

Presupposition: A Semantic or Pragmatic Phenomenon?

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Abstract

There has been debate among linguists with regards to the semantic view and the pragmatic view of presupposition. Some scholars believe that presupposition is purely semantic and others believe that it is purely pragmatic. The present paper contributes to the ongoing debate and exposes the different ways presupposition was approached by linguists. The paper also tries to attend to (i) what semantics is and what pragmatics is in a unified theory of meaning and (ii) the possibility to outline a semantic account of presupposition without having recourse to pragmatics and vice versa. The paper advocates Gazdar's analysis, a pragmatic analysis, as the safest grounds on which a working grammar of presupposition could be outlined. It shows how semantic accounts are inadequate to deal with the projection problem. Finally, the paper states explicitly that the increasingly puzzling theoretical status of presupposition seems to confirm the philosophical contention that not any fact can be translated into words.

Key words: entailment, pragmatics, presupposition, projection problem, semantic theory

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I. Introduction

The nature of presupposition has been the subject of serious debate since early seventies. Attention was paid to presupposition mainly because of two reasons. The notion of presupposition involves the specification of the concepts of truth, falsity and logical form. Discussions of presupposition also broach a theory of meaning underlying the concept of logical form and extending well beyond it. Linguists, however, have used the notion “presupposition” in multitudinous ways. This could be explained by the fact that the use of the term “presupposition” is conditioned by the framework in which it is explicated. Put differently, specifying whether presupposition is a semantic or a pragmatic notion is a necessary assumption on which a grammar of presupposition could be outlined. This unfortunate, inconsistent use of the notion raises different, though related, questions: what is pragmatic and what is semantic in a unified theory of meaning – if there is one? Is it possible to outline a semantic account of presupposition without recourse to pragmatics and vice versa? Is it possible to do either semantics or pragmatics without drawing on philosophy?

Given these facts, this paper is in no sense intended as a full exegesis of the notion “presupposition”. It will expose the ways pragmaticists and semanticists approached presupposition and will argue that presupposition is a pragmatic rather than semantic phenomenon. To this end, this paper will raise “the projection problem for presupposition” and show that semantic accounts are inadequate to solve it. For one thing, the success of any theory of presupposition is measured against how much of the projection problem it can solve.

II. Semantic Presupposition

One of the conditions a semantic theory can fulfill is to characterize and explain the systematic relations between words and between sentences. Semantic presupposition is held to be a relation between sentences. It is often defined by reference to entailment along the following lines. Entailment is a relation between two sentences wherein the truth of the second necessarily follows from the first. One cannot assert the truth of one and deny that of the other. To put it another way, S_1 semantically entails S_2 if and only if in every situation which makes S_1 true, makes S_2 true as well. However, if S_2 is false S_1 must be false. On the other hand, S_1 semantically presupposes S_2 if and only if in all situations in which S_1 is true, S_2 is true, and in all situations where S_1 is false, S_2 is true (Lyons, 1977). Negation is a useful test to draw the distinction between entailment and presupposition (Kempson, 1975, Levinson, 1983). Consider (1),

- (1) Bill managed to come on time
- (2) Bill came on time
- (3) Bill tried to come on time

Should we negate (1), as in (4), we will not be able to infer (2). Even so, the inference in (3) is preserved, and, thus, is shared by both (1) and its negation (4).

- (4) Bill did not manage to come on time

In this sense (3) is a semantic presupposition of both (1) and (4). Examples (1-4) reveal that whenever (1) is true, (2) must be true; but when (4) is true (2) need not be true. That is, (1) entails (2) but (4) does not. This implies that negation changes sentences’ entailments but leaves presuppositions as they are.

Central to semantic presupposition is what Kempson (1977) calls “presuppositional logic” or three-valued logic. It has been suggested (e.g. Fodor (1979)) that the logic on which semantic representations of sentences is based is not two-valued (true and false). Rather, it allows for a third possibility: neither true nor false (truth valueless). By way of illustration, a sentence like (5)

(5) The Bishop of Morocco is wise
is true if there is a Bishop of Morocco. Should not such a person exist, the question whether the sentence is true or false simply does not arise. We, therefore, do not assign any truth value to (5). This is the type of argument Strawson (1950) advanced against Russell’s claim that sentences like (5) are false. Strawson maintains that the implication that the individual in question exists is a background assumption against which the assertion makes sense.

