

Presupposition from the Perspective of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: Presupposition is an important concept of logical semantics. From different research perspectives, different classification can be carried out. This paper intends to set several factors involved in the process of communication within the perspective of TCFL, such as intra lingual factors (including vocabulary, grammar, etc.) and exterior linguistic factors (including the subject of communication, language environment, etc.) and try to release the original presupposition category to provide some implications to presupposition and TCFL from a new angle.

Introduction

Presupposition, also known as the premise, is one of the important categories of semantics and pragmatics. It was firstly put forward in the book *Sense and Reference* in 1892 by the German philosopher and mathematician G.Frege. In 1960s, the word of presupposition entered the field of linguistics and became an important concept of logical semantics. From different research angles, different classifications of presupposition can be carried out, such as semantic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition. The close relationship between presupposition and communication has been recognized by various scholars in a long time period. This paper intends to set several factors involved in the process of communication within the perspective of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, such as intra lingual factors (including vocabulary, grammar, etc.) and exterior linguistic factors (including the subject of communication, language environment, etc.) and gets rid of the original presupposition category to provide some implications to presupposition and TCFL from a new angle.

Intra Lingual Factors and Presupposition

The presupposition has certain effects on words, the selection of sentence structure and the arrangement of word order etc. In the process of communication of overseas students, some expressions seem grammatical without other mistakes, but it is not easy to be understood by native speakers, which is due to the misunderstanding of the presupposition of language materials, which also means a correct understanding of presupposition and a better application may bring clear explanations to language phenomena and improvement in comprehension and application in specific words and structure of accuracy and appropriateness.

A: Vocabulary and Presupposition

Fillmore(1968) (1969) (1970), P&CKiparsky(1970) and S.C.Levinson(1983) had made profound research on the close relations between words and presupposition, especially the co-accepted statements. The following are examples about the relations between presupposition and

words of different part of speech in modern Chinese language.

Verb & presupposition: In modern Chinese, there are many verbs which are related to presupposition. The following sentences can be explained by presupposition.

- (1) Ni3 ba3 mao4zi0 tuo1 le. (2) Ni3 ba3 mao4zi0 dai4 le.
you BA hat take off LE you BA hat put on LE
'Take off your hat.' 'put on your hat.'

Sentence (1) is reasonable which has presupposed that you first wear the hat, then take off. Meanwhile, sentence (2) presuppose that you first to take off the hat then put it on, which is somewhat wired. For Sentence (2), to be smooth, it is better to change the presupposition, like *Ni3 ba3 mao4zi0 dai4 hao3* or *Ni3 ba3 mao4zi0 dai4 shang4* "wear the hat". The syntactic structure of sentences is the same, the only difference is the application of the pair of antonyms.

Adverb & Presupposition: We first look at the following sentence: (3) He didn't pass the CET4 again. With the adverb "again", it has presupposed that similar things had happened that "he" did not pass the CET4 before. If there is no similar situation before, "again" is not appropriate here, resulting in semantic incompatibility. Shen Jiaxuan (1999) in the analysis of the difference of *cha4 dianr3 P* and *cha4 bu0 duo1 P* "almost" pointed that the presupposition of *cha4 dianr3 P* is *jie1jin4 P* "approaching", not *fei1 P* "not P"; *cha4 bu0 duo1 P* does not presuppose but refers to *jie1jin4 P* "approaching", and implicate *fei1 P* "not". Therefore, the asymmetry of *cha4 dianr3 P* and *cha4 bu0 duo1 P* can be explained.

Demonstratives & Presupposition: The demonstratives in Chinese falls into the categories of indefinite and definite ones. According to Fan Xiao and Chen Zhong, (2002), the definite pronoun represents the existence of the basic property, which is associated with the existence of presupposition. Further, a definite noun refers its existence of the object; but indefinite noun doesn't refer to the existence of its referent necessarily. Let's compare the following two sentences:

- (4) The scientists haven't discovered the alien creatures so far.
(5) The scientists haven't discovered that alien creatures so far.

There are two possibilities that the scientists haven't discovered the alien life: one is there exists alien creatures, but haven't been discovered; the other is there is no alien creatures, certainly no discovery at all. "That" in sentence (5) is definite presupposed the existence of the alien creatures.

Conjunctions & Presupposition: If we can combine the theory of presupposition in the explanation of conjunctions, teachers can deepen the understanding of learners to improve the accuracy of their expressions. In the use of conjunctions in expressions, different presupposition will influence the choice of conjunctions.

