

Iranian EFL Learners and their Knowledge of Presupposition

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ABSTRACT

The present study was done to see whether there exists any correlation between the semantic presupposition knowledge and pragmatic presupposition knowledge of EFL learners. To this end, 35 subjects, screened by a proficiency test, were given a 30 –item multiple-choice test including pragmatic presupposition and semantic presupposition. A native speaker checked the final version of the data and made the necessary corrections. The results showed that there was not significant correlation between semantic presupposition knowledge and pragmatic presupposition knowledge of EFL Learners.

KEY WORDS: Presupposition; semantic; presupposition; EFL.

INTRODUCTION

The presupposition theory in pragmatic is a new branch of linguistics. Linguists' interest in presupposition rises from their study on semantic relation. Presupposition can be studied from three perspectives, those are, from logical, semantics and pragmatics perspectives. Semantic and pragmatic presuppositions are two distinct kinds of presupposition in natural languages. From 1973 onwards it has become increasingly clear that presupposition differs from other semantic relations in that it is very sensitive to context. It cannot be viewed as a kind of sheer semantic relation. Rather, presupposition should be studied from a pragmatic perspective or approach.

Different perspective of study on presupposition aim at different purposes, in other words the study the study from a logical perspective on presupposition intends to reveal the true-and-false relationship between propositions which are thrown out as the relationship of necessary conditions. At the same time, to disclose the implied of the special sentences is the intention of both the study from the semantic perspective and the study of pragmatic perspective on presupposition. But the difference lies on that contexts are involved in the pragmatic perspectives study while semantic perspectives do not.

The first linguist who brought forward the definition on presupposition was Gottlob Frege [1] who is a German scholar (Levinson, 2001). In 2001, Levinson proposed the concept of presupposition. According to him, presupposition is the common ground which is embedded in an utterance that is took for granted by all participants, in other words, the background knowledge proposed by the statements or the undisputable information mutually known to all the participants in an utterance in a certain context. He points out that presupposition can be studied from both semantic approach and pragmatic approach.

It is agreeable that presuppositions are implied meanings which have close relationship with the meanings of some lexical items or grammatical structures. Those constructions are in fact first represented in semantic fields, such as Strawson [7] in 1950. Whereas, in the 1970's works, such as in the published papers of Morgan and Stalnaker [5], they hold the idea that the theories of presupposition are theoretically inadequate in semantic point of view which result in that presuppositions are so sensitive to contextual ingredients that cannot be took as semantic notion. It is undisputable to lots of linguists that it is not some lexical items or grammatical structures' internal implication that presuppositions are lies on that of some special but the characteristics of utterances in certain context, in other words presupposition lies on the properties of the utterances combine with a particular context where the sentences are uttered. These two different but close related approaches will be discussed briefly below.

Semantic presupposition

The semantic approach rooted in philosophy and it can trace back to the history of philosophy. In semantic approach, presuppositions are the relationship between sentences and the relationship between

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their propositions. According to Fasold[2], semantic presupposition referred as a relation between something that is actually said or could be said and something else which has to be the case in order for the thing said to make any sense at all. One of the properties of presupposition is constancy under negation. Two closed related notions, those are, entailment and assertion, which are both took the relationship between two propositions into consideration, are discussed in order to get a better understanding of this property of semantic presupposition.

A proposition A presupposes a proposition B refers to if proposition A is true, then proposition B is true, proposition A would be either true or not true; if proposition B is not true, then proposition A makes no sense; one cannot assert whether proposition A is true or not true: if proposition A is not true proposition B is still true.

An outstanding linguistic scholar Yule in 2000 give a definition to entailment, that is, entailment refers to something that logically from what is asserted. Proposition A entails entailment refers to something that logically from what is asserted. Proposition A entails proposition B implies that if proposition A is true, then proposition B definitely be true. If proposition A is not true, proposition B would be either true or not true. If proposition B is not true, proposition A definitely be not true. Looking at following two examples, example (1) entails example (2).

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| (1) John is a bachelor. | (A) |
| (2) John is a man. | (B) |

Following are examples that demonstrate the relationship between presupposition and assertion. When proposition A presupposes proposition B, in other words, sentences (3) presupposes sentences (4), then even when negate the statement (3) and get the opposite of the relationship as in statement (3'), however, the relationship between statement (3') and statement (4) still the same. Generally speaking, it is agreed that this feature of presupposition is defined as constancy under negation. Assertion has close relationship with the two proportions. Proposition A asserts proposition B refers to if proposition A is true, then proposition B definitely be true. On the condition that proposition A is false (when proposition A is negated) then proposition B is not true. On the condition that proposition A is either true or not true, supposes proposition A is controversial, and then the proposition B could be either true or not true. Looking at the following examples, we can see that statement (3) asserts statement (5).

