Presuppositions
– triggers, tests and projection

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a working definition

*a presupposition* is a condition which must be fulfilled 
*in order for an expression to „make sense“*

special case:

... *in order for a (straightforwardly asserted declarative) sentence to have a truth value (i.e. to be true or false) at all*

this is a *semantic definition* of presuppositions – no reference to context or utterance situation is made

a presupposition is introduced by a lexical element or construction called the *presupposition trigger*
presupposition triggers

elements that introduce presuppositions are called presupposition triggers

(1) **Factive Verbs**
   
   *Jolanda regrets that she kissed Bartholomew*

(2) **Phase change verbs**
   
   *Charles stopped smoking*

(3) **It-Cleft Construction**
   
   *It was Charles who ate all chocolate cookies*

(4) **Pseudo-Clefts**
   
   *What Jolanda brought to the party was a bottle of red wine.*
presupposition triggers

elements that introduce presuppositions are called presupposition triggers

(5) **Iterative Adverbs**

*Charles has opened the window again.*

(6) **Additive Particles**

*Charles has opened a window, too.*

(7) **Definite Descriptions**

*The king of Tübingen is bald.*

*My dog has the flu.*

(8) **Certain Quantifiers**

*Angela Merkel welcomed all delegates from Lesotho.*
presupposition tests

presuppositions are somehow independent of the conventional meaning and entailments expressed by a sentence can be distinguished from entailments via various presupposition tests all tests involve some modification of the original sentence that changes the conventional meaning in some respect – what is left unaffected is a candidate for a presupposition

1. Negation
   presuppositions are not affected by negation

2. Modals
   presuppositions are not affected by modals

3. Questions
   presuppositions are not affected by question formation
presupposition tests: negation

sentential negation affects the conventional meaning (truth) of a sentence, but leaves presuppositions untouched

(1') Jolanda does not regret that she kissed Bartholomew
(2') Charles did not stop smoking
(3') It was not Charles who ate all chocolate cookies
(4') What Jolanda brought to the party was not a bottle of red wine.
(5') Charles has not opened the window again.
(6') It's not the case that Charles has opened a window, too.
(7') The king of Tübingen is not bald.
    My dog does not have the flu.
(8') Angela Merkel did not welcome all delegates from Lesotho.
presupposition tests: modals

**modals** affect the modality of a sentence, i.e. its epistemic/deontic/etc. „status“, but leave presuppositions untouched

(1'') *Jolanda might regret that she kissed Bartholomew*

(2'') *Charles must stop smoking*

(3'') *It can't have been Charles who ate all chocolate cookies*

(4'') *What Jolanda brought to the party was most likely a bottle of red wine.*

(5'') *Charles should open the window again.*

(6'') *Charles might have opened a window, too.*

(7'') *The king of Tübingen may be bald.*

  *My dog certainly has the flu.*

(8'') *Perhaps Angela Merkel welcomed all delegates from Lesotho.*
presupposition tests: questions

question formation affects the speech act (an assertion is changed to a question), but leaves presuppositions untouched (but note that with questions presuppositions are not conditions for „having a truth value“)

a reformulation as a question is not possible, if constructions are involved

does this type of test also works with other speech acts (where possible)

(1'') Does Jolanda regret that she kissed Bartholomew?

(2'') Has Charles stopped smoking?

(5'') Did Charles open the window again?

(6'') Has Charles also opened a window?

(7'') Is the king of Tübingen bald?

Does my dog have the flu?

(8'') Did Angela Merkel welcome all delegates from Lesotho?
presupposition tests

just to check:

entailments (as opposed to presuppositions) do not survive the test battery

(8) Angela Merkel welcomed all delegates from Lesotho

entails that Angela Merkel welcomed all female delegates from Lesotho

(8') Negation:

  Angela Merkel did not welcome all delegates from Lesotho

(8'') Modals:

  Perhaps Angela Merkel welcomed all delegates from Lesotho

(8'''') Question:

  Did Angela Merkel welcome all delegates from Lesotho?

all do not entail that Angela Merkel welcomed all female delegates from Lesotho.
presupposition projection

presupposition projection refers to the fact that larger constituents containing presuppositions triggers inherit their presuppositions in certain ways.

