

Pragmatic Presupposition in Interpersonal Communication - A Case Study of Lovers' Dialogue

Jialiang Chen

School of English for International Business
Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China.

ABSTRACT

Pragmatic presupposition is a common linguistic phenomenon in natural language. In real life, an increasing number of people begin to use pragmatic presupposition to carry out interpersonal communication, so as to make the expression richer and more accurate. However, while the appropriate use of pragmatic presupposition is related to the effectiveness of communication, many people cannot attach great importance to the significance of pragmatic presupposition and fail to understand its role in interpersonal communication. This paper takes pragmatic presupposition theory as the theoretical basis and lovers' dialogues as an example to analyze the application of pragmatic presupposition in a specific context with the aim of helping people fully understand pragmatic presupposition theory and promote the effect of interpersonal communication in specific contexts.

Key Words: pragmatic presupposition, dialogue, boyfriend and girlfriend, interpersonal communication

INTRODUCTION

Research Objective

Presupposition is inevitable in our daily lives, and our words in communication always contain a number of presuppositions. Therefore, the study on the presupposition phenomenon is of great necessity, which has been proved by many linguists. Pragmatists study the presupposition behavior from the pragmatic viewpoint, and it is inseparable from the context. The verbal communicative process is a dynamic process, and the presupposition changes in the process of communication. At the same time, it affects the conduct of communication. On the one hand, the speaker predicts the hearer's cognitive state before making pragmatic presupposition; on the other hand, pragmatic presupposition has an essential effect on the hearer's understanding of utterance. On the basis of presupposition theories, this paper analyses the features of pragmatic presupposition and discusses the principles of using pragmatic presupposition; after that, it proposes that the speaker can manipulate the pragmatic presupposition so as to achieve successful interpersonal communication results. Using pragmatic presupposition reasonably has a great effect on the speaker's utterance construction and the hearer's utterance understanding, thus achieving effective communication.

The objective of this thesis is to study the role of pragmatic presupposition in daily conversations between lovers and the speaker's effective manipulation of pragmatic presupposition to achieve a

smooth conversation. Through analyzing the features of pragmatic presupposition in conversations, it emphasizes the great importance of pragmatic presupposition on the speaker's utterance construction and the hearer's utterance interpretation; through studying the principles of using pragmatic presupposition, it puts forward some concrete linguistic devices to manipulate pragmatic presupposition, especially between lovers.

Research Significance

Many scholars have studied presupposition from the semantic and pragmatic perspectives. Since presupposition is inseparable from the contexts, many linguists study pragmatic presupposition in concrete contexts, such as in advertisements, courts, and literary works and so on. The pragmatic presupposition is very important in our daily conversations. To achieve successful communication, the addresser will make pragmatic presuppositions before uttering, and the addressee can understand the utterance meaning better through inferring the pragmatic presupposition in utterances.

Research Method

In interpersonal communication, people usually use a variety of communication strategies and methods. In recent years, the development of pragmatic presupposition theory provides a new perspective for interpreting interpersonal communication. An increasing number of people begin to employ pragmatic presupposition for interpersonal communication. If used properly, it can add color to interpersonal communication, but if not used properly, it can also bring some obstacles to communication. Based on the theory of the pragmatic presupposition, this paper analyzes the dialogue between couples, with a variety of speaking styles of boyfriend upset his girlfriend, and suggests the application of and answer a lot of boyfriends' doubt, trying to help more people promote interpersonal communication effect by avoiding unnecessary trouble.

PRESUPPOSITION

Presupposition Theory

Presupposition is a common linguistic phenomenon in natural language. People usually use presupposition to express known information. The concept of presupposition was first proposed and studied by Frege, a German mathematician and logician, in 1892. George Yule (2000:25) describes presupposition as something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance. Subsequently, many scholars began to study presupposition. Their research further aroused scholars' strong interest in the theory of presupposition, and the definition, characteristic, trigger, function and application of presupposition constantly came into the researchers' vision. Presupposition has become a common concern in philosophy, logic and linguistics.