Thus far, two features characterizing semantic presupposition have been specified. On the one hand, it is identified in the light of the logical form of the sentence. Taken together with the fact that semantics deals with systematic relations between linguistic units (words and sentences), these two characteristics imply that presupposition is a stable, invariant notion. Unfortunately, this is not the case. That is, the behavior of presupposition, as an inference, is marked by variability. Further logical definitions cannot capture presupposition in all the sentences of a natural language.

The explanation of the first claim is subsumed under the rubric of the projection problem for presupposition (will be attended to much later). A semantic theory of presupposition will wrongly predict that (6) and (7) share the same presupposition. In fact, only (6) presupposes (8).

- (6) If John has a car, he won’t regret working far away from home.
- (7) If John works far away from home, he won’t regret doing so.
- (8) John works far away from home.

A second objection to semantic presupposition can be seen along the following lines. It is widely accepted that what we wish to recognize as presuppositions does not lie in their logical properties. For one thing, a logically true sentence like (9) would be judged as being somehow extraordinary.

- (9) Either devils exist or they do not exist.

Moreover, a logical account of presupposition is unable to cater for presuppositions of speech acts other than assertion. The logical definition in (10) does not extend to a sentence like (11) which carries the presupposition that the addressee used to smoke for some time.

- (10) $A \gg B$ if and only if $A \models \& \sim A \models B$
- (11) When did you stop smoking?

Without belabouring the point, it is clear that no semantic theory of presupposition could be viable since semantics concerns itself with the characterization of stable meanings associated with linguistic expressions. Presupposition, as will be illustrated, is not a stable phenomenon and “does not belong to any orderly semantics”, (Levinson 1983, p. 142). This could be seen by investigating “the projection problem”, a characteristic which distinguishes presupposition from entailment.

III. The Projection Problem for Presupposition

The projection problem for presupposition² is the problem of explaining “how the presuppositions and assertions of a complex sentence are related to the presuppositions and assertions of the clauses it contains” (Langendoen & Savin 1971, p. 55). That is, the problem is posed by the fact that when a clause carrying a presupposition is embedded in a larger sentential structure, then sometimes the whole subordinate sentence maintains the “basic” presupposition. Sometimes the presupposition is weakened in such a way that it survives as a suggestion. And sometimes it disappears all together. By way of example, consider the simple clause in (12) and see how its presupposition “John used to play the lottery” varies in strength when the clause is embedded in another matrix sentence.

- (12) John has stopped smoking
 (a) Mary knows that John has stopped smoking
 (b) This entails that John used to smoke
 (c) If John has stopped smoking, Mary will be pleased
 (d) Maybe John has stopped smoking
 (e) If John used to smoke, he has stopped smoking
 (f) If John has stopped smoking, he used to smoke.

It is clear that the projection of presupposition in the examples above is not systematic. The presupposition of (12) is preserved in (a) and (b), weakened to some extent in (c) and (d), and there is no trace of it in (e) and (f). Why is this so?

One way to get around this problem is to posit that the function of presupposition-triggers³ varies according to the structure of, and the words contained in, the sentence where they occur. Presupposition-triggers are lexical items which help us spot the source of presupposition. They are words which, because of their inherent semantic nature, implicate certain propositions that we call presuppositions. The source of presupposition in (1), for instance, is the verb “manage”. (1) does not contain anything which would prevent us from making the inference in (3). This is not the case for (12), where the trigger “has stopped” does not function in (c-f). The presupposition is suspended because (12) is embedded in a conditional construction in (c), (e) and (f), and it is weakened to a noticeable degree in (d) because (12) is “qualified” by the word “maybe”.

Another case in point is the way the trigger “again” in (13) ceases to function. (13) entails, *inter alia*, (14) and presupposes (15) because of the iterative adverbial “again”.

- (13) The two banks were robbed again last night
 (14) A bank was robbed again last night
 (15) The two banks were robbed before.

Should (13) occur as the antecedent of a conditional as in (16), the entailment (14) disappears, but the presupposition (15) is “inherited” by the matrix sentence.

- (16) If the two banks were robbed again, their managers will lose their jobs.

The presupposition (15), however, vanishes under disjunctive expressions as (17) illustrates.

- (17) Either the two banks were robbed again or the tillers were expelled by the Managers.

