Presupposition and entailment

Presupposition and entailment describe two different aspects of information that need not be stated as speakers assume it is already known by listeners [these concepts used to be much more central to pragmatics than they are now, but they are still important to understand the relationship between pragmatics and semantics]

Presupposition: something the speaker assumes to be the case before making an utterance. Speakers, not sentences, have presuppositions!! not the same meaning as in ordinary usage (‘John wrote Harry a letter, presupposing he could read’)!!

Entailment: something that logically follows from what is asserted in the utterance Sentences, not speakers, have entailments.

Example analysis:

- Mary's brother bought three horses.

Presuppositions:

Mary exists,

Mary has a brother,

Mary has only one brother,

Mary's brother is rich> speaker's subjective presuppositions, all can be wrong

Entailments:

Mary's brother bought something, bought three animals, two horses, one horse etc.> entailments follow from the sentence regardless of whether the speaker's beliefs are right or wrong

[Because of its logical nature, entailment is not generally discussed as much in contemporary pragmatics as the more speaker-dependent notion of presupposition]

PRESUPPOSITION

Presupposition is treated as a relationship between two propositions

Mary's dog is cute (= proposition p)

Mary has a dog (= proposition q)

p >> q (p presupposes q)

Negation does not change the relationship of presupposition

Mary's dog isn't cute (= NOT p)
Mary has a dog (= q)

NOT p >> q (NOT p presupposes q)

Constancy under negation= the presupposition of statement remains constant (i.e., true) even when that statement is negated

Everybody knows that John is married (= p)

Everybody doesn't know that John is married (= NOT p)

John is married (= q)

p >> q & NOT p >> q

>speakers disagree about validity of p, but not of q

**TYPES OF PRESUPPOSITION**

Linguistic forms (words, phrases, structures) are indicators (or triggers) of potential presuppositions which can only become actual presuppositions in contexts with speakers.

**A. Existential Presupposition**

speaker is committed to the existence of the entities named, e.g., the King of Sweden, the cat, the girl next door, your car, etc.

**B. Factive Presupposition**

certain verbs/construction indicate that something is a fact

Everybody KNOWS that John is married (>> John is married)

She didn't REALIZE he was ill (>> He was ill)

We REGRET telling him (>> We told him)

I WASN'T AWARE that she was sick (>> She was sick)

It ISN'T ODD that he left early (>> He left early)

I'M GLAD that it's over (>> It's over)

**C. Lexical Presupposition**

The use of a form with its asserted meaning is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that another, non-asserted, meaning is understood

He MANAGED to repair the clock (>> he tried to repair the clock)
Asserted meaning: he succeeded
He didn't MANAGE to repair the clock (>> he tried to repair the clock)

Asserted meaning: he failed
He STOPPED smoking (>> he used to smoke)

They STARTED complained (>> they weren't complaining before)

You're late AGAIN (>> You were late before)

**D. Structural Presupposition**

Certain sentence structures conventionally and regularly presuppose that part of the structure is already assumed to be true

**Wh-questions:**
When did he leave? (>> he left)

Where did you buy the bike? (>> You bought the bike)

This type of presupposition can lead listeners to believe that the information presented is necessarily true, rather than just the presupposition of the person asking the question

How fast was the car going when it ran the red light? (>> the car ran the red light)

If the question is answered with some estimate of the speed the speaker would appear to be accepting the truth of the presupposition (very popular with lawyers)

**E. Non-factive Presupposition**

Certain verbs/constructions indicate that something is not a fact / not true

I DREAMED that I was rich (>> I was not rich)

We IMAGINED we were in Hawaii (>> We were not in Hawaii)

He PRETENDS to be ill (>> He is not ill)

**F. Counterfactual Presupposition**

Structures mean that what is presupposed is not only not true, but is the opposite of what is true, i.e. contrary to facts

If you were my friend, you would have helped me (>> You are not my friend)
### SUMMARY

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<th>Example</th>
<th>Presupposition</th>
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<td>the X</td>
<td>&gt;= X exists</td>
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<td>factive</td>
<td>I regret leaving</td>
<td>&gt;= I left</td>
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<td>lexical</td>
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### Exercise:

Identify the respective presuppositions and classify them according to type

1. John didn’t realize that he was in debt  
   >> John was in debt factive

2. Before Strawson was even born, Frege noticed presuppositions  
   >> Strawson was born structural

3. If Hannibal had only had twelve more elephants, the Romance languages wouldn’t exist now  
   >> Hannibal didn’t have 12 more elephants counterfactual

4. John didn’t see the man with two heads  
   >> there exists a man with two heads existential

5. Carter returned to power  
   >> Carter was in power before lexical

6. Fred hallucinated that he had won a billion Dollars  
   >> Fred didn’t win a billion Dollars non-factive

7. Agatha accused Ian of plagiarism  
   >> Agatha thinks plagiarism is bad lexical
**Distinction between Entailment and Presupposition**

Entailment is a relation between sentence meanings, or propositions. (Sometimes, speaking loosely, we talk as though it were a relation between sentences.) Presupposition can also be seen as a relation between propositions, although many linguists (including George Yule) prefer to see presupposition as strictly pragmatic, and a relation between a speaker and a proposition. In any case it is important to see that these are two independent kinds of relations. A proposition which is presupposed in a particular utterance may or may not also be entailed.

