"Presupposition" Tradition and Development

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"Presupposition", since brought about by the famous philosopher Gottlob Frege, has been a specific interest for many philosophers, semanticists as well as pragmaticists. Different representatives' perspectives are discussed and compared in this paper which therefore intends to seek for a rationalized supposition for "presupposition".

Keywords: presupposition, entailment, projection, context

Introduction

The study of preposition can be dated back from Gottlob Frege, the pioneer of analytic philosopher more than a hundred years ago. Frege's view is that if anything is asserted, there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have a reference. Since then, it has aroused heated discussion in the field of philosophy. After the Russellian and Wittgensteinian trends, it gradually moved from the field of philosophy to the uprising linguistic territory, especially semantics. However, logicians' analysis seems not to be able to manage because speakers' intention frequently got involved. Therefore, it has become a hot topic in pragmatics in 1970s. Major controversy lies between semanticist representative Jerrold Katz in her "A Solution to the Projection Problem for Presupposition" and Janet Fodor in her "In Defense of the Truth-Value Gap", and their pragmaticist counterpart R. C. Stalnaker in his "Pragmatic Presuppositions", G. Yule in his "Presupposition and Entailment".

Philosophers' Conclusion

Philosophers mainly take a reference angle and their summary of presupposition is:

1. Referring phrases and temporal clauses (for example) carry presuppositions to the effect that they do in fact refer;
2. A sentence and its negative counterpart share the same set of presuppositions;
3. In order for an assertion or a sentence to either true or false, its presuppositions must be true or satisfied. (He, 2007)

Viewed from the above three points, it's obvious that a typical philosophical solution focuses on "fact", logical, truth-valued ("true or false"), and excluded ("negation" as polarity suggested). Therefore, it has so many conditions and constraints that it is universal in name while hardly verified.

Semanticists' Division

Following the pioneering philosophers' footprints, semanticists have made a division between presupposition and entailment as shown in the following sentence tokens. "My friend is a bachelor" entails he is adult and male while presupposes I have a certain friend, or my "that" certain friend exists. So, the distinction still lies in the

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lexical level. It seems the word "bachelor" itself entails the properties of "adult" + "male". Or, they are the hyponym meanings of the word "bachelor". However, the word "bachelor" certainly has other identity, such as "a university student who has finished his four years' study and graduated officially with a diploma". Here, it seems a pure logical solution's vulnerability cannot rescue or otherwise speaker's intention or context is inevitable to get involve. We'll refer to this in later part of this paper.

Pragmaticists' Studies—Presupposition as Either Semantic or Pragmatic Concept

In his "Pragmatic Presuppositions" published in 1974, Stalnaker casts a binary taxonomy of what is presupposition, i.e., semantic as well as pragmatic perspective separately. Preposition is on one hand regarded as a semantic relation holding between sentences or propositions which draw the distinction between presupposition and assertion in terms of the content or truth-conditions of the sentence uttered or the proposition expressed (Stalnaker, 1974, p. 738). On the other hand, a pragmatic analysis toward presupposition claims the distinction between presupposition and assertion should be drawn according to the situation—the attitudes and intentions of the speaker and his audience. In his argument for the latter viewpoint, Stalnaker points out the pragmatic nature of "presupposition".

Presupposition and Entailment

To clarify the by and by merged borderline between semantics and pragmatics and identify a proper relationship between presupposition and entailment, G. Yule in his famous book *Pragmatics* published in 1996 reclaimed this relation. Yule starts with a common ground that presupposition and entailment are both what is communicated but not said. Then, he defines presupposition as something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance while entailment is something that logically follows from what is asserted in the utterance (Yule, 1996, p. 761). So, speakers have presuppositions while sentences have entailments.

He further classifies presupposition into several types as shown in Table 1 as below.

Table 1

Presupposition Types

Type	Example	Presupposition
Existential	The *X*	>>*X* exists
Factive	I regret leaving	>>I left
Non-factive	He pretended to be happy	>>He wasn't happy
Lexical	He managed to escape	>>He tried to escape
Structural	When did she die	>>She died
Counterfactual	If I weren't ill	>>I am ill

Source: Yule, 1996, p. 766.

This table of classification clearly shows a broadened scope of presupposition that it exists even in "lexical" level. Actually, it reflects the nature of the speaker's intention of diction. It is definitely a bold and correct step not only in lexical level, but also includes such key words as "factive" and "structural" which are formerly logical and grammatical factors. No doubt they all contribute to presupposition and therefore to pragmatics. Fortunately, the borderline between presupposition and entailment is not as vague or clear held by different people as that between semantics and pragmatics. However, projection problem seems more intricate than what we've discussed so far.

