

Pragmatics (2):

Presupposition, Speech Acts, Politeness

LING 1003 Language, Thought and Culture
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Today's Lecture

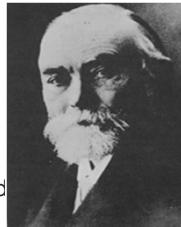
- Previously we looked at:
 - Pragmatics – intended speaker meaning
 - Context – physical and linguistic
 - Deixis – pointing with language in a context
- Today's Lecture
 - Presupposition
 - Speech Acts
 - Politeness

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Presupposition

- “We design our linguistic messages on the basis of large-scale assumptions about what our listeners already know”
Yule(2010: 133)
- Technical term: **presupposition**
- Borrowed by linguists from logic;
- Friedrich Frege in “On sense and reference”.



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Presupposition

- **Presupposition:** “what a speaker (or writer) assumes is true or known by the listener (or reader)” (Yule 2010: 133)
- **Constancy Under Negation Test:** part of an utterance meaning which remains truthful when the sentence is transformed into a negative form.
- Assertive sentences always contain some presupposition.
- The meaning of the sentences is composed of the assertive part of the sentence plus presupposition.

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Presupposition

Example 1

A. HKU is ranked 23rd in the world.
HKU is not ranked 23rd in the world.

Presupposition:

There is a university called HKU.

B. Germany manufactures reliable cars.
Germany does not manufacture reliable cars.

Presupposition:

Germany manufactures cars.

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Presupposition

C. Alan is tall.

Alan is not tall.

Presupposition:

There is a man called Alan.

D. Mary is married.

Mary is not married.

Presupposition:

There is a person called Mary.

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Presupposition Triggers


- Certain words that can signal the presence of presupposition in a sentence: presupposition triggers:
 - ✓ Regret
 - ✓ Realize
 - ✓ Forget
 - ✓ Stop
 - ✓ Begin
- If there one of these words in a sentence, then it means that the sentence contains a presupposition:

Example 2
 Jack stopped beating his wife.
 Jack hasn't stopped beating his wife.
 Presupposition:
 Jack had been beating his wife.

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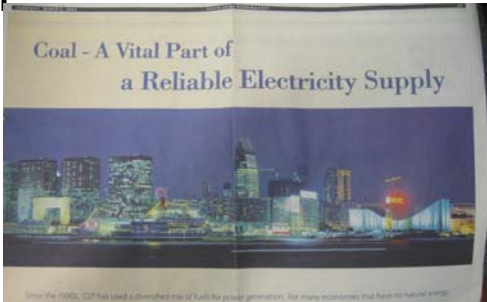
Presupposition in Advertising

- The "trick" of claiming something by presupposition rather than by directly asserting it is very widely used by lawyers and advertisers.



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Presupposition in Advertising




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Presupposition in Court



- Type of presupposition triggers: wh-words & how.
- In the following examples the tricky lawyer has tried to "sneak" some facts into his questions via presupposition:



Example 4

- What did you do before you started shoplifting?
- Why did you steal the camera from the shop?
- What time did you leave the scene of the crime?
- Which one of you pulled the trigger of the gun?

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Speech Acts

Example 5

- "I warned everyone that I could. I said to family members that one day, that Michael Jackson was going to wake up dead".
- "Domestos: Kills 99.9% of all known germs dead."
- "If I find out he's alright, I'm gonna kill him!"

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J. L. Austin

Ordinary Language Philosophy:

People communicate effectively and unproblematically with the language just the way it is.



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J. L. Austin

- “How to Do Things with Words”.
- Some utterances are used not just to state something but to **do** things:

Example 6

I apologize.

I promise to do better.

I name this ship “**Queen Elizabeth**”

I object to your proposal.

I declare the meeting open.

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Speech Acts

Utterances

Constatives

e. g. I'm British;
I'm Chinese,
He's tired,
They are together.

Performatives

e. g. I object to your proposal;

I promise to do it.

Other verbs: say,
protest, apologize,
deny, thank, etc.

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Performatives: Test

Example 7

I hereby apologize.

I hereby name this ship “Queen Elizabeth”.

I hereby object to your proposal.

I hereby declare the meeting open.

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Felicity Conditions

- Conditions which make performatives successful:

Condition 1:

- There must be a conventional procedure following a conventional effect;
- The circumstances and the persons must be appropriate.

Condition 2:

- The procedure must be executed:
 - Correctly;
 - Completely.



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Felicity Conditions

Condition 3:

Often:

- The person must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions, as specified in the procedure;
- If consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must do so.

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[Direct/Indirect Speech Acts]

Example 8
 Can you drive a car?
 Can you pass me the salt please?
 Its hot in here?
 Do you mind not being so noisy?

- Indirect speech act – the speakers intention is not expressed directly (e.g. asking to pass the salt, not about the ability of the hearer to do so).

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[Politeness]

- In a common sense: being polite - showing good manners and consideration for other people (e.g. open the door for a lady, give your seat to an elderly person in public transport).
- Linguistic politeness: the way people choose to speak and how the hearers react to their speech.

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[Politeness]

(Adapted from Peccei 1999)

Here are five utterances with an imperative structure. Assume that each one of them would be spoken by the host to a guest. Rearrange them in order of politeness:

- a) Take a look at this.
- b) Clean up the kitchen floor.
- c) Pass the salt.
- d) Have some more cake.
- e) Peel these potatoes.

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[Politeness]

(Adapted from Peccei 1999)

- In each of the following dialogues there are three alternative responses for the second speaker. Put them in increasing order of politeness:



Meridyth: Well, I've done that. I've dyed my hair blonde.
 Ed: a. You look beautiful.
 b. You look awful.
 c. You look amazing.

Tom: Do you like the wine I picked out?
 Gabriela: a. It's Italian, isn't it?
 b. Yes, I do.
 c. Not really.

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[Politeness]

- A significant view on linguistic politeness as a pragmatics phenomenon: "Politeness: some universals in language usage", **Penelope Brown** and **Stephen C. Levinson** (Max Plank Institute for Psycholinguistics, Netherlands).

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[Politeness]



- Concept of "**face**" – your public self-image
- Politeness – "showing awareness and consideration of another person's face" (Yule, 2010: 135).
- **Face-threatening act** – "a threat to another person's self-image" (Yule, 2010: 135).
- **Face-saving act** – "saying something that lessens the possible threat to another's face". (Yule, 2010: 135).

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References



Required reading:

- Yule, G. (2010). *The study of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 133 – 136.

Other references:

- Peccei, J. S. (1999). *Pragmatics*. London, N.Y.: Routledge.
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. London & N.Y. Longman: 1995.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.