

## **Students' Comprehension of Types of English Presuppositions in Higher Education**

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### ***Abstract***

*A pragmatic viewpoint holds that a sentence's presuppositions govern the types of settings in which it may be felicitously stated (Karttunen, 1974). The purposes of the research were to identify the students' utterance errors in the understanding of the uses of the types of presupposition and to assess the quantitative numbers of the students' utterance errors in using presupposition. The data in this research were collected by giving presupposition tests to the students. This research was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. There were 25 students were taken as a sample of research. The findings showed that the student's ability in uttering presupposition was 51% (inadequate). The student's ability in classifying the types of presupposition was 67% (Fair). In conclusion, the students found it difficult to comprehend the speaker's meaning of presupposition.*

**Keywords:** *Comprehension, Presupposition, Utterance*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language is used by people to express themselves. It is used not only to express their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions but also to share them with others. In fact, whether speaking or writing, presupposition and entailment occur in everyday life. When a speaker says something, he or she has background knowledge that comes into play. Semantics relations may hold between sentences of a language. Sometimes, those relations are the result of syntactic structure. Learning and analyzing how to distinguish presupposition is very useful in understanding the meaning of sentences semantically and pragmatically. Pragmatics studies the interpretation as a result of communication.

It is crucial to explain how a word's meaning relates to the meaning of the speech in which it is employed. (Mercer, 1991). Two logical ideas have developed with enough semantic clarity to be applied to issues having meaning aspects. A presupposition is one concept, and entailment is another. (Weber, 1977). Presuppositions and entailments play an important role in determining the meaning of a natural language utterance (Mercer, 1992). As opposed to declaring something, presuming something is taking it for granted. As an illustration, one may assertively state (1a) Sam broke the typewriter. Sam is accused of being the culprit after it is assumed that the typewriter was damaged. In a similar vein, if one assertively says (2a), John will once more quit school. One guesses that he has already dropped out of school and predicts that he will do so again. The speaker commits to both his assumptions and his assertions in each instance. However, there are some big differences between the two. (Soames, 1989).

There were nine presuppositions such as two existential presuppositions 22%, one lexical presupposition 11%, two structural presuppositions 22%, three factual presuppositions 34%, and one counterfactual presupposition 11% (Tambunan et al., 2019). The most common type of presupposition used in TIME Magazine is existential. The assumption assumed by the speaker to be committed to the existence of the entity names, and assumed to be present in the noun phrase is known as an existential presupposition. It is one of six types of presuppositions (Febrikal, 2015).

Presupposition deals with the knowledge of world and situations in which the speakers engage in conversation (Natkare, 2015). Entailment flows logically from what is said in the speech, whereas presupposition is what the speaker considers to be the case before making an utterance. When reading or

listening to written or spoken language, one typically seeks to grasp not only what the words themselves imply but also what the author or speaker intended to say. (Stateva et al., 2021) examines the impact of bilingualism on the learning and application of the Maximize Presupposition principle in the context of speakers' decisions between propositional attitude predicates (equivalent to know and thin). The impact of bilingualism on the learning and application of the Maximize Presupposition principle in the context of speakers' decisions between propositional attitude predicates (equivalent to know and thin). (Bacovcin et al., 2018) found a few hints of variations among triggers, which are compatible with our alternate theories about how the brain functions. Additionally, they discovered that assumption accommodation occurs even when it is not necessarily required for the job at hand, such as when learning a new language.

Presupposition has been linked to the employment of a vast number of words, phrases, and structures in the analysis of how speakers' assumptions are frequently communicated. These linguistic patterns are taken into account here as possible presupposition indicators, which can only turn into genuine presupposition in situations where speakers are present. (Yule, 2010) classifies that the word presupposition is the assumption that something is true due to the presence of some verbs such as "know" and "realize" and phrases involving glad. For instance: He had stopped stealing office supplies. Non-factive presupposition: it is an assumption that something is not true. For example, verbs like "dream", "imagine" and "pretend" are used with the presupposition that they are contrary to what is true.

