Introduction
1 Introduction
Presupposition

Test
A sentence $S$ presupposes $p$ if both $S$ and the negation of $S$ entails $p$.

Claims
1. A presupposition is a special kind of entailment.
2. Presuppositions persist under negation

1. If you have offended the King of France, there will be a war.
2. Did you meet the king of France?
Ordinary entailments vs. presupposition

Entailment-blocking contexts:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{negation} & \quad \text{(Neg)} \\
\text{conditional} & \quad \text{(If \ldots)} \\
\text{yes-no question} & \quad \text{(YNQ)}
\end{align*}
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-presupposed</th>
<th>Presupposed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neg</strong></td>
<td>You saw a king. ⇒ A king exists.</td>
<td>You saw the king. ⇒ A king exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You didn’t see a king. ⇒⇒ A king exists.</td>
<td>You didn’t see the king. ⇒ A king exists.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>If. . .</strong></td>
<td>If you saw a king . . . ⇒⇒ A king exists.</td>
<td>If you saw the king . . . ⇒ A king exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YNQ</strong></td>
<td>Did you see a king? ⇒⇒ A king exists.</td>
<td>Did you see king? ⇒ A king exists.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Russell (1905)

The King of France is bald

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( \exists x )</th>
<th>KofF(x) &amp; (( \forall y ) KoF(y) ( \rightarrow ) x = y) &amp; Bald(x)</th>
<th>Kof exists &amp; Kof is unique</th>
<th>Presupposed</th>
<th>Asserted</th>
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</thead>
</table>

The King of France is not bald

<table>
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<tr>
<th>( \exists x )</th>
<th>KofF(x) &amp; (( \forall y ) KoF(y) ( \rightarrow ) x = y) &amp; ( \sim ) Bald(x)</th>
<th>Kof exists &amp; Kof is unique</th>
<th>( \sim ) Bald(x)</th>
<th>Kof is not bald</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presupposed</td>
<td>Asserted</td>
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Only what was asserted is negated!
On Denoting

1. The King of England is bald. Not a statement about a meaning, but a statement about a guy (Edward VII, who actually was bald), the guy denoted by (“referred to by”, for us) the expression the King of England.

2. The King of France is bald. A statement about a meaning, but not a statement about a guy (there was and continues to be, no King of France).

3. Surely what’s going on in these two cases can’t be so different!
What is asserted/what is presupposed

Frege’s point

What is presupposed can’t be negated. So it must not be part of what’s asserted. What’s asserted and what’s presupposed are distinct facts about an utterance. They belong in different realms (semantics vs. pragmatics?).
The fact: Surely the following ain’t so bad!

The King of France is not bald, because there is no King of France.

The King of France is not bald

It is not the case that the King of France is bald

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>~∃x</th>
<th>KofF(x) &amp; (∀yKoF(y) → x = y) &amp; Bald(x)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kof exists</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asserted</td>
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Everything is negated.

**Takeaway**: Never mind Russell’s theory! We reject that in this chapter. The point is that what was supposed to be an entailment of the negated sentence can be cancelled! So presuppositions can’t be entailments!
What are presuppositions?

1. Until you hunt around a bit for evidence, they are an awful lot like entailments.

2. But Frege and Strawson think of presuppositions as conditions on assertibility. One can not felicitously utter “The King of France is bald” unless a unique King of France exists.

3. So they’re not part of what’s asserted, and they don’t belong in the semantics of the sentence (contra Russell).

4. As felicity conditions on utterances (assertions), they have to be true if the assertion is true (like an entailment!), But they also have to be true if the assertion is false!

5. If a presupposition of an utterance isn’t true, no assertion is made at all (Strawson 1950)
What is the truth value of an external negation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\sim p$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$q$</th>
<th>$p &amp; q$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
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</table>
Why are felicity conditions cancellable?

External Negation

1. John hasn’t stopped smoking, because he never did smoke.
2. It is not the case that “John stopped smoking” is true, because he never did smoke.
4. He didn’t say təmero; he said təmaro!
5. This is a **pragmatic ambiguity**
Variety of Presupposition triggers

1. Definite descriptions *The X, John’s X*
2. Change of state verbs (*stop, . . .*)
3. Factive verbs (*regret, admit, . . .*)
4. Iteratives (*again, return, . . .*)
5. Clefts (*It was John who . . ., What John did was . . .*)
Clefts

The cleft construction is a presupposition trigger

a. It was John who stole the cookie.  
b. It was not John who stole the cookie.

c. John stole the cookie.  
d. John didn’t steal the cookie.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Someone stole the cookie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. It was John who stole the cookie.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. It was not John who stole the cookie.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. John stole the cookie.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. John didn’t steal the cookie.</td>
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Whether the cleft is asserted (a.) or denied (b.), someone stole the cookie. But (d.) does not entail someone stole the cookie.

Whether questioned or hypothesized . . .

e. Was it John who stole a cookie?  
f. If it was John who stole a cookie . . .
Lexical triggers

1. The door didn’t **open**.
2. The car didn’t **start**.
3. He didn’t **regret** that he had spoken so rudely.
4. The following day, he didn’t **come back**.
5. You don’t **get to** be on the witness stand.
6. He didn’t **manage to** faint.
Defeasibility arguments for pragmatic nature

Type I: Metalinguistic negation
Type II: Suspendability

a. John has stopped smoking, if he ever did smoke
b. It was his mother who taught him how to dress, if anyone did.
Abusch (2002): hard vs. soft triggers

Abott’s principle (Abbott 2006)

Detachability of presupposition from meaning predicts ease of cancellation/suspension: More detachable means less defeasible.

1. That’s what gave me the courage and confidence to go to New York.
2. That gave me the courage and confidence to go to New York.
3. # That’s not what gave me the courage and confidence to go to New York; (in the end, ) nothing did.
4. That didn’t give me the courage and confidence to go to New York; (in the end, ) nothing did.
Assignment: Presupposition

From Birner Chapter 5, Discussion questions, pp. 173, 174.

1. Prepare to discuss: Question 5. This means you review what a conventional implicature is. For a discussion of conventional implicature, see Birner Chapter 2 (posted on Blackboard), especially section 2.2.2. This discussion makes it clear that it is hard to cancel conventional implicatures. Nevertheless they are implicatures because they are not truth conditional. Apply this to the example in Question 5.

2. Write up and hand in 2, 4, 7, 9, 10. (Due Apr 30)
Discussion questions

Question I

Comment on the presuppositions of the following two sentences. Be especially sure to comment on any differences between their presuppositions. Finally, if there are any differences, comment on the trigger that is responsible for the differences.

1. The French language is more difficult than other languages.
2. Why is the French language more difficult than other languages?
Question II

Comment on the presuppositions of the following two sentences. Be especially sure to comment on any differences between their presuppositions. Finally, if there are any differences, comment on the trigger that is responsible for the differences.

1. The president of the college fired John.
2. When did the president of the college fire John?
Discussion questions

Question III

Comment on the presuppositions of the following two sentences. Be especially sure to comment on any differences between their presuppositions. Finally, if there are any differences, comment on the trigger that is responsible for the differences.

1. The president of the college fired John.
2. Who did the president of the college fire?
Unaccommodating presuppositions: A neogricean view.
In *Draft paper for Workshop on Presupposition Accommodation at The Ohio State University*.

Abusch, Dorit. 2002.
Lexical alternatives as a source of pragmatic presuppositions.

Logic and conversation.

Metalinguistic negation and pragmatic ambiguity.

Strawson, Peter F. 1950.
On referring.
*Mind* 59(235):320–344.