According to linguists, the presupposition is a common phenomenon in the use of natural language, which can be divided into semantic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition. The semantic presupposition is defined from the meaning of a statement or the true or false value of a proposition. It is a necessary condition for a statement to obtain the true value, mainly related to the logical relationship. From the perspective of pragmatics, the meaning of conversations is not only related to the logical relationship of sentences, but also involves context, speaker and listener. In contrast, the semantic presupposition is static, while pragmatic presupposition is dynamic and varies with context, communicative object and communicative intention. When sentences or propositions are put to use in context, however, people are more concerned with how speakers or writers make use

of a presupposition as a way of communicating implicit meaning. People tend to use "pragmatic presupposition" as a term to signal that they are dealing with something not exactly the same as the semantic notion of presupposition (Chen, 2009). Speakers, not sentences or propositions, have pragmatic presuppositions. The pragmatic presupposition is one of the important research fields in semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. It is a common phenomenon in language and widely exists in various types of verbal communication activities.

Theoretically, the information pragmatically presupposed by the speaker must be shared by the hearer, and this property of pragmatic presupposition is called common ground or mutual knowledge requirement (Chen, 2009). Linguists have different understandings of pragmatic presupposition, and there are various opinions on its definition. However, pragmatic presupposition can be understood and defined in three ways: First, the pragmatic presupposition is the speaker's assumption of the linguistic context. Second, the pragmatic presupposition is the appropriate condition to be satisfied for performing a speech act or for making a sentence have the necessary social appropriateness. Third, pragmatic presupposition refers to the common knowledge, or background knowledge, of both parties in communication. In the opinion of He Ziran, pragmatic presupposition generally refers to those presuppositions that are sensitive to context and related to the speaker's belief, attitude and intention (He, 1997). Pragmatic presupposition also has various characteristics such as appropriateness, subjectivity and concealment. The discourse derived from these characteristics contributes to the interaction in the communication process and enriches the linguistic connotation and communicative activities. Linguists have not reached a consensus on the classification of pragmatic presupposition. According to different triggers, George Yule divides presuppositions into six types in detail: factive presupposition, non-factive presupposition, counter-factual presupposition, existential presupposition, lexical presupposition and structural presupposition (Yule, 2000). The application and effect of these presuppositions in interpersonal communication will be discussed with concrete examples next part.

Recent Studies on Presupposition at Home

Many scholars abroad contribute a lot to presupposition study, which is helpful for Chinese linguists to do research in this field. Many Chinese linguists studied presupposition on the basis of the presupposition theories established by foreign linguists. Though the presupposition study in China started later than in western countries, many Chinese linguists have done much work and got fruitful results in this field. They have studied the issue with different focuses.

Li Dazhong introduced the study on this issue in the Russian linguistics area in 1981. In 1986, Shen Jiaxuan introduced the theory of presupposition from the English language area. In 1988, Huang huaxin wrote an article *On the Characteristics and Classification of Presupposition*, and he talked about the properties of presupposition and classified presupposition into overt presupposition, factual presupposition and so forth. Later, Shu Dingfang (1989) talked about this topic from the origin, the definition, the classification and so on. What's more, she paid much attention to presupposition from the logic semantic and pragmatic perspective. In 1990, Xu Liejiong explained the theory of presupposition in a semantics book.

From then on, more and more scholars in our country paid much attention to presupposition study. In the 1990s, a lot of original foreign works were introduced to China. Many Chinese researchers studied the issue on the basis of these foreign theories. Hu Zehong (1996), Luo Xuemei (1999), Liu

zhe (2001), and Wang yang (2005) etc. studied the definition of presupposition, the characteristics of presupposition, the functions of presupposition, and the differences between the semantic and pragmatic one. Some linguists, such as Zhou Liquan (2000), Liu Qiang (2005) studied the nature of presupposition, the defeasibility of presupposition and the projection problem of presupposition and so on. Yin Zhiping (1997) and Dai Yaojing (2001) studied presupposition to explain some language phenomenon. Zhang Keding (1995) and Yuan Yulin (2000) focused on the relationship between information focus and presupposition. Lu Yali (2001) studied the relationship between the theory of presupposition and teaching methodology. And Xu Honglin (2005) focused on the roles of presupposition in language use.