To examine and identify the student's understanding of the types and the uses of presupposition in certain utterances, the researchers were conducted the research at the place where they teach. Based on the researchers experience and observation as the English lecturers at Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing (STBA) Persada Bunda Pekanbaru, they found that some of the students had difficulties in understanding and distinguishing the uses and the types of presupposition in utterances. Here are the samples utterances they were given to students to find out their presupposition and entailment: a. *STBA has some new lecturers*. We can presuppose or assume that b. *there are lecturers of STBA and the lecturers are new*. That utterance can be classified as an Existential presupposition. a. *What time did the class begin?* We **presuppose** or **assume** b. that *the class began*. It is categorized as a structural presupposition. That an **entails** b: a. *Our translation lecturer does not come today*. b. *We do not have a translation class today*. It can be seen that the utterance of our translation lecturer does not come today entails we do not have a translation class. It is clear that this study has certain issues based on the identification of the aforementioned issues. Due to the complexity of the issues, the researchers only concentrate on: 1). Some EFL students still have not understood and distinguished the types of presupposition well. 2). Some students find semantics and pragmatics hard to learn.

## METHOD

Quantitative data and qualitative data are the two types of data. Using different techniques to differentiate quantitative and qualitative research is examined (Karnedi et al., 2021). This study was conducted at Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing (STBA) Persada Bunda Pekanbaru. It was a location where the researchers performed their duties as the English lecturers. There were 25 students were taken as a sample of research. The researchers conducted research in this area to discover and pinpoint the students' comprehension of the presupposition test that was administered to them. Using different techniques to differentiate quantitative and qualitative research is examined. This study used a scoring rubric (adapted from Hughes (2002:104) and Yule (2002) to quantify student errors (1996) It did so using the following formula:

$$X = \frac{\sum x_i}{n}$$

where: X : Mean  
 $\sum x_i$  : Sum of students' score  
 n : Sum of students' amount.

The main tool for obtaining quantitative data was the test. The researchers who were interested in presupposition created the exam. The steps for gathering the data are as follows:

1. The researchers administern, lkhmkniied a test on presupposition to the students after they had completed their semantics and pragmatics coursework. The tests' format and content are as follows:

**Table 1. The Test Format for Types of Presupposition**

No.	Utterances	Speaker's Assumption/ Presupposition	Types of Presupposition
1.1.	a. My Lecturer's house is big.	b. ....	.....

2.	a. If Lida cares about her health, she will stop smoking.	b. ....	.....
3.	a. She didn't realize someone was ill.	b. ....	.....
4.	a. I'm glad it's over	b. ....	.....
5.	a. Chris has given up writing.	b. ....	.....
6.	a. You are late again.	b. ....	.....
7.	a. When did Mary arrive at campus?	b. ....	.....
8.	a. I dreamed that I was rich.	b. ....	.....
9.	a. We imagined that we were in Bali	b. ....	.....
10.	a. If you were my sister, I would not let you go.	b. ....	.....
11.	a. Where did you meet our lecturer.	b. ....	.....
12.	a. Susi's bag is red.	b. ....	.....

2. The students had sixty minutes to fill in the utterances of presupposition in the blank sheets and classify the presupposition based on its type. There were some steps in analyzing the data:
- The data of students' tests were analyzed by using model analysis proposed by Yule (1996).
  - The result of the students' tests was analyzed quantitatively based on the formula stated above and qualitatively by adopting students' rating scores in testing for language proposed by Arthur Hughes.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As stated in the research's objectives, this study attempted to quantify the quantitative numbers of students' utterance errors related to utilizing presupposition and identify the students' utterance errors in their comprehension of the uses of the types of presupposition. The results collected through the administration of a test on presuppositional utterances in semantics were examined by the researchers. The tests' analysis was based on Yule and Saeed's hypotheses. A collaborator also assisted them in taking pictures and gathering data.