Another factor which can circumvent the function of presupposition-triggers is of a pragmatic nature. Triggers operate according to the assumption (s) of the speaker and the context where the utterance takes place. As (12) above illustrates, if one asserts that X stopped doing, then one presupposes that X had been doing it. However, under negation: X as not stopped doing presupposes either X continues doing or X never started doing. Under the second analysis the presupposition disappears once again.

With regard to the projection problem, Lagendean & Savin (1975, p. 57) claim that “compound sentences inherit all of the presuppositions of their constituent clauses”. That this prediction is erroneous is demonstrated by the counterexamples in (12 – 17). This remark is sufficient to prove that their semantic account of presupposition has no explanatory value⁴.

So far, our discussion has been driving at two conclusions. On the one hand, the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't behavior of presupposition strongly suggests that this phenomenon cannot be accounted for within a framework concerned with the stable semantic properties of linguistic expressions. Put differently, any theory which treats presupposition on truth-conditional or logical grounds is doomed to inadequacy. On the other hand, the assorted projection problem turns out to be the “genuine” feature which distinguishes presupposition from other systematic relations holding between linguistic units. Therefore, a pragmatic account is essential to a “correct” theory of presupposition.⁵

IV. Pragmatic presupposition

In the definition of pragmatic presupposition put forward by linguists, attention was paid to the speaker, the context of utterance and the “knowledge” the conversants share. Stalnaker (1974), for example, offers the following definition:

A proposition B is a pragmatic presupposition of a speaker in a given context just in case the speaker assumes or believes that B, assumes or believes that his audience assumes or believes that B, and assumes or believes that his audience recognizes that he is making these assumptions or has these beliefs. (p. 200)

Stalnaker (1974) suggests that pragmatic presupposition is what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in a conversation. This definition would reasonably account for the lack of truth value of sentences with false “presupposition”. Instead of viewing (18) - with the presupposition (19) – as neither true nor false, the advocates of pragmatic presupposition would say that it is inappropriate. That is, to utter a sentence whose presupposition is, and is known to be, untrue would be simply to produce an infelicitous utterance, rather than, as semanticists would have it, a truth-valueless sentence.

- (18) The Bishop of Morocco does not drink
 (19) There is a Bishop of Morocco.

Though background knowledge is held to be an essential element in the utterance interpretation, we cannot do without the verbal discourse itself and the context of utterance. Background knowledge is to be taken into consideration together with the semantic representation of a sentence uttered at a particular context. More specifically, in sentence interpretation, the principle of pragmatic presupposition should supplement, rather than replace, the semantic representation (logical form). For one thing, pragmatics task is to explain the relation between ways of understanding utterances and the contexts in which they are uttered (Levinson 1983 p. 1-34). Pragmatic principles, Atlas (1979, p. 273) explains, “take as input the context and the logical form that renders the contextually determined meaning of an utterance”. By way of illustration, if I tell you that (18), there is no a priori reason for you to suppose that I am flouting Grice’s maxims, (Grice 1975). You will think of the negation as either predicate or sentential. Therefore, you are likely to use my sentential negation evidence to infer the supposition that the existence of the Bishop of Morocco is denied. To the extent this analysis is right an adequate account of presupposition should draw on both semantics and pragmatics.

Definitions of presupposition like Stalnaker’s do not solve the increasing puzzles of the notion. A correct conception of presupposition should be able to outline a grammar of presupposition which caters for the projection problem. Many attempts were made to fulfill this condition, but the theories proposed were beset with counterexamples (Katz, 1979). Nonetheless, the presupposition accounts of Karttunen and Peters (1979) and Gazdar (1979 a,b) are adequate to varying degrees. They both recognize that presupposition constitutes an aspect of meaning distinct from the kind of semantic content which is the subject matter of truth conditional semantics. The importance of their theories lies in the fact that they aimed at solving the projection problem. In what follows a brief overview of their approaches will be outlined along the following lines.

