

Presupposition

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1 Introduction

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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

The king of France is bald \Rightarrow *There is a King of France*

The king of France is not bald \Rightarrow *There is a King of France*

If you have have offended the King of France, there will be a war. \Rightarrow *There is a King of France*

Did you meet the king of France? \Rightarrow *There is a King of France*

Ordinary entailments vs. presupposition

Entailment-blocking contexts: $\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \text{negation} & (\text{Neg}) \\ \text{conditional} & (\text{If } \dots) \\ \text{yes-no question} & (\text{YNQ}) \end{array} \right.$

Non-presupposed			
	You saw a king.	\implies	A king exists.
Neg	You didnt see a king.	$\not\implies$	A king exists.
If...	If you saw a king...	$\not\implies$	A king exists.
YNQ	Did you see a king?	$\not\implies$	A king exists.
Presupposed			
	You saw the king.	\implies	A king exists.
Neg	You didn't see the king.	\implies	A king exists.
If...	If you saw the king ...	\implies	A king exists.
YNQ	Did you see king?	\implies	A king exists.

Russell (1905)

The King of France is bald

$\exists x$	$\text{KofF}(x) \ \& \ (\forall y \text{KoF}(y) \rightarrow x = y) \ \&$ Kof exists Kof is unique	$\text{Bald}(x)$ Kof is bald
	Presupposed	Asserted

The King of France is not bald

$\exists x$	$\text{KofF}(x) \ \& \ (\forall y \text{KoF}(y) \rightarrow x = y) \ \&$ Kof exists Kof is unique	$\sim \text{Bald}(x)$ Kof is not bald
	Presupposed	Asserted

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?).

External Negation

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

$\sim \exists x$	KofF(x) & (∀yKoF(y) → x = y) &	Bald(x)
	Kof exists Kof is unique	Kof is bald
	Presupposed	Asserted

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)

Three truth values

What is the truth value of an external negation?

p	$\sim p$	p	q	$p \& q$
T	F	T	T	T
F	T	T	F	F
N	N	F	T	F
		F	F	F
		N	T	?
		T	N	?
		N	F	?
		F	N	?
		N	N	?

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.
- 3 Metalinguistic negation. Requires an *appropriate prior utterance* (Horn 1985).
- 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 ...*)

The cleft **construction** is a presupposition trigger

a. It was John who stole the cookie.	
b. It was not John who stole the cookie.	Someone stole the cookie
c. John stole the cookie.	
d. John didn't steal the cookie.	Someone stole the cookie

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.

Assignment: Presupposition

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

Write up and hand in 2, 4, 9, 10. (Due Apr 8, 2021)

Question 1

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?

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?

Clarification: How to test question presuppositions

Problem: Negated questions are sometimes very weird.

- a. *When did the president fire John?*
- b. *# When didn't the president fire John?*

Solution: Use suspension.

- a. *When did the president fire John, if he ever did?*
- b. *When didn't the president fire John?*

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Logic and conversation.

In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics: Speech Acts*, Vol. 3. Academic Press Inc.

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