### The Analysis of Students' Qualitative Errors of Uttering Presupposition

**Datum 1: a. My Lecturer's house is big.**

**Table 2. Analysis of Datum 1**

Student :1	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition	My lecturer has big house	My Lecturer exists and he has a house.
Types	No error	Existential

Based on the student's answer, it can be seen that she made an error of presupposition but she could classify the type of that presupposition correctly. In this item, among twenty students, only one of them uttered it correctly. Their errors were not about uttering the right presupposition but also most of them had difficulties in determining its type. *My lecturer's house is big* presupposes *my lecturer exists* and the speaker also holds the specific presupposition that *he has a house*. That utterance belongs to existential presupposition. It is the assumption of the existence of the entities named by the speaker.

**Datum 2: a. If Lida cares about her health, she will stop smoking.**

**Table 3. Analysis of Datum 1**

Student: 3	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition	Lida doesn't care about her health, she still smoking.	Lida smokes.
Types	No error	Counterfactual presupposition

The above identification table showed that it was hard for student 3 to find out the presupposition of that utterance. *Lida doesn't care about her health, she still smoking* was not the right presupposition. The correct presupposition of that utterance can be seen as follows, that a below presupposes b:

- If Lida cares about her health, she will stop smoking.
- Lida smokes.

In the other words, **Lida smokes** is the right presupposition of that if conditional sentence. This is a counterfactual presupposition, which makes the assumption that the presupposed reality is not just false but also the complete opposite of what is true or in conflict with the available evidence. For instance, many conditional structures—often referred to as counterfactual conditionals—assume that the information included in the if-clauses is false at the moment of utterance.

In this case, most of the students found difficulties in uttering the right presupposition and classifying its type. Because a conditional sentence or counterfactual presupposition is hard for the students to understand. It is not simple grammar but it is a complex one to understand well.

**Datum 3: She didn't realize someone was ill.**

**Table 4. Analysis of Datum 3**

Student: 6	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition	She is an arrogant.	Someone is ill.
Types	Counter factual	factive

Based on the student's answer, it was a great mistake made by the student in uttering the right presupposition. The correct presupposition of this utterance is *someone is ill*. The other students also faced the same problem in uttering that sentence. Among 25 students, only 3 of them uttered it precisely. *She didn't realize someone was ill* is classified as a factive presupposition is the presumption that something is true because certain verbs, like "know" and "realize," or expressions like "happy," are present. We can therefore assume that someone is ill when a speaker claims she was unaware they were ill.

**Datum 4: I'm glad it's over.**

**Table 5. Analysis of Datum 4**

Student: 10	Error Identification	Error Correction
Presupposition	I can go home so.	it's over
Types	Lexical	Factive Presupposition

It is a very unpredictable answer that done by the student. Error identification and error correction showed that how hard the student uttered the correct presupposition. *I can go home so* is not the right preposition. *I'm glad it's over* presupposes *it's over*. This presupposition is classified as a factive presupposition. it is the assumption that something is true due to the presence of some verbs such as "know" and "realize" and of phrases involving glad. But the student considered that it was lexical type. In other words, she not only made error in identifying the right presupposition but also it was hard for her in classifying its type.

**Datum 5: Chris has given up writing.**

**Table 6. Analysis of Datum 5**

Student 10	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition	Chris is tired	He used to write
Types	Counter factual	Lexical presupposition

The above table showed that the student 10 uttered the incorrect presupposition and its type. *Chris has given up writing* does not presuppose *Chris is tired*, the right utterance is *he used to write*. Counter factual is not the right type of that presupposition. The precise type is lexical presupposition. It is the assumption that, in using one word, the speaker can act as if another meaning (word) will be understood. But understanding presupposition and mastering English grammar are the main problem that caused the error.

**Datum 6: You are late again.**

**Table 7. Analysis of Datum 6**

Student: 20	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition	He is lazy.	You were late before.
Types	No error.	Lexical presupposition.