Karttunen and Peters (1979) isolate three kinds of presupposition without naming them ‘presuppositions’. Instead, they make use of Grice’s term “implicature”. They assume that what linguists and philosophers call “presupposition” is similar to the inference Grice identifies as “Implicature”⁶. Karttunen and Peters (1979) call particularized conversational implicature the counterfactual presupposition of subjunctive conditionals because the latter behaves exactly as we expect the former to behave. They classify the presupposition in (20) as separate from all the other presuppositions because (a) it is not present with all subjunctive sentences as (22) and (b) it does not exhibit the properties of projecting presuppositions to complex sentences as in (24)

(20) If it were snowing, the ground would be white

(21) It is not snowing

(22) If this man were welsh, he would speak exactly the way he does

(23) (Maybe) this man is German

(24) Bob realizes that Roger is here

The presupposition in (25), according to Karttunen and Peters (1979) is a conversational implicature since it is cancelable under sentential negation as (26) shows. They call the presupposition a generalized conversational implicature because the verb “criticize” cannot be used performatively to produce speech acts of the same kind that it can be used to report. To put it another way, the behavior of this lexical item is simply “an idiosyncrasy”. The generation of this

implicature, that is, “is not dependant on particular characteristics peculiar to certain contexts of utterance” (p. 11)

- (25) Bill criticised John for going out with his wife
- (26) Bill did not criticise John for going out with his wife because John did not go out with Bill’s wife

Karttunen and Peters identify a third type of presupposition which they label as “conventional implicature”. Drawing on Grice’s theory, they maintain that the inferences in (28) are implicated -rather than asserted- by (21). These inferences are conventional implicatures in that they are evoked by the presence of the word “even”.

- (27) Even Jill hates semantics
- (28) a. Other people besides Jill hate semantics
 - b. Of the people in question, Jill is the least likely to hate semantics.

Conventional implicatures cannot be suspended because of the contradiction in (29).

- (29) Even Jill hates semantics, but no one else does.

It should be noted that Karttunen and Peters approach differs from other pragmatic accounts of presupposition, namely Stalnaker (1971), in that they make use of the notion of conversational implicatures without defining it in terms of “felicity” or “appropriate”. These terms themselves are too vague to be accepted as primitives of theory of meaning. Should Karttunen and Peters’ conception of presupposition be as has illustrated, how can they explicitly describe it?

Karttunen and Peters tried to assign their analysis a role to play in Montague’s grammar. The rationale behind this was partly to extend this grammar and partly to give their conception of presupposition its *raison d’être*. Before showing how this was done, a word about Montague’s grammar is in order. Montague’s semantics, Partee (1975) explains, derives its impetus from the principle of compositionality. That is, the meaning of complex constructions is determined by the meaning of their parts and the syntactic rule by which they are derived. Clauses are formed in a bottom-up, rather than top-down, fashion. While a sentence is generated, its semantic representations are built one after the other in parallel to the construction of its surface syntactic form. Montague (1974), Partee (1975) reports, treated only the truth-conditional aspect of meaning.

What is new in Karttunen and Peters’ proposal is that sentences are “made up” of two kinds of meaning; namely, extension expression, the meaning expressed by the sentence itself, and implicature expression (presupposition) which signifies what the sentence conventionally implicates. They posit that these expressions are listed in the lexicon with each phrase. To each phrase derived by a syntactic rule, the “two-tiered” semantic rule assigns an extension expression and an implicature expression as a function of the extension and implicature expressions of the phrases from which it is derived.

In their attempt to solve the projection problem, Karttunen and Peters propose that each presupposition is associated with a “heritage expression” which would govern its projection. Accordingly, they classified embedding constructions into “holes”, “plugs” and “filters”. The first class includes factive verbs (*regret*), aspectual verbs (*begin*) and implicatives. Holes let through all the presuppositions of their component sentence. The second class includes, inter alia, verbs of saying (*ask, promise, warn*). Plugs block the presuppositions of the whole complex sentence. They stop functioning when the complex sentence is used in the first person present tense or when the complement is an indirect question. The third class contains the expressions *if, then, and, and either ... or*. These filters block the presuppositions of one clause whenever, taken together with the context, certain complex conditions relating to the entailments of the other clause are met.

Nonetheless, this system of heritage expressions does not provide powerful means for deriving presuppositions in all sorts of English sentences. Let us consider a couple of counterexamples. Karttunen and Peters characterize negation as a hole because presuppositions survive sometimes under negation (especially internal (predicate) negation). (30) and (31) stand as clear counterexamples to their claim.

- (30) I don't know that Bob is a tutor
- (31) I am not aware that her parents live in Morocco.

Plugs, as mentioned earlier, have the characteristic of blocking presuppositions. Consider the examples in (32-7).

