



A Stylistic Analysis of Presupposition Triggers in Some Selected Novels by Joseph Conrad

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Abstract

This study investigates presupposition as a linguistic and stylistic device in selected novels by Joseph Conrad, namely *Heart of Darkness* and *The Shadow-Line*. It focuses on identifying and analyzing presupposition triggers employed in literary discourse to uncover how implicit meanings are conveyed by the author. The analysis adopts Karttunen's classification of presupposition triggers, as discussed in Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996). A qualitative approach is applied to a sample of eight excerpts selected from the two novels. The findings indicate that Conrad's novels make systematic use of specific presupposition triggers, particularly existential, structural (it-cleft and pseudo-cleft), and lexical triggers, including factive and aspectual verbs. The study demonstrates that presupposition triggers function effectively in literary texts to shape meaning and guide reader interpretation, confirming the applicability of Karttunen's model to stylistic analysis in fiction.

Keywords: Stylistic Analysis of Presupposition

تحليل أسلوبى لمحقرّات الافتراض المسبق في بعض الروايات المختارة لجوزيف كونراد

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المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الافتراض المسبق بوصفه أداة لغوية وأسلوبية في روايتين مختارتين للكاتب جوزيف كونراد، هما *Heart of Darkness* و *The Shadow-Line* وتركز الدراسة على تحديد وتحليل محقرّات الافتراض المسبق في الخطاب الأدبي، بهدف الكشف عن كيفية توظيف المعاني الضمنية في النصوص الروائية. وتعتمد الدراسة تصنيف كارتنن لمحقرّات الافتراض المسبق كما ورد في ليفنسون (1983) ويول (1996)، مع اتباع منهج نوعي في تحليل ثمانية مقتطفات مختارة من الروايتين. وتُظهر نتائج التحليل أن روايات كونراد توظف أنماطاً محددة من محقرّات الافتراض المسبق، ولا سيما المحقرّات الوجودية، والبنبوية (جملة الشقّ *it-cleft* وجملة الشقّ الزائف *pseudo-cleft*)، إضافة إلى المحقرّات المعجمية مثل الأفعال الواقعية (factive verbs) والأفعال الحديثة (aspectual verbs). وتؤكد الدراسة فاعلية محقرّات الافتراض المسبق في تشكيل المعنى وتوجيه تأويل القارئ، كما تُبرز صلاحية نموذج كارتنن للتطبيق في التحليل الأسلوبى للنصوص الأدبية.

كلمات مفتاحية: تحليل أسلوبى لمحقرّات الافتراض

Introduction

Presupposition is a linguistic tactic examined by numerous linguistic scholars and philosophers. This article focuses on finding and analysing the presupposition triggers in Joseph Conrad's novels 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The Shadow-Line.' The research seeks to elucidate the several methods of presupposition triggers employed by authors in literary compositions. The approach relies on Karttunen's model of presupposition triggers (as referenced



in Levinson 1983 and Yule 1996). The article concludes that the two unique categories employ specific presupposition triggers. Specifically, existential, structural (it-cleft), structural (pseudo-cleft), lexical (factive verbs), and lexical (aspectual verbs).

The Notion of Stylistics

According to Hough (1969: PP. 1-2), the term stylistics is defined as a prominent branch in linguistics. It is concerned with the study of style in language. This term is described as an old one; it is mainly taken from the Latin word (stilus) to denote a short made of reed used for writing on a broad made of wax. Traditionally, stylistics goes back to the very beginning of classical Rhetoric and poets.

Verdonk (2002: P.1) mentions that the term 'style' in the language is one that we use commonly in our everyday conversations and writings. Actually, we can use it with reference to the shape or design of something, like the elegant style of the house, and when talking about how something is presented, like *I don't like his style of management*. The term style is commonly used in our daily life and communication when describing someone's way of speaking, performance, or writing. In addition, we can use it when we talk about furniture and describe a distinctive manner of a school or institution.

Crystal (1991: p.332) depicts the term 'stylistics' as a field of linguistics that shows the features of situational distinctive uses (varieties) of language, and tries to establish the basics of principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by members and social groups in their use of language. There are various types of stylistics: general stylistics, Applied stylistics, literary stylistics, and stylo-statics.

Semino (2011) reveals the basic aim of stylistics as being the description of formal linguistic characteristics which are restricted by specific socio-cultural contexts, the explanation of why those features are used instead of alternatives, and the classification of those features based on their contextual function.

The Concept of Presupposition

Yule (1996: P.25) describes pragmatic presupposition as "*something the speaker assumes to be the case before making an utterance.*" Wales (2011: P.341) points out that the term 'presupposition' is used in semantics and pragmatics and taken from logic to denote the necessary preconditions or assumptions made in speaking or writing an utterance, distinct from what may actually be asserted, as in:

(1) "*So, I'm surprised she's leaving.*"



In the aforementioned example, the speaker or writer presumes the occurrence of someone's departure while simultaneously expressing the speaker's astonishment. The presumption remains unchanged even if the speaker was not taken aback.

Renkema (1993: P.154) remarks that the term 'presupposition' originated in the philosophy of logic, where it is employed to refer to a specific type of implicit information. The listener must identify the implicit information due to the presence of unarticulated content in the speaker's statement. Huang (2007) defines the term 'presupposition' as an inference or proposition whose truth is taken for granted in the utterance. It is noteworthy to state that assumption is intricately linked to speakers and phrases.

Stalnaker (1973: P.447) indicates that there is a relationship between a speaker's presuppositions and sentence presuppositions to interpret a sentence appropriately. He defines speaker presupposition in (A) and sentence presupposition in (B) below:

- (A) A person's presuppositions are the propositions whose veracity he assumes in a dialogue.
- (B) A sentence possesses a presupposition if its usage would typically be deemed incorrect unless the speaker assumes a specific notion. A statement necessitates a presupposition in such a scenario. This concept of presupposition requirement will elucidate the linguist's definition of presupposition.

The statement "*I have to pick up my sister at the airport*" presupposes the existence of a sister for the speaker. This statement will be deemed unsuitable unless the speaker assumes he has a sister or behaves as though he has one. Therefore, in this scenario, a phrase necessitates presupposition, and its appropriateness is solely dictated by the speaker's internal condition.

Presupposition Triggers

Saeed (2016: PP. 101-102) asserts that a distinct category of presupposition is conveyed by unique phrases or constructions, collectively referred to as 'presupposition triggers.' This category of presupposition is elucidated in the subsequent points:

1- It is important to note that some of these triggers are derived from the syntactic structures like (cleft-construction, and Pseudo-cleft construction):

- (1) "*It was his behavior with frogs that distinguished me.*"
- (2) "*What disgusted me was his behavior with frogs.*"
- (3) "*Something disguised me.*"



2- Various types of subordinate clauses generate presuppositions, such as temporal adverbial clauses and comparison clauses.

3- The utilisation of specific terms (lexical triggers), particularly verbs such as regret and realise, designated as factive verbs due to their presupposition of the veracity of their complement clause:

(5) *"Mina realized that Ali had dandruff."*

(6) *"Ali regretted eating the banana."*

4- A notable category of presupposition triggers is known as 'aspectual verbs,' such as (start, begin, stop). These kinds possess a switch assumption; the new condition is simultaneously described and assumed not to have undergone the change:

(7) *"Judy