Referring to the students' answer, it can be understood that she did not really know what presupposition is. She tended to define the sentence rather than utter the right presupposition. Yet, she could classify the type of the presupposition correctly. *You are late again* presupposing *you were late before*. That is the right

presupposition of that utterance. It is the assumption that, in using one word, the speaker can act as if another meaning (word) will be understood. The type of that utterance is lexical presupposition.

**Datum 7: When did Mary arrive at campus?**

**Table 8. Analysis of Datum 7**

Student: 12	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition Types	Mary have not arrive at campus. No error.	Mary arrived. <i>Structural presupposition</i>

The datum 12 showed that, the student's error was not only about uttering the right presupposition but also, he had difficulties in mastering English grammar. He uttered that *Mary have not arrive at campus*. He did not understand tense well. The right presupposition must be in past tense but he wrote it in unclear tense. Simply, *when did Mary arrive at campus?* **presupposes** *Mary arrived*. But he was still able to classify its type correctly.

**Datum 8: I dreamed that I was rich.**

**Table 9. Analysis of Datum 8**

Student: 24	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition Types	Just about my dream. Non factual	I am not rich. <i>Non-factive presupposition</i>

The type the presupposition above is a non- factive presupposition. It is an assumption that something is not true or contrary to the fact. It is exactly the same with if conditional sentences. For example, verbs like "dream", "imagine" and "pretend" are used with the *presupposition* that what follows is not true. *I dreamed that I was rich* **presupposes** *I am not rich*. When the utterance was in the past form, the fact showed that it happens in the present situation.

In fact, the student's answer was really far from the right one. *I dreamed that I was rich* does not **presuppose** *Just about my dream*. He misunderstood the definition of this type of presupposition. In the other cases, some students uttered precisely but they wrote it in the past tense (I was not rich). When the expressing in past tense and the true situation is in present.

**Datum 9: We imagined that we were in Bali**

**Table 10. Analysis of Datum 9**

Student: 17	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition Types	We are feel in Bali now. No answer	We are not in Bali. Non- factive presupposition

It seemed that it was not easy for student 17 to find out the right utterance of the presupposition above. He uttered "*We are feel in Bali now*". It was not the correct utterance. The error was not about finding the right speaker's meaning of that utterance but he did not know much about using be in a sentence.

Among 25 students, only 8 of them uttered the presupposition and classified its type precisely. It meant that more than 50% students were not able to find the right utterance and the type of presupposition. *We imagined that we were in Bali* **presupposes** *we are not in Bali*. The verb "imagine" belongs to non-factive presupposition. People use the word "imagine" when they want reality to be different, to be exactly the opposite of (contrary to) the true situation. When a speaker expresses a dream or imagine about a present situation, she/he uses a past form.

**Datum 10: If you were my sister, I would not let you go.**

**Table 11. Analysis of Datum 10**

Student: 13	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition Types	I let her go, she not my sister. No error	You are not my sister. Counterfactual presupposition

To find out the right presupposition of the above utterance was not by saying *I let her go, she not my sister*. *You are not my sister* was the precise one. The statement in datum 9 was presumptive counterfactual reasoning. The presumption that what is assumed is not merely false, but also the complete antithesis of

what is true or counter to the evidence. For instance, many conditional structures—often referred to as counterfactual conditionals—assume that the information included in the if-clauses is false at the moment of utterance. Even though you aren't my daughter, I would let you go if you were. Simply saying, "If you were my daughter, I would let you go," assumes that you are not.

**Datum 11: Where did you meet our lecturer.**

**Table 12. Analysis of Datum 11**

Student: 8	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition Types	Our lecturer is exist. Existential	You met our lecturer. Structural presupposition

Based on the student's answer, it was a great mistake that made by the student in uttering the right presupposition. *Where did you meet our lecturer?* does not **presuppose** *our lecturer is exists*. In fact, it was not an existential type. Using be is also an error done the student. *Where did you meet our lecturer?* **presupposes** *you met our lecturer*. It belongs to words and phrases that have presuppositions attached, or structural presuppositions. For instance, the traditional interpretation of an English WH-question is that the information following the WH-form (such as when and where) is already known to be true. Instead of only the questioner's assumptions, the listener believes that the information being offered is unquestionably true.

