Handout Five

ENTAILMENT AND PRESUPPOSITION

ENTAILMENT

Exam Question: Draw inferences from the fact that when water freezes, a pipe bursts.

Student’s Answer: I have never seen an inference so I cannot draw one.

(From Howlers by Russell Ash, 1985)

EXERCISE 5.1

Look at the following ‘slips’ from radio and television announcers. What’s wrong here?

(a) It’s been an amazing year for Crystal Palace over the past 12 months.
(b) The robbery was committed by a pair of identical twins, both are said to be about age 20.
(c) Send in your competition answers with your name, age, and how old you are.
(d) So you’re a housewife and a mother. Do you have any children?

EXERCISE 5.2

Pretend that you have just arrived from another planet. You have learned the vocabulary and grammar of English, but you have never visited Earth before, nor have you ever met or spoken to another Earthling. As is the custom on your planet, you interpret everything you hear literally. Your job is to decide whether each of my following statements is true or false and why.

(a) My mother is a woman.
(b) My mother is a doctor.
(c) The tiger is unhappy.
(d) The tiger is an animal.
(e) My mother is a boy.
(f) The tiger is a reptile.
Analytic sentences

Contradictions

Synthetic sentences

Synthetically true

Synthetically false

EXERCISE 5.3

Assume that sentence (a) in each pair is synthetically true. Then look at sentence (b) and decide if you can assume that it is automatically true given the truth of (a).

1(a) Annie caught a trout.
1(b) Annie caught a fish.

2(a) Annie is thin.
2(b) Annie is not fat.

3(a) Annie baked a cake.
3(b) Annie baked something.

Entailment

Paraphrase

EXERCISE 5.4

For each pair, decide whether you can assume that sentence (b) is automatically true given the synthetic truth of sentence (a). Then reverse the process. If sentence (b) is synthetically true, can you assume that sentence (a) is automatically true?

1(a) Goldilocks saw a bear.
1(b) Goldilocks saw an animal.

2(a) This porridge is too cold.
2(b) This porridge is not too hot.

3(a) Baby Bear cried.
3(b) Baby Bear wept.

4(a) Mama Bear is in front of Papa Bear.

4(b) Papa Bear is behind Mama Bear.

**One-way entailment**

**Two-way entailment**

**Mutual entailment**

**EXERCISE 5.5**

In each of the following dialogues, spot the information which appears redundant or contradictory from a semantic point of view. Then decide in pragmatic terms what this sort of information might be ‘telling’ the hearer.

(a) Tom: What’s your stepmother like?

Bob: Well, she’s a woman and she married my father.

(b) Dave: There’s your Uncle George.

Lucy: That man’s a snake.

(c) Jane: You ate all the cookies!

Steve: I ate some of the cookies.

Take the sentence, The painters broke the window. This sentence has many entailments. Here are some very basic (one-way) entailments:

Entailment 1: ‘Someone broke the window.’

Entailment 2: ‘The painters did something to the window.’

Entailment 3: ‘The painters broke something.’

**Foregrounding**
EXERCISE 5.6

Here are three different stress patterns for Annie ruined the sweater. Try matching each utterance with the entailment which is being foregrounded. While you are doing this, think how the message subtly changes with each change of stress.

Utterance (a): Annie RUINED the sweater.
Utterance (b): Annie ruined the SWEATER.
Utterance (c): ANNIE ruined the sweater.
Entailment 1: ‘Someone ruined the sweater.’
Entailment 2: ‘Annie did something to the sweater.’
Entailment 3: ‘Annie ruined something.’

PRESSUPOSITION

I celebrate myself and sing myself,
And what I assume, you shall assume.
(Walt Whitman)

Truth-value

EXERCISE 5.7

Decide if it is possible to assign either ‘true’ or false’ to each of the following sentences. (Remember, ‘true’ and ‘false’ are not quite the same as ‘yes’ and ‘no’.) Are there any sentences where this was not quite possible regardless of how much knowledge you had about the people, places and events involved or the meaning of English words?

(a) Abraham Lincoln is the current president of the USA.
(b) The Eiffel Tower is in Paris.
(c) A car is an automobile.
(d) Have a cookie.
(e) Be careful of the crumbs.
(f) Where was Abraham Lincoln born?
(g) How much did the car cost?

**Declarative sentences**

\[
\text{You} \quad \text{ran} \quad \text{away.}
\]

\[
\text{Subject} \quad \text{Verb}
\]

**Imperative sentences**

\[
\text{Run} \quad \text{away!}
\]

\[
\text{Verb}
\]

**Interrogative sentences**

\[
\text{Why did you run away?} \quad \text{Did you run away?}
\]

\[
\text{Verb} \quad \text{Subject} \quad \text{Verb} \quad \text{Verb} \quad \text{Subject} \quad \text{Verb}
\]

**EXERCISE 5.8.**

For each of the following utterances decide whether the sentence being uttered is declarative, imperative or interrogative and whether the accompanying inference seems valid.

(a) Where has Faye looked for the keys? ‘Faye has looked for the keys.’
(b) Did you buy this awful wine? ‘This wine is awful.’
(c) Don’t sit on Annie’s sofa. ‘Annie has a sofa.’
(d) Stop being lazy. ‘You are being lazy.’
(e) Lucy knows that George is a crook. ‘George is a crook’.

Presuppositions

Faye has looked for the keys directly asserts ‘Faye has looked for the keys’

Where has Faye looked for the keys? presupposes ‘Faye has looked for the keys’

Annie has a sofa directly asserts ‘Annie has a sofa’

Don’t sit on Annie’s sofa presupposes ‘Annie has a sofa’

EXERCISE 5.9.

In Exercise 5.8 change has to hasn’t in (a); did to didn’t in (b); do to don’t in (c); stop to don’t stop in (d); and knows to doesn’t know in (e). Do the inferences still hold?

Negation

EXERCISE 5.10

Each of the following utterances mentions chocolate cake. Decide which ones contain the presupposition that at the time the utterance was made ‘There was a chocolate cake’. What do those utterances have in common?

1(a) Mike might find the chocolate cake in the kitchen.

1(b) Mike might find a chocolate cake in the kitchen.

2(a) Is Mike giving Annie that chocolate cake?

2(b) Is Mike giving Annie a chocolate cake?

3(a) Did Mike hide a chocolate cake?

3(b) Did Mike hide Annie’s chocolate cake?
Possessives

Definite noun phrase

Existential presupposition

‘There is a cure for baldness.’

‘The cure is revolutionary.’

‘I have this cure.’

EXERCISE 5.11

For each of the following utterances, decide which ones contain the presupposition that ‘Mike smashed the television’. In other words, which ones indicate that the speaker has assumed that this proposition is true but has not directly asserted it. What do those utterances have in common?

(a) Did Mike smash the television?

(b) When did Mike smash the television?

(c) I was eating popcorn when Mike smashed the television.

(d) Why did Mike smash the television?

(e) I don’t understand why Mike smashed the television.

(f) I wonder if Mike smashed the television.

(g) I wonder how Mike smashed the television.

Subordinate clause

EXERCISE 5.12

In this exercise we look at some other kinds of words and constructions that can lead to presuppositions. In each case write out a presupposition contained in the utterance and decide what has triggered it.

(b) Meridyth pretends she’s a rock star.

(c) Ed should stop eating raw oysters.