speaker smoked before being warned of the consequences

**4. Iterative:** The flying saucer came again >> the flying saucer came before.

Another piece of bad news for the government >> that there had been at least one previous of bad news for the government.

**5. Temporal clauses:** while Chomsky was revolutionizing linguistics, the rest of social science was asleep >> Chomsky was revolutionizing linguistics.

I thought I was a lucky man *before/after/until/when* I got married >> that the speaker got married.

**6. Cleft sentences:** It was Henry who killed Rose >> someone killed Rose.

It was the Arabs who invented the astrolabe >> someone invented the astrolabe

**7 Comparisons and contrasts**: Carol is a better linguist than Barbara >> Barbara is a linguist. The negative form of the above sentences has the same presupposition.

**8. Counterfactual conditions**, which presupposes that affirmative propositions contained in the *if-clause* did not occur and negative propositions contained in the if-clause did occur:

If had won at the lottery on Saturday, I wouldn’t be here now >>that I didn’t win the lottery on Saturday, and

If I hadn’t won the lottery On Saturday, I would be here now >> I did win the lottery on Saturday.

**9. Stress:** Randion removes dirt AND odours >> that other washing powders do not remove powders, and If music be the food of love, play on. This original interpretation of the first line of *Twelfth night* in a production I once saw had the effect of turning the real conditional into a counterfactual, with the resulting presupposition that music, or at least the tuneless rendering being played at the time, was not the food of life.

**10. Implicative verbs** such as *remember, forget, manage and happen*

- Reading and writing have improved immeasurably>> a low base

- I forgot/I didn’t remember to send my mother a card >> the speaker should have sent his/her mother a card.

- A headline in *The Times* /Mr. Cool manages to avoid doing a Henman >> that it was not easy for Mr Cool to avoid doing a Henman and asserts that he succeeded in avoiding doing it .(In case this headline is obscure, the story below was about those rare occasions when the erratic British tennis player Tim Henman managed to keep cool head ,hence the label (“Mr Cool”.)

**4.Types of Presupposition**

Presuppositions are associated with the use of a large number of These linguistic forms are considered as indicators of potential presupposition, which can only become actual presupposition in contexts with speakers. Existential presupposition: Entities named by the speaker and assumed to be present - noun phrase. - possessive constructions.

**1. Noun phrase**: e.g. The Cold War has ended; presupposes that the existence of the entities it refers to, in this case the Cold War

**2. Possessive constructions :** “Tony ’s car is new” we can presuppose that Tony exists and that he has a car.

**3. Factive presupposition:** identified by the presence of some verbs such as: “know“, realize“, “be glad”, “be sorry”, etc. She didn’t realize he was ill >> He was ill. We regret telling him >> We told him. I wasn’t aware that she was married >> She was married. It isn’t odd that he left early >> He left early. I’m glad that it’s over >> It’s over.

**3- Lexical presupposition:** In using one word, the speaker can act as if another meaning will be understood. For instance: Mary stopped running >> She used to run. You are late again >> you were late before. Are you still such a bad driver? >> You were a bad driver “stop“, “*again*“ “*still*” are taken to presuppose another ( ) concept.

**4- Structural presupposition:** it is the assumption associated with the use of certain structures. - Wh-question constructions. When did she travel to the USA? >> she travelled. Where did you buy the book? >> you bought the book. The listener perceives that the information presented is necessarily true, or intended as true by the speaker.

**5- Non- factive presupposition:** It is an assumption referred to something that 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 was not rich. We imagined that we were in London >> we were not in London.

**6- 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. If you were my daughter, I would not allow you to do this >> you are not my daughter. If I were rich I would buy a Ferrari >> I’m not rich)

**5. Properties of presupposition**

Presuppositions exhibit a number of distinctive properties, namely: constancy under negation, defeasibility or cancellability and problem projection.

**5.1 Constancy under negation**

This simply means that any presupposition generated by the use of a lexical item or a syntactic structure and remains the same when the sentence containing that lexical item or syntactic structure is negated. A good diagnostic: presuppositions are shared by members of ‘the S family’ — that is, they remain constant under

1. Negation (denial)   
2. Questioning   
3. Embedding under modals (e.g. *might, it is possible that*)   
4. Embedding as the antecedent of a conditional (i.e. in an *if*-clause).

Example: A speaker of any of the sentences below would be presupposing that there is a king of France.  
    a. The king of France is bald.   
         b. The king of France is not bald.   
         c. Is the king of France bald?   
         d. The king of France might be bald/Possibly the king of France is bald.   
         e. If the king of France is bald, he should wear a hat in the winter.

C. A presupposition of the S family may or may not be entailed by S itself (as it is in the example above — see (2a)), but in any case it will not be entailed by the negated, questioned, modalized, or conditionalized sentences.

* Mary’s cat is cute. (p) Mary has a cat. (q) pq = p **presupposes** q
* If the speaker denies the proposition p (NOT p), the presupposition q doesn’t change. Mary’s cat isn’t cute. (NOT p) Mary has a cat. (q) Not p >>q = Not p **presupposes** q

**5.2 Defeasibility or cancellability**

Defeasibility or cancellability is another important property of presupposition. Therefore, they are nullified if they are inconsistent with: a) background assumptions b) conversational implicature c) certain discourse contexts.

In the first place, they can disappear in the face of inconsistency with background assumptions or real world knowledge. Contrast the following examples (we will use >> to stand for ‘does not presuppose’)

a- John got an assistant professorship before he finished his Ph.D. >> John finished his Ph.D.

b- John died before he finished his Ph.D. >> John finished his Ph.D.

While a) presupposes that John finished his Ph.D. by virtue of the temporal clause, b) does not carry that presupposition. This is because this presupposition conflicts with our real-world knowledge that one cannot do anything after one dies. Consequently, the unwanted presupposition vanishes.

Secondly, presupposition can be cancelled by inconsistent conversational implicatures. For example: If John is organizing a stag night, Mary will be angry that he is doing so.

= > Perhaps John is organizing a stag party, perhaps he isn’t.

>> John is organizing a stag night.