Presupposition has been widely studied both at home and abroad, though the study of presupposition in china started later than in western countries. Chinese scholars have got fruitful works in recent twenty years. However, few linguists have studied presupposition in context, even though some linguists took certain factors into consideration and regarded context as background knowledge. The roles of presupposition in context and functions of presupposition in real communication still need studying. In this paper, the author tries to study presupposition in a real communicative context between lovers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the analysis of how speakers' assumptions are typically expressed, presupposition has been associated with the use of a large number of words, phrases, and structures. These linguistic forms here should be considered as indicators of potential presuppositions, which can only become actual presuppositions in contexts with speakers (Yule, 2000).

Existential Presupposition

As illustrated in previous examples, the possessive construction in English is associated with a presupposition of existence. The existential presupposition is not only assumed to be present in possessive constructions (for example, 'your house' means 'you have a house'), but more generally in any definite noun phrase. By using any of the expressions in [1], the speaker is assumed to be committed to the existence of the entities named.

[1] the President of America, the village next to the town, the walking stick

Factive Presupposition

There is a different type of presupposition present in [2]. In [2], the verb 'realize' occurs in a structure, 'Everybody realizes the information (as a fact)' with the fact as the presupposition. The presupposed information follows a verb like 'realize' can be treated as a fact, and is described as a factive presupposition. A number of other verbs, such as 'know', 'regret' have factive presupposition.

[2] She realized that she had no money. (>>She had no money.)

When giving information in this way, the speaker has provided the fact, whether the response to the action ('realized' as in [2]) is approved or denied.

Lexical Presupposition

There also exist a number of other forms that may best be treated as the source of lexical presuppositions. Generally speaking, in lexical presupposition, the use of one form with its asserted meaning is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that another (non-asserted) meaning is understood. Each time we say that someone 'managed' to do something, the asserted meaning is that the person succeeded in performing the action in some way. When we say that someone 'did not manage', the asserted meaning is that the person failed to accomplish something. In both cases, however, there is a presupposition (non-asserted) that the person 'tried' to do something. Therefore, 'managed' is conventionally interpreted as asserting the lexical items, similar to 'stop' in [3].

[3] He stopped drinking. (>>He used to drink.)

In the case of lexical presupposition, the speaker's use of a particular expression is taken to presuppose another (unstated) concept, whereas in the case of a factive presupposition, the use of a particular expression is taken to presuppose the truth of the information that is stated after it.

Structural Presuppositions

In addition to presuppositions that are associated with the use of certain words and phrases, there are also structural presuppositions. In this case, certain sentence structures have been analyzed as conventionally and regularly presupposing that part of the structure is already assumed to be true. It can be said that speakers can use such structures to treat information as presupposed (assumed to be true) and hence to be accepted as true by the listen. Typically, the wh-question construction is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that the information after the wh-form is already known to be the case, as illustrated in [4].

[4] When did they arrive? (>>They arrived.)

The type of presupposition illustrated in [4] can lead listeners to believe that the information presented is necessarily true, rather than just the presupposition of the person asking the question.

Non-factive Presupposition

Contexts in which presuppositions are assumed to be true have been taken into consideration above; however, there are still examples of non-factive presuppositions associated with a number of verbs in English. A non-factive presupposition is one that is assumed not to be true. Verbs like 'dream', 'imagine', etc are used with the presupposition that what follows is not true, as in [5].

[5] I dreamed that we could go travelling all over the world. (>>We did not go travelling all over the world.)

Counter-Factual Presupposition

In terms of deixis, a structure that is interpreted with a non-factive presupposition 'if I had ...' (with subjunctive mood employed), which creates a counter-factual presupposition, meaning that what is presupposed is not only not true, but is also the opposite of what is true, or 'contrary to facts'. A conditional structure of this type shown in [6], generally called a counter-factual conditional, presupposes that the information in the if-clause is not true at the time of utterance.

[6] If I had a great amount of money, I would buy a big house. (>>I do not have a great amount of money.)