(9) Charles started to learn Italian.

(9') Francesca hopes that Charles started to learn Italian.

(9'') Francesca hopes that Charles started to learn Italian and she thinks of marrying him.

all inherit the presupposition triggered by started. But

(10) Francesca claims that Charles started to learn Italian.

(11) If Charles did not learn Italian before, he started to learn Italian.

do not presuppose that Charles did not learn Italian before (the moment of utterance).
presupposition projection

it depends on the involved constructions, whether embedded presuppositions project.

Lauri Karttunen (1973) distinguishes holes, plugs and filters

holes

are permeable for presuppositions

• negation
  (12) *Mary does not know that Charles started to learn Italian*

• (antecedents) of conditionals
  (13) *If Mary knows that Charles started to learn Italian she will be jealous*

• first conjunct in sentential coordinations
  (14) *Mary knows that Charles started to learn Italian and she is jealous*
presupposition projection

plugs
block all presuppositions

- believe contexts
  (15) *Mary believes that Julio stopped smoking*

- speech contexts
  (16) *Mary said that Peter beats his dog*

filters
block presupposition under certain conditions

- consequent of conditionals
  (17) *If Charles had health problems, he stopped smoking.*
  (17') *If Charles has smoked before, he stopped smoking.*

- second conjunct in sentential coordinations
  (18) *Charles had health problems and he has stopped smoking.*
  (18') *Charles has smoked and he has stopped smoking.*
presupposition projection

In the following: write \( \varphi\{\psi} \) if \( \varphi \) is an expression with presupposition \( \psi \)

Summary so far:

- *It's not the case that* \( \varphi\{\psi} \) presupposes \( \psi \)
- *Perhaps* \( \varphi\{\psi} \) presupposes \( \psi \)
- \( \varphi\{\psi} \) *and ...* presupposes \( \psi \)
- *If* \( \varphi\{\psi} \) *then ...* presupposes \( \psi \)
- *X believes/*... \( \varphi\{\psi} \) presupposes –
- *X says/*... \( \varphi\{\psi} \) presupposes –
- \( \chi \) *and* \( \varphi\{\psi} \) presupposes \( \psi \), if \( \chi \) *does not already entail* \( \psi \)
- *If* \( \chi \) *then* \( \varphi\{\psi} \) presupposes \( \psi \), if \( \chi \) *does not already entail* \( \psi \)
presupposition projection

A closer look at expressions of the form $\chi$ and $\varphi\{\psi\}$ and *If* $\chi$ *then* $\varphi\{\psi\}$

(19) *There is going to be a depression, and the president of General Motors will lose his job, too.*

(19') *If there is a depression, the president of General Motors will lose his job, too.*

(20) *Geraldine is a Mormon and she has given up wearing her holy underwear.*

(20') *If Geraldine is a Mormon she has given up wearing her holy underwear.*

do not presuppose $\psi$, but do presuppose the **conditional presupposition** $\chi \rightarrow \psi$:

(19'') *If there is a depression, somebody will lose his job.*

(20'') *If Geraldine is a Mormon, she wears holy underwear.*
presupposition projection

So \( \chi \) and \( \varphi \{ \psi \} \) and \( \text{If } \chi \text{ then } \varphi \{ \psi \} \) presuppose \( \chi \rightarrow \psi \). But consider

(21) \text{If the problem was discussed in class it wasn't John who solved it.}
    presupposes: If the problem was discussed in class somebody solved it (\( \chi \rightarrow \psi \))

(22) \text{If the problem was difficult it wasn't John who solved it.}
    presupposes: somebody solved the problem (\( \psi \))

Observation:
sometimes conditional presuppositions \( \chi \rightarrow \psi \) can be strengthened to \( \psi \)

But strangely not when they are themselves projected:

(23) \text{Mary knows that if the problem was difficult then someone solved it.}
    presupposes: \( \chi \rightarrow \psi \)

This is called the proviso problem (by Geurts, 1996)
introductory literature


foundational literature