- (32) John claims that even Bill goes out with your wife
- (33) The addressee has a wife
- (34) Bill is the least likely person to go out with the addressee's wife.
- (35) The doctor did not tell me that my heart won't function properly again
- (36) The speaker had a heart!
- (37) The speaker's heart used to function properly before.

Intuitively, (32) presupposed (33) and, arguably, (34). (35) presupposes (36) and (37). This is not predicted by Karttunen and Peters' theory. Instead, it wrongly predicts that (32) and (35) do not have the presuppositions we have assigned to them, since “claim” and “tell” are both plugs and, thus, prevent the presuppositions of the complement from becoming presuppositions of the matrix sentence. We can conclude, then, that the plugs, holes, and filters theory of presuppositional projection is not valid in so far as it is unable to accommodate these counterexamples.

Karttunen and Peter's theory of presupposition, Seuren (1985), Levinson (1983) and Gazdar (1979a,b) argue, does not differ in inflexibility from semantic theories of presupposition, though it differs from them in not including presupposition inferences in the truth conditions of sentences. In this connection, Gazdar (1979) maintains that

If [Karttunen and Peters'] theory made the correct predictions about the presuppositions of compound sentences of arbitrary complexity, then an unmotivated ambiguity of negation and an ad hoc taxonomy of Complementisable verbs would be a small price to pay . (p. 111)

Another attempt to build a grammar for presupposition is outlined in Gazdar (1979 a,b). His analysis hinges on two assumptions. On the one hand, a natural language, to Gazdar, consisted of two meaning expressions: sentences which are associated with potential presuppositions (what he calls “pre-suppositions”) and utterances which he associates with actual presuppositions. On the other hand, unlike Karttunen and Peters, Gazdar (1979) takes presuppositions to be cancelable. Worth nothing is that he uses “pre-suppositions” as a technical tool to specify actual presuppositions. He explains that “they are what the presuppositions would be if there was no ‘projection problem’, no ‘ambiguity’ in negative sentences and no context sensitivity” (1979 b, p. 124). Therefore, he does not attach any theoretical importance to ‘pre-suppositions’.

Gazdar’s (1979 b) approach assumes that a discourse context is a set of taken-for-granted propositions. When one speaks in a given context one “increments” this context by adding other propositions one intends to get across to one’s audience. This increment works in the following fashion: entailments are added first, followed by conversational implicatures and then presuppositions. He supplements this ordering by the proviso that a proposition may be added if it does not contradict with the propositions already established.

Gazdar’s position that presuppositions are cancellable is based on the assumption given above. By way of example, consider (38).

- (38) John does not regret losing the game, because, in fact, he won.
 (39) John lost the game.

Since the speaker knows that John did win the game, there is no chance for the pre-supposition (39) to be inherited by the complex sentence (38). Notice that the affirmative sentence corresponding to (38) - i.e. (40) - entails its factive complement which is not cancellable. This leads to the anomaly in (40).

- (40)* John regrets having lost the game, because, in fact, he won.

Again, although (41) pre-supposes (42), it does not presuppose it everywhere, since in most contexts it is known that there is no Bishop of Morocco.

- (41) If there is a Bishop of Morocco, the Bishop of Morocco is not wise.
 (42) There is a Bishop of Morocco

- (43) It is consistent with all the speaker knows that there is not a Bishop of Morocco.

Given the definite description in the consequent, (41) potentially presupposed (42). However, this is cancelled by the implicature of the conditional construction in (43). For one thing, (43) will be added to the discourse domain, in the sense of Seuren (1985), before the pre-sup-position (42), and, thus, block this addition on grounds of inconsistency. The reader may have noticed that in Gazdar’s model the order of sentence constituents is irrelevant in presupposition assignment and

cancellation. Following Karttunen and Peters, Gazdar assumes that any presupposition trigger has its own presupposition recorded in the lexicon or elsewhere.

On Strawson view of presupposition sentences like (44) are paradoxical, because they assert the denial of their own presuppositions. Under Gazdar's analysis, however, (44) does pre-suppose that there is a Bishop of Morocco. There is no theoretically significant motivation to think of the logical form of (44) as different from that of (45)

- (44) The Bishop of Morocco does not exist.
 (45) The Bishop of Morocco does not drink.

Thus far, we have considered cases where the entailment or implicature of the sentence 'suspend', to borrow Gazdar's term, one of its presuppositions. There are cases where the discursive context itself cancels pre-supposition. The discourse (text) in (46), for instance, does not have (47) as presupposition.