**Datum 12: Susi's bag is red.**

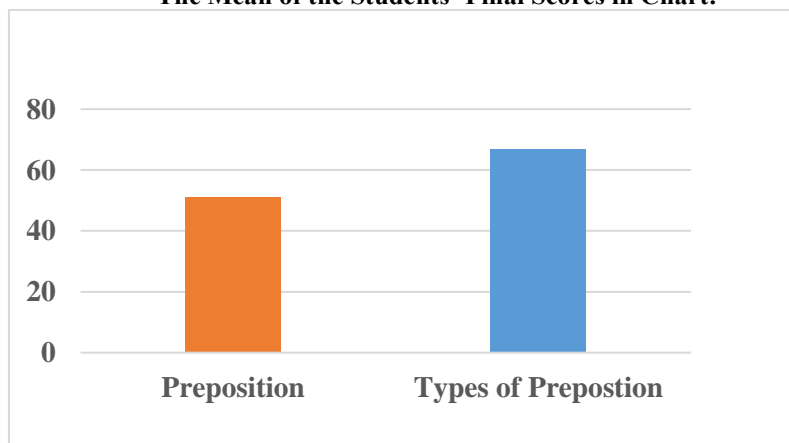
**Table 13. Analysis of Datum 12**

Student: 3	Error Identifications	Error Corrections
Presupposition Types	Red bag has Susi. Lexical	Susi exists and She has a bag Existential presupposition

The student' answer indicated that it was really hard for her to find out the right utterance of *Susi's bag is red*. Even it was only a simple presupposition. When we observed her answer, *red bag has Susi*. It does not make a sense to be a good sentence. The second error was in classifying the type of presupposition. It was not a lexical type but it was existential. *Susi's bag is red* **presupposes** *Susi exists and she has a bag*. It belongs to an existential presupposition: it is the assumption of the existence of the entities named by the speaker.

In light of the above analysis, it can be concluded that most of the students found it difficult to define presuppositional utterances. Many factors could cause their errors. Mastering semantics and pragmatics as parts of linguistics branches were the main factors. In determining the meaning of a natural language speech, presuppositions are crucial. Presuppositions are described as statements whose veracity the speaker takes for granted to carry on a discussion or other form of communication. The presupposition is anything that the speaker believes to be true before speaking. It indicates how individuals might analyze some components of hidden meaning to demonstrate their thought processes. The speaker has all of these presumptions, all of which may be incorrect. The presupposition is sometimes thought of as the connection between two propositions. Unfortunately, not all students passed these tests easily. There were contradicting scores among them. The lowest grades were given to 6 students who received in-acceptable rating scores. Their scores were less than 1 point. It meant they could only answer less than 10%. Four of the students got less than 40%.

**The Mean of the Students' Final Scores in Chart:**



On the basis of the table and diagram above, it can be stated that:

1. The student's ability in uttering presupposition was 51%. (inadequate). It showed that the Students still struggled greatly with choosing the appropriate language level, verifying the veracity of facts, numbers, and words, and upholding proper writing mechanics. Simply put, they frequently committed grammatical or word-order mistakes, and the reader frequently had to rely on their interpretation.
2. The student's ability in classifying the types of presupposition was 67% (Fair). It meant Students showed some difficulty avoiding wordy expressions, still used unnecessary information, had a limited vocabulary, and frequently made mistakes that hampered the communication of their thoughts.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the research, the students had difficulty understanding presuppositions, and they were unable to differentiate and classify the types of presuppositions. The second research analysis result showed that the students' achievements were unexpected, and the average scores were classified into different categories with most of students got fair score. The findings showed that the students' lack of comprehension on using presupposition in certain utterances. In fact, presupposition plays an important role to help the speaker and listener understanding the meaning implied based on the situation in a conversation. Thus, for future researcher, it is expected to identify the factors that inhibit the students in understanding presupposition and the strategy to help students in learning and implementing presupposition in real life situation.

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