Grammar and Presupposition. Grammatical structure & Presupposition: the grammatical structure mainly refers to the fixed structure of some specific meanings in modern Chinese. Take the following dialogue as an example: (6) A: *zhe4jian0 yi1fu0 hao3kan4 shi4 hao3kan4, jiu4shi4 gui4 le dianr3*. "This dress is so nice, but it's a little expensive". B: *gui4 jiu4 gui4 ba0, xi3huan1 de0hua4 jiu4 mai3 xia4lai0*. "If you like it, just buy it, no matter expensive or not". This structure of "..... is..... that is....." affirms the first half and emphasizes more on the latter negative meaning, a kind of helpless discontent.

Grammatical components & Presupposition: Grammatical components mentioned here mainly include the subject, predicate, attribute, adverbial and complement. This paper only gives one example of these components and the associated presupposition. (7) *Lao3wang2 mei2 mai3 na4ben3 shu1*. "Lao Wang did not buy the book. (8) *Lao3wang2 mei2 mai3 dao4 na4ben3 shu1*. "Lao Wang has not bought the book". The superficial difference of the two sentences is the word *dao4* "to", but their presuppositions and conditions are different. Both of the two has presupposed the V happened,

the focus is on the object in the *V dao4* “V to” structure. However, the previous has no such presupposition, when Lao Wang thinks the book is too expensive without purchase, which means the international students may not skillfully express by the latter sentence. V is the presupposition when use *V dao4*. If it is to negate V, the structure of *bu0 V* or *mei2 V* will be used. Therefore, it will be decisive whether there is complement or not.

Word order & Presupposition: from the structure of discourse, presupposition can only exist before a statement. Because the content of presupposition in discourse is regarded as the known information, therefore, the content can neither be after the presupposition, nor be contradiction. Because the content of presupposition in discourse is regarded as the known information, the speaker seems to have non negotiation, for instance: (9) Xiao Li knows that we will have a meeting tomorrow, but I don't know. "Xiao Li knows tomorrow's meeting" shows that the speaker has already known that there will be a meeting, which is contradicted to “I don’t know”; however, the sentence "I know that there is a meeting tomorrow, but Li does not know" is acceptable and these two presuppositions are coherent; "Li knows there was a meeting yesterday, but I don't know" is also acceptable, the first sentence has presupposed the speaker having already known, while the latter asserted that "I" did not know before the meeting, which does not constitute a contradiction. Therefore, it is very necessary to explain the errors caused by the presupposition of word order.

Exterior linguistic factors and Presupposition

Cognition and Presupposition. The cognitive presupposition here related to the communicative subjects which refers to the presupposition of communication in normal conditions based on the communicators’ experience and cognitive psychological principles, namely common sense or encyclopedic knowledge. The presupposition does not involve language materials, neither with specific context. The presupposition of consensus generally has the following three situations: first, the presupposition tend to become the common sense or information for both sides; second, presupposition will be revealed by the speaker's utterance and understood by listener; third, presuppositions are sometimes limited in communication between the parties, others can understand the superficial meaning, but lack in the handle of presupposition and fail to understand the true meaning of the conversation. Cognitive presupposition is associated with the first case. Case on the following dialogue: (10) A: When will you invite me to dinner? B: February 30th. The unification of social and cultural knowledge of this cognition domain cognitive activation of such presupposition: February has only twenty-eight days. This thesis is the mutual communication of the cognitive environment, which is part of presupposition. Obviously, the answer of B rejects the request of A because of the inconsistency with the cognitive environment. "February only has 28 days". The presupposition inside the communication between the two sides makes people correctly understand the speaker's intentions. It is a euphemism of rejection so as to achieve the purpose of communication.

Context and Presupposition. In the actual communication, the presupposition is usually the mutual information known to two parties or common people, combined with context. In addition of the cognitive state of the communication subject, the presupposition information of both sides in the language also comes from the context. Ignorance of the context will lead to the ignorance of all the dynamic information in verbal communication and partial interpretation of presupposition. The same sentence has different presupposition in different contexts. When the speaker speaks, the listener can make different response according to the context and the corresponding presupposition.

Conclusion

Presupposition not only lies in the interior of the language, but also derived from the exterior phenomena. It is necessary to improve and emphasize the efficiency of teaching for the teachers and ensure the proper ways of communication for learners in TCFL. As an attempt of the discussion and the trigger of deeper research, the research and teaching practice will bring continuous improvement.

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