- (46) You say that someone in this room speaks four languages. Well, it could be. But it certainly isn't Adrien who speaks four languages. And it certainly isn't Kim...Therefore no one in this room speaks four languages.
 (47) Someone in this room speaks four languages.

Because of the clefts constructions, the third, fourth and subsequent sentences (but not the last) pre-suppose that the speaker knows that (47). The first sentence, however, implicates that for all the speaker knows (47) is not the case. Once this sentence is added to the context, it automatically suspends the pre-supposition inferred from the subsequent cleft sentences.

Simpler instances of this case characterize sentences conjoined with "*before*" as (48) shows.

- (48) The scientist died before he finished the experiment
 (49) The scientist died
 (50) The scientist finished the experiment
 (51) Nobody does anything after death

Given a context containing (51) as real-world knowledge, (51) will suffice to cancel (50), a pre-supposition of (48).

Given this brief survey of Gazdar's approach, one can safely take it that this theory has considerably reduced the puzzles posed by the behavior of presupposition. Though there are some counterexamples to this theory (we won't go into these here), presupposition is predictable to a noticeable degree in his grammar. The explanatory value of Gazdar's theory in connection with the projection problem manifests itself when we measure it against other pragmatic accounts of presupposition.

Other theories which also view presupposition as a multi-tiered phenomenon are put forward by Wilson and Sperber (1979) and Bickerton (1979). What is common between these two

proposals is that they both draw on the syntactic surface structure of sentences to account for presupposition behavior. Bickerton makes the strong claim that the source of presupposition is purely syntactic; whereas Wilson and Sperber resort to the syntactic surface structure of sentences after they have assigned to them semantic and pragmatic interpretations.

Wilson and Sperber (1979) propose that an adequate account of presupposition should be of a semantic-pragmatic nature. Their analysis hinges on the assumptions that any sentence is a set of ordered entailments. These entailments are ordered according to their “prominence”, in the light of the semantic, lexical and phonological properties of the sentence. The question which seems pertinent here is: how semantics, pragmatics and syntax interact?

Wilson and Sperber (1979) maintain that a semantic account will have to specify all the entailments of the sentence being described. They also noted that understanding an utterance involves establishing its relevance as intended by the speaker. Further they make use of Chomsky’s (1972) observation to suggest that for each of the entailments generated by semantics, there is a particular surface syntactic constituent to which it is linked by means of “variable substitution”. They call this kind of entailment “Grammatically Specified Entailment” or “Focal Range” (Wilson and Sperber 1979, p. 313). Applying this approach to (52), the focal range is provided in (53).

- (52) She has stolen all my books
 (53) a. She has stolen all someone’s books
 b. She has stolen all of something
 c. She has stolen something
 d. She has done something
 e. She has done something to all my books
 f. She had stolen some of my books
 g. She has stolen all of something of mine
 h. Someone has stolen all my books
 i. Something happened

The ordering given in (53) is pragmatically interpreted in terms of relevance. That is, the point of (52) - as an utterance- lies in the increment of information added to the background to obtain the elementary presupposition. The higher ordered entailments are the most relevant, and, thus, likely to contain the point of the utterance. Each proposition in the foreground is more relevant than the one below it. The point of (52), for instance, is not that she has stolen something, but exactly what it is that she has stolen (assuming, of course, that the focal range is all my books). The point of saying (52) is whatever information that has to be added to (53-a) to obtain (52).

Wilson and Sperber (1979) conclude that the mechanics of variable substitution brings with it a distinction between five groups of entailment which behave differently in pragmatic interpretation⁷.

What Wilson and Spencer’s analysis aimed at is building semantic representations in such a way that pragmatic principles could mechanically operate on them. Unfortunately their “tidy” theory collapses when contextual and discursal considerations are brought into play. It is widely

accepted that contextual assumption and modes of discourse suspend presuppositions. Accordingly, such a theory is likely to make the wrong predictions about what inferences participants make from sentences in context. Towards the end of their outline, Wilson and Spencer somehow felt that the way they have exploited entailment is likely to bring about the problems (especially the projection problem) semantic accounts of presupposition run into. However, they are not in a position to retreat to an account of presupposition in terms of conversational implicature. For one thing, they maintain that “the status of conversational implicature seems just as unclear as that of presuppositions themselves” (p. 301).