- | | |
|--|-------|
| (3) John continues to make mistakes. | (A) |
| (3') John does not continue to make mistakes. | (A') |
| (3'') Does /Does not John continue to make mistakes? | (A'') |
| (4) John has made mistakes. | (B) |
| (5) John is making mistakes. | (B') |

There are two statements (4) and (5) are embedded in statement (3). If statement (3') can be got by negating or questioning sentences (3), then the proposition of sentence (4), which is presupposed by (3), is still true, but sentence (5), which is entailed by (3), turns into wrong sentence after negation, and turns into either true or not true after question.

Pragmatic Presupposition

Many scholars started to study presupposition as a kind of pragmatic implication according to the particular properties of presupposition. Pragmatic perspective treats sentences as utterances of human beings who communicate with each other by the language. Every scholar has his own point of views on the definition of pragmatic presupposition. Under this condition, different scholars will give different definition to presupposition no matter it is a broader or narrower one. In general, those different definitions can be mainly classified into three categories: those that treat presupposition as the addresser's assertion or intention of the utterances; those that view presupposition as the common knowledge of mutual known to the participants in the communication; and those that hold the view that the presupposition is the necessary condition of communication activity.

There are three different kinds of definitions of pragmatic presupposition. *First* of all, presupposition is considered as the interlocutor's assertion.

Secondly, presuppositions are defined as the felicity condition for the performance of a communication activity.

Thirdly, presupposition is treated as knowledge which is mutually known to all the participants.

According to the discussion above, we arrive at the conclusion that there is not a clear-cut boundary among the three definitions of pragmatic presupposition. Because different scholars have different

viewpoints on the definition of pragmatic presupposition, they carried out their study from different point of views. However, they all point out that context and the situation of the conversation are big factors when presupposition is studied. And presupposition should be used in the process of conversation. Based on these three definitions, presupposition is regarded as the speaker's assertions about the context of the conversation, about the felicity condition and constancy under negation of presupposition in certain concrete context.

Undoubtedly, there is close relationship among these three kinds of perspectives to pragmatic presupposition. What's more important, these three perspectives of pragmatic presupposition shared something: presupposition is the common knowledge mutual known by both the speaker and listener involved in a conversation, which works as the foundation for the interlocutor transmitted; just for the mutual known information, the listener is possible to comprehend the intention of the interlocutor.

What's more, in 1995, an outstanding linguistic scholar Grundy categorized presupposition as pragmatic presupposition and conventional presupposition. In the light of his pragmatic presupposition theory, pragmatic presupposition is defined as the hinted assumption and substantially pragmatic presupposition is non- linguistic.

Here is an example of him for illustration:

(1) Please notice Lily I 'm at breakfast.

Grundy[4] holds an idea that when the interlocutor utters sentence (1), he surely insisted some assertions, in other words, the speaker must hold the following assumptions. That is to say, the speaker is absolute know that the individual Lily will come to see him in a short time, and the interlocutor also thinks that the listener knows who is Lily and the listener is willing to tell Lilly. If such assertions did not exist, the interlocutor will not perform such a speech act for he knows the speech act has no meaning though uttered.

Different scholars give definition of pragmatic presupposition from different point of views with special central points and in different expression. Whereas, they have the same opinion on one perspective, in other words, semantic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition have significant differences. That is to say, pragmatic presupposition has close relationship with the context where the sentences are uttered. At the same time, semantic presupposition is closely connected with the lexical items and sentence structures. In short, interlocutors have presupposition should in the pragmatic viewpoint; presupposition is part of the implication of the sentence structure in the semantic viewpoint.

The properties of pragmatic presupposition

The interlocutors should take two notions into consideration when he or she makes use of presupposition in verbal communication, in other words, presupposition should be appropriate to the context where the sentences uttered and mutually known to the participants of the communication. The two fundamental properties of pragmatic presupposition: appropriateness and background knowledge which are crucial for a sentence comprehending. Accordingly, these manifest two particular properties of pragmatic presupposition in actual communication. *First*, the pragmatic presupposition should be appropriate to the context where the sentences uttered. It is known to everybody that the some presuppositions are held by interlocutor when he or she utters a sentence and these presuppositions works as the felicity condition of the listener comprehends of the sentences. However, in actual conversation, the listener may not comprehend the sentences meaning of the interlocutor or get a wrong interpretation to the sentences meaning of the interlocutor. Consequently, unsuccessful communication happened. Just for the in appropriateness of the pragmatic presupposition caused by interlocutor. This feature of presupposition is also named felicity condition of presupposition for a sentence. The felicity conditions are different in different contexts. A sentence would be appropriate if and only if the sentence is uttered under the satisfaction of felicity condition.