Projection

The projection problem, along with the Russellian controversy or kinds of other complexes or scepticism, is one of the recent focuses in the discussions around presupposition. Not like $1 + 1 = 2$, the mathematic equation, the total meaning of a sentence does not equal to the sum of the meaning of its subordinate clauses. In other words, some clause's meaning does not "project" into the whole.

Nobody realized that John is lying.
John is lying.
I imagined that John is lying.
John is not lying. (=-b)
I imagined that John is lying and nobody realized that he is lying.
Yule's analysis is as follows:
Sa >> (presupposes) Sb
Sc >> -Sb
Sc & a >> -Sb

The Stanford Logical Definition of Presupposition (hereafter briefed as SLDP) holds a different view that since a negates c in e, -b cannot be achieved. Instead, e has a logical status other than true or false, i.e., a third value which is neither true nor false. In the case above, if the belief factor be filtered from "imagine" in Sc, Se proves neither true nor false according to SLDP. Noel Burton-Roberts, however, proposes instead his own Revised Logical Definition of Presupposition (RLDP), which is based on weak and strong entailments: If S1 is true and S2 is true, S2 will be a weak entailment of S1. However, S2 will be a strong entailment of S1 if (1) S2 is a weak entailment of S1, and (2) wherever S2 is false, S1 is false. When S2 is a weak entailment of S1 but not a strong entailment of S1, S2 will be a presupposition of S1. B-R treats the third logical status as a gap and coined a concept of generalized presupposition: "S2 is a generalized presupposition of S1 if and only if the non-truth of S2 renders S1 liable to lack of truth value" (Chen, 1991, p. 171). In the aforementioned examples, Sc (or rather Cc (the capitalized C refers to "Clause")) in Sc & a is a generalized presupposition of Sa (or Ca). Actually, it still does not change anything except for another new technical term. This may cause another problem in its workings instead of a real "solution" to the original simple question. The advantages of the two approaches are obvious. More and more linguists are realizing formal logic, or rather the traditional semantics itself cannot be the key to presupposition. Context as a very important notion in pragmatics enters the academic scope.

CCPs Theory

CCPs theory is the short form of Context Change Potentials brought about by Irene Heim in her "On the Projection Problem for Presuppositions" in 1983. She starts her theory by comparing the then popular Gazdar (henceforth G.) and the other Karttunen and Peters (henceforth K. & P.') stances on projection problem. K. & P.'s theory weighs more on mere description for the projection facts while G.'s more on explanation.

K. & P.'s major concern is "content property", "presupposition property", and "heritage property". That means, if A has p as its truth conditional content and p' as its presupposition, and B has content q and presupposition q', then the presupposition of "If A, B" is p' & (p→q'). "If" is the most typical and frequently discussed functor taking two propositional arguments. G. manages to get away from heritage properties. CCP actually is an attempt to combine mutual advantages, i.e., the descriptive function and explanatory capacity into one.

CCPs are instructions specifying certain operations of context change. The CCP of "It is raining" is the instruction to conjoin the current context with the proposition that it is raining (If we construe propositions as sets of possible worlds, as we will here, "conjoin" means "intersect"). The CCPs of complex sentences can be given compositionally on the basis of the CCPs of their constituents (Heim, 1983, p. 117). She writes "c+S" to designate the result of executing the CCP of Sentence S on Context c. Then she illustrates the CCP of "if" as

$$C + \text{If } A, B = c \backslash (c + A \backslash c + A + B) \text{ ("\textbackslash" means intersection)}.$$

It's not hard to see that Irene Heim, as a representative of trendy cognitive linguist and traditional semantics, considers context a more and more important factor. Moreover, her context in question is no longer a static technical term, but an ever-changing dynamic flow which undergoes conversation turn-taking, situation in space, time, material, and people, or even mental stream as exemplified by belief system. The identification of contexts with propositions has been abandoned. Context changes in response to utterances are like updating operations: additions of further entries on already established contexts. Every piece of word or sentence is based on the speaker or the hearer's knowledge before it is uttered. In this inference, even baby's murmur has a presupposition according to certain context, as mentioned before, which is no longer static proposition or else. Endless context sections are variables for no constant. You may prefer to call it comparative definiteness.

Conclusion

Presupposition as a heated discussed topic in the 1970s, though it was brought about by the famous logician and philosopher Frege, may not necessarily a formal and logic notion as disputed, verified, and proved by generations of semanticists as well as pragmaticists. Nowadays, "context", "global", "dynamic", "changing", etc., have been far more frequently mentioned than linguists 50 years ago would expect. More and more people, including many semanticists, begin to realise the nature of living language in interaction. Language in use and used by people becomes today's theme in linguistic area. Presupposition as a pragmatic term gradually wins its place. It may indicate another direction for linguistic development.

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