Bickerton (1979) tried to show that presuppositions presuppose because of the nature of syntax. He has used conjunction as a test to isolate three kinds of inference. He calls the first “strong entailment”. Given a pair of sentences A and B, where A strongly entails B, *and*-conjunction of A and B results in ungrammatical sentences irrespective of the order of conjuncts. By way of example, (54) strongly entails (55), which makes (56) an ill-formed construction.

- (54) John managed to come on time
- (55) John came on time
- (56) *John came on time and he managed to come on time

The second inference Bickerton identifies is called “presupposition”: A presupposes B if the *and*-conjunction of A and B results in a grammatical sentence when A is the first conjunct, but not when B is the first conjunct as the examples in (57-60) show.

- (57) Mary regretted that John could not come
- (58) John could not come
- (59) John could not come and Mary regretted that he could not come
- (60) Mary regretted that John could not come and he could not come

The third inference Bickerton offers is “weak entailment”: A weakly entails B where *but*-conjunction yields well-formed sentences irrespective of the order of conjuncts, while *and*-conjunction yields well-formed sentences except for cases marked by “a presuppositional reading”. These characteristics are illustrated by (61), (62) and (63) respectively.

- (61) John was trying to finish his essay, but he hadn't finished it yet
- (62) My books were stolen and it was Mary who stole them
- (63) *It was Mary who stole my books and someone stole them

Bickerton's finding reads as (64).

- (64) If S_1 strongly entails S_2 , S_1 may neither precede nor follow S_2 ; if S_1 presupposes S_2 , S_1 may follow but not precede S_2 ; if S_1 weakly entails S_2 , S_1 may either precede or follow S_2 (p. 246).

To supplement his analysis, Bickerton broaches the extra-linguistic factors that are brought to bear on sentence interpretation. However, he does not describe how these factors fit in his framework

nor does he specify the contexts where the inferences he has identified can and cannot survive. Therefore, the explanatory value of Bickerton's theory is very limited. What we need is a grammar able to predict the behavior of presupposition, rather than a series of syntactic facts arising from the nature of presupposition.

Conclusion

We have considered briefly all kinds of presupposition definitions linguists put forward in the 70s: semantic, pragmatic, semantic-pragmatic, and syntactic. Using Gazdar's model as evidence, we have illustrated how Gazdar uses implicature to cancel presupposition, which qualifies his analysis to achieve a reasonably accurate prediction of presupposition behavior in embedding constructions. The multitudinous uses of the notion "presupposition" running through the abundant literature suggest that, all else being equal, presupposition is a collection of distinct species: some semantic others pragmatic. But the pragmatic side of this hybrid seems to be of more importance than the semantic side. However, how to draw a clear-cut distinction between the two sides is the puzzling question pending on further research. This implies that there is much more to "presupposition" than this paper has been able to expose.

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Footnotes

1. The term was first used by Frege (1892) and defined by Strawson (1964) to explain the definite referring noun phrase and its referent (Lyons 1977). See Kempson (1975:47-51) for an exposition of the controversy of Strawson and Russell over the King of France is bold, which represents the beginning of the long-standing controversy over the nature of "presupposition".
2. It was first called this by Lagadoen and Savin (1971)
3. For a list of presuppositional-triggers see Lewinson (1983:181-5)
4. For more counterexamples to this hypothesis, see Soams (1979)
5. Seuren (1985) proposes that PP is a semantic phenomenon. But semantic to him is "the theory of interpretation of sentences in use". Only because he maintains that discourse plays a systematic role in interpretation, that he does not use the term "pragmatic" to approach PP.
6. According to Grice (1975), if the utterance of a sentence X in a given context allows the inference Y even though Y is beyond what the speaker actually says, then s/he had implicated Y and Y is an implicature of the utterance of X. Grice proposes that there are two kinds of implicature: Conversational and conventional. He associates the first with his notion of cooperative conversation, in which the participants observe certain conversational maxims (i.e. quantity, quality, relevance and manner). Further, he divides

conversational implicatures into particularized and generalized according to the extent to which they depend on a particular context of utterance. He takes the second implicature (conventional) to arise from the conventional meaning of lexical items and the grammatical constructions associated with the sentence.

7. See the list of these entailments in Wilson & Sperber (1979 p. 321)

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