The *second* particular property of pragmatic presupposition is that presupposition should be mutually known to the participants of a conversation. Based on the previous section we arrive at a conclusion that a sentence pragmatically presupposes a presupposition if and only if this presupposition is appropriate or serve as the felicity condition to the very context. In fact, there exists another factor that affects the good comprehension of utterance inference. In other words, this presupposition should be mutually known by the speaker and listener or at the lowest should be known by the speaker and listener or at lowest should be non- conversational to the corresponding context. That is to say, an inappropriate statement would come into being if a sentence whose presupposition is not mutually acknowledged to the listener or the presupposition is controversial to the knowledge scale of the listener.

All in all, presupposition would be treated as known information for the speaker and hearer of a conversation; the inadequateness of known information with the interlocutor prohibits the listener from correctly comprehending of the inference or the aims of the conversation.

Presupposition is closely related with the lexical items and grammatical structure in the utterance for it is a kind of implied meaning. The interlocutor's own intention turns into the deep sources of implied meaning; the surface sources are specific sentence structures in the utterance. This also a difference between presupposition and conversational implicature which is another kind of implied meaning. Precisely, some lexical items and grammatical structures always took as the basis of the implied meaning of presupposition, at the same time, the semantic context of the whole utterances decides the implied meaning of conversational implicature. Because of this close relationship we will discuss about conversational implicature in the next section.

Semantic Presupposition vs. Pragmatic Presupposition

Many linguistic scholars restrain presupposition to the scope of semantic or philosophy. According to the contextual factors, faith or background knowledge of the participants in a conversation, they give the definition of presupposition from the pragmatic perspective. There is not a clear cut between semantics presupposition and pragmatic presupposition. The pragmatic point of view of presupposition has its root in the semantic theories of Frege of 1892 and Strawson in 1952. They described presupposition in terms of a common discussion in which they get a basic distinction between what an interlocutor presupposes and what he or she assumes asserts in his statement. Accordingly, the outstanding linguistic scholar Stalnaker in 1973, declares that generally speaking, there is no big difference between the semantic and pragmatic notions, because in a certain conversation, any semantic presupposition of a statement indicated would be a pragmatic presupposition of the interlocutors; the context, on the other hand does not bear. This viewpoint of presupposition obviously supports the combination of so named semantic presupposition into the pragmatic structure. In 1981, another outstanding linguistic scholar, McCawley points out a more detailed illustration of this proposition, that is, generally speaking, a sentence presupposing a proposition with a semantic presupposition p will pragmatically assert q , for instance,

Billy regrets that she is a member of the second language acquisition.

The proposition of sentence semantically presupposes that Billy is a member of the second language acquisition, at the same time, the utterance in which the speaker assumes that Billy regrets that he is a member of the second language acquisition will pragmatically presuppose that Billy is a member of the second language acquisition. This indicates that it is not strange that the origin of the semantic presupposition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The subjects of this study were 35 male and female students majoring in English Translation at Islamic Azad University, Arak Branch. They were chosen from among 55 junior university students through administration of a proficiency test. A multiple choice test of semantic and pragmatic presupposition including 30 items was designed and checked by a native speaker of English. The objective of the study was to find correlations between learners' semantic presupposition knowledge and pragmatic presupposition knowledge.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

$$r = \frac{\sum XY - \frac{(\sum X)(\sum Y)}{n}}{\sqrt{(\sum X^2 - \frac{(\sum X)^2}{n})(\sum Y^2 - \frac{(\sum Y)^2}{n})}}$$

Using Person Correlation Coefficient formula (), the result was $r=.12$. Hence, a weak correlation between knowledge of semantic presupposition and knowledge of pragmatic presupposition was shown. The results indicate that the gulf between what we say and what we mean, which is of great interest in pragmatics, cannot be accommodated in linguistic proper.

Conclusion

All the presupposition triggers in the form of lexical items or grammatical structures are linguistic measures that pragmatic presupposition is concluded. From this point of view, semantic presupposition is the noticeable subset of pragmatic presupposition. As the famous linguistic scholar Givón[3] in 1984 puts it, semantic presupposition is the noticeable subset of pragmatic presupposition.

As the result of this study show, however, Iranian EFL learner's knowledge about pragmatic presupposition is not related to their semantic knowledge of presupposition. It is a wrong belief that if teachers succeed in developing linguistic competence among their students, pragmatic competence takes care of itself. Introducing of pragmatic tasks and exercises in the classroom situation would prove highly motivating to learners particularly in non- native contexts.

New course books need to be designed with texts to facilitate the acquisition of pragmatic competence. Awareness raising activities relating to pragmatics need to be included right from the beginning.

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