We call implications preserved under negation presuppositions

We call implications not preserved under negation entailments

**II. Entailment (||-).**

A. A sentence (meaning) A entails B (A ||- B) if whenever A is true, then B must also be true. Entailment is a very strong kind of implication. It is a semantic relation — thus, it holds no matter what the facts of the world happen to be (it holds in all possible worlds).

B. Examples.

(1) a. Mary broke the window ||- The window broke
    b. Sue and Fred went to the party ||- Sue went to the party

**III. Presupposition (>>).**

A. 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.

B. 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.

(2) 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.
D. Some examples — the presupposition triggers are underlined in each example. For the first three categories, the presupposition is also an entailment of the S sentence (though not the negated version of S). For the last two, the presupposition is not entailed by S — these are sometimes called conventional implicatures.

1. Definite referring expressions (singular terms).
   (3) Mary saw/didn't see the horse with two heads >> There exists a horse with two heads
   (4) Kepler died/didn't die in misery >> There is some individual named Kepler

2. Change of state verbs (start, stop, continue, etc.).
   (5) Joan began/didn't begin planting tomatoes >> Joan had not been planting tomatoes before

3. Clefts, other focusing constructions.
   (6) What Bill lost was/wasn't his wallet >> Bill lost something
   (7) It was/wasn't his wallet that Bill lost >> Bill lost something
   (8) Bill lost/didn't lose HIS WALLET >> Bill lost something

   (9) Tu es/n’es pas très grande (Fr., ‘You (fam.) are/are not very tall’) >> The addressee is a close friend, a social inferior, or an animal

5. Various modifiers.
   (10) He is an Englishman; he is therefore brave >> Being brave is a consequence of being English
   (11) Even Bill could solve that problem >> Bill is the last person you’d expect to be able to solve the problem

**Presupposition triggers**

In English, presuppositions are usually triggered by lexical items. There are several tricks to find out whether a lexical item is a presupposition trigger or not. These tests are:

- The negation test
- The conditional test
- The question test

**Presupposition trigger test**

Consider the sentence:

Alex is a bachelor.

This sentence implies that Alex is male.
But are we dealing with a presupposition or entailment?

Does this presuppose: Alex is male?

**Negation**: Alex is not a bachelor.

**Implies**: Alex is male? YES

**Conditional**: If Alex is a bachelor, then ...

**Implies**: Alex is male? YES

**Question**: Is Alex a bachelor?

Implies: Alex is male? YES

Conclusion: being a bachelor presupposes being male.

Consider the sentence:

Butch knows that Zed is dead.

This sentence implies Zed is dead.

But are we dealing with a presupposition or entailment?

**Presupposition test**

Butch knows that Zed is dead.

Does this presuppose: Zed is dead?

**Negation**: Butch does not know that Zed is dead.

**Implies**: Zed is dead? YES

**Conditional**: If Butch knows that Zed is dead, then ...

**Implies**: Zed is dead? YES

**Question**: Does Butch know that Zed is dead?

**Implies**: Zed is dead? YES

**Conclusion**: knowing P presupposes

Presupposition triggers are not rare. English comes with a large variety of presupposition triggers.
**Possessives**

Example:

Mia likes her husband.

Mia does not like her husband.

Presupposition:

Mia has a husband.

**To regret**

Example:

Vincent regrets that he left Mia alone.

Vincent does not regret that he left Mia alone.

Presupposition:

Vincent left Mia alone

**To like**

Example:

Mia likes Vincent.

Mia does not like Vincent.

Presupposition:

Mia knows Vincent.

**To answer**

Example:

Butch answered the phone.

Butch did not answer the phone.

Presupposition:

The phone was ringing.

**Only**
Example:

Only Jules likes big kahuna burgers.
Not only Jules likes big kahuna burgers.

Presupposition:

Jules likes big kahuna burgers.

Again

Example:

Butch escaped again.
Butch did not escape again.

Presupposition:

Butch escaped once before.

To manage

Example:

Butch manage to start the chopper.
Butch did not manage to start the chopper.

Presupposition:

Butch had difficulties starting the chopper.

Third

Example:

Butch lost for the third time.
Butch did not loose for the third time.

Presupposition:

Butch lost twice before.

Continue

Example:
Butch continued his race.

Butch did not continue his race.

Presupposition:

Butch interrupted his race.

**To win**

Example:

Germany won the world cup.

Germany did not win the world cup.

Presupposition:

Germany participated in the world cup.

**Another**

Example:

Peter wants another beer.

Peter does not want another beer.

Presupposition:

Peter had at least one beer.

**To lie**

Example:

Butch lied to Marsellus.

Butch did not lie to Marsellus.

Presupposition:

Butch told something to Marsellus.

**Cleft construction**

Example:

It was Butch who killed Vincent.
It was not Butch who killed Vincent.

Presupposition:
Someone killed Vincent.

**Proper names**

Example:
Butch talked to Marsellus.
Butch did not talk to Marsellus.

Presupposition:
There is someone named Marsellus.

**Definite NP**

Example:
Butch talked to the boss.
Butch did not talk to the boss.

Presupposition:
There is a boss.

**Accommodation**

Example:
Vincent informed his boss.

Presupposition: Vincent has a boss.

What if we don’t have a clue whether Vincent has a boss or not?

Accommodation: incorporating missed information as long as this is not conflicting with other information