ANALYSIS (MAIN BODY ARGUMENT/DATA ANALYSIS)

Many boyfriends accidentally offend their girlfriends with the confusion about why they burst into anger. As a matter of fact, speaking itself is a complicated process of learning. From time to time some unknown information is inadvertently provided, which can lead the other person to fantasize and trigger a certain type of quarrel. That phenomenon involves the theory of pragmatic presupposition. Based on the previous classification of pragmatic presuppositions, the following will analyze six pragmatic presuppositions in the context of the dialogues between lovers, namely, factual presuppositions, non-factual presuppositions, counter-factual presuppositions, existential presuppositions, lexical presuppositions and structural presuppositions. The analysis and study of pragmatic presupposition in interpersonal communication can enable us to further understand the characteristics of language and better activate communication and effectively apply presupposition. It can also help boyfriends to communicate with their girlfriends smoothly and avoid unnecessary quarrels.

Existential Presupposition

The existential presupposition is a pragmatic presupposition used to indicate the existence of something in the world. Existential presuppositions are usually triggered by deterministic descriptions and are usually common to communicators, that is, background information known to all in daily communication.

Situation 1: The girlfriend asked her boyfriend to meet her at the station.

Girlfriend: What do you mean? Not picking me up?

Boyfriend: I'm busy. I am sorry I ...

G: I don't care. You have to.

B: You really need to change your temper. (>>You have a bad temper.)

In this dialogue, the boyfriend says "you really need to change your temper", which can trigger the existent presupposition that his girlfriend has a bad temper. The boyfriend feels that his girlfriend is playing a temper, expressing not only his unwillingness to pick her up but also his helplessness to tolerate her bad temper. Hearing these words, the girl may be sad or even angry.

Situation 2: The girlfriend asked her boyfriend to go shopping together, but he didn't want to.

W: Go shopping with me? Are you going? You're not going, are you?

M: Why are you such a tigress? (>>You are fierce.)

In this dialogue, the boyfriend says "why are you such a tigress", in which "tigress" is a kind of existent presupposition, indicating that the girlfriend is fierce, not gentle at all. This kind of way of talking will certainly make the girlfriend displeased after the girlfriend hears it.

Factive Presupposition

The so-called factive presupposition refers to a fact spoken by the speaker to other subjects involved in the dialogue except himself. This "fact" may be true, or it may just be the speaker's guess. But the

"fact" behind the words, the meaning, is something that the listener derives in interpersonal communication.

Situation 3: The girlfriend came back from shopping with a few bags in her hand.

B: What do you always go shopping for every day?

(>>You go shopping every day.)

G: ... every day? I do not go out for shopping every day, do I?

What do you mean by every day?

In this dialogue, "What do you always go shopping for every day?" is based on the fact that "you go shopping every day", which is a factive presupposition. Maybe the boyfriend just simply wants to ask what things his girlfriend has bought, but the addition of "every day" has a hidden meaning, probably making the girlfriend feel her boyfriend tired of her buying things and leading to her anger.

Situation 4: The girlfriend tried on a new dress, took a picture and sent it to her boyfriend.

B: I don't know why you always block your face in photos.

G: That is because the mobile phone is small and the face is ... , you know.

B: Then you should block your belly... (>>Your belly is fatter.)

G: ...

In this dialogue, the first sentence from the boyfriend in this conversation has led to an awkward situation. The word "always" presupposed that the girlfriend's behavior of shielding her face has happened many times. The girlfriend defused the awkward question with humor. However, the presupposition that "you should block your belly" is that "your belly is fat and you should block the belly with the mobile phone, not the face". On hearing her boyfriend saying she is fat, the girlfriend may be heartbroken unavoidably in a way.

Lexical Presupposition

Lexical presupposition refers to the fact that the use of a certain meaning of some words presupposes the existence of another hidden meaning of the word, which is usually caused by some state verbs and repeated verbs.

Situation 5: The girlfriend found some pictures of another girl on her boyfriend's cell phone.

G: See? Explain to me what this is all about!

B: That's just one of my friends.

G: Why do you have her photos?

B: Whatever you think. (>>Whatever you think is right.)

In this dialogue, "whatever" is the default trigger word, which presupposes a scenario where whatever the woman thinks is reasonable by default, such as "my boyfriend must be having an affair with her", which is also proved possible by "whatever you think". Therefore, what really matters here is not "whatever you think," but the infinite possibilities that come with the presupposition of that lexical expression.

Situation 6: The girlfriend is complaining.

B: What's wrong with you again? (>>You are always making trouble.)

G: Again? What do you mean by again? You've been tired of me, aren't you?

You think I am troublesome. You don't like me anymore.

B: Why do you overreact again?

In this dialogue, "what's wrong with you?" is necessarily better than "what's wrong with you again?" The lexical form "again" results in the girlfriend's anger. The problem arises from this expression "again", naturally causing impatience and quarrel.

Structural Presuppositions

The structural presupposition is often associated with the grammatical structure of the language, either directly reflected in some trigger words, or reflected in a certain sentence structure. In this presupposition, the speaker can use a certain sentence structure to presuppose that part of the structure is true and make the listener believe.

Situation 7: The girlfriend bought a lot of cosmetics from the mall.

G: I had a good day and bought what I needed.

B: What makes you happier than spending money?

(>>You just love spending money.)

G: ...

In this dialogue, the expression "what makes you happier than spending money" presupposes that spending money can make a woman happiest". Apart from that, this structure can be interpreted with a higher meaning that a woman just loves spending money. The girlfriend is bound to be very unhappy at that moment.

Situation 8: The girlfriend is making a plan for an outing.

B: When did you become so nagging? (>>You were nagging before.)

G: What do you mean? I nag? I have never become a nag!

In this dialogue, "when" in the conversation presupposes that the girlfriend has formed the habit of nagging. She quickly denied the presupposition, saying she did not become a nag, which implies her smartness. However, hearing his boyfriend describing herself in this way, she will become depressed and mad inevitably.

Non-factive Presupposition

Non-factive presupposition means that what is said is not consistent with the fact, indicating that it is not true.

Situation 9: The girlfriend wants to lose weight and she plans to take exercise every day.

G: Do you think I've lost any weight lately?

B: I don't know.

G: I've been working out. I'm sure I'll lose weight.

B: At first you were exercising... (>>You did not keep exercising later.)

In this dialogue, the boyfriend's utterance "at first" assumes that the following content is no longer true. That is, the girlfriend did not keep exercising after a period of time. In this context, the implied meaning of this sentence is that the girlfriend did not keep exercising later, so she did not lose weight, and everything is just her self-perception. The girlfriend's mind is so delicate that she can deduce the meaning of the words very quickly, while the boyfriend does not know why his words make his girlfriend angry.

Situation 10: The girlfriend passes by a wedding dress shop and notices a beautiful wedding dress in the window, but she is a little fat.

G: This wedding dress is so beautiful. It must be very beautiful, but...

B: Oh really? Stop dreaming. (>>You are too fat to wear that dress.)

In this dialogue, the boyfriend's "stop dreaming" triggers the non-factive presupposition that "my girlfriend will never be able to wear this dress." The implication is that the girlfriend is overweight. In the face of the boyfriend's way of talking, the girlfriend must be full of anger at the moment.

Counter-Factual Presupposition

Counter-factual presupposition means that something is said to be contrary to the facts, which is usually accompanied by a conditional sentence or some word that represents a presupposition.

Situation 11: The girlfriend didn't get the job, but the other girl who went with her did.

G: Today I applied for a job, but I didn't get in. Another woman got in.

B: if you were pretty, wouldn't you have a better chance?

(>>You are not more beautiful than that woman.)

G: ...

In this dialogue, the boyfriend's utterance "if you were pretty" triggers the counter-factual assumption that "you are not beautiful". After listening to her boyfriend, the girlfriend will soon be angry about how he thinks she is not beautiful and that maybe he does not love her anymore. At the same time, it can be estimated that the boyfriend may be helpless to answer in this way. It can be seen that the way of speaking plays a very significant role in the communication process.

Situation 12: Both lovers have finished dinner.

G: Oh, my god. I'm stuffed for dinner tonight.

B: Hadn't you been stuffed for dinner before?

(>>You've had enough for dinner before.)

G: ...

In this dialogue, "hadn't you been stuffed for dinner before" leads to the following counter-factual presupposition that "you had enough for dinner before", which will obviously upset the girlfriend seriously.

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis above, figuring out the presupposition in interpersonal communication is not only beneficial to diluting conflict between lovers, but also promotes a harmonious relationship.

Firstly, pragmatic presupposition can make communication develop toward the expected direction. The communicative process is the process of information transmission, and pragmatic presupposition is necessary to ensure information transmission for effective communication. In the communication, whether the addresser and the addressee will be able to communicate effectively depends on the shared background knowledge of the two sides. The participants share some common background knowledge, the utterances made by the addresser can be correctly understood by the addressee, and the communication will proceed smoothly. At the beginning of verbal communication, the addresser always puts some information as the pragmatic presupposition. The

pragmatic presupposition is the starting point for conversation, which often determines the process and development direction of the conversation. By taking advantage of the subjectivity of presupposition, the speaker can choose the presupposition for his intention, so that the conversation can develop toward the expected direction.

Secondly, pragmatic presupposition contributes to the achievement of the speaker's hidden intention. Once the presupposition information is accepted by the addressee, the conversation will be carried out smoothly, and the presupposition information will be considered as shared information. The presupposition is predicted by the speaker before making the utterance, and meanwhile it is always hidden in an inconspicuous place in the sentence. Therefore, the addresser can consciously take advantage of the latency of pragmatic presupposition to hide one's intention so as to achieve the communicative purpose. In this way, the addresser can realize the communicative purpose without exposing his intention.

Thirdly, pragmatic presupposition can help transfer the information focus so as to achieve the speaker's communicative intention. The pragmatic presupposition is closely related to the information focus. In verbal communication activities, the addresser usually organizes information in the form of a unit. The information in utterances contains both the old information and the new information. The old information is known to the addressee, while the new information is not known to the addressee. Therefore, the new information is an essential part of communication. Under some circumstances, new information can be transferred to other parts.

Here is a very interesting situation based on the three discussions above. The girlfriend hesitates to have the chocolate so she talks to her boyfriend, "I want to have that one, but I am afraid of becoming fatter." It is obvious that the boyfriend is supposed to answer yes or no according to the question. If the answer is no, the girlfriend may be disappointed for failing to have the chocolate. But what if the answer is yes? As far as the girlfriend is concerned, her boyfriend admits the fact that she is too fat to have that chocolate, which will easily cause serious conflict. Therefore, aiming at this situation, figuring out the presupposition is the key process of settling the controversy. With the application of the suggestions, the perfect answer may be: "You are not fat at all. You can just help yourself to it". This response cleverly avoids the embarrassment of both sides (eating chocolate means being fat, while abandoning chocolate means being unhappy) and manages to delight the girlfriend, which is a win-win conclusion.

According to the speaker's communicative purpose and intention, the speaker can shift the focus of the utterance information. The change of information focus is based on the change of pragmatic presupposition. No matter what the information focus is, the speaker utters with some pragmatic presupposition in mind, and the pragmatic presupposition decides the way to express information focus. The change of information focus leads to the change of pragmatic presupposition, which is a creative way to answer such kind of question, so the addresser can achieve his intention by shifting the information focus.

CONCLUSION

Presupposition, as a kind of pragmatic reasoning, is a universal phenomenon in language use and plays a significant part in interpersonal communication, which indicates the necessity of analyzing daily communication from this level. However, improper use of presupposition will inevitably lead to some unnecessary trouble. Through a brief discussion on the study of pragmatic presupposition

and the classification of pragmatic presupposition, this paper analyzes the phenomenon of pragmatic presupposition in interpersonal communication by taking the dialogues between lovers as the analytical subject. Based on those examples, the artifice and application of pragmatic presupposition can be well presented. Therefore, young lovers are supposed to be aware of pragmatic presupposition in language, so as to serve interpersonal communication more effectively. In addition, it is necessary to enhance the ability to comprehend the application of pragmatic presupposition, distinguish the application occasions and put it to good use appropriately.

Using pragmatic presupposition reasonably has a great effect on the speaker's utterance construction and the hearer's utterance understanding, thus making the effective communication smoothly achieved. The thesis proposes that the speaker can manipulate the pragmatic presupposition through using linguistic devices so as to achieve successful communication results and aims to give people, particularly lovers, more inspiration for effective communication and further improve people's ability to use language, therefore successfully using the language in communication to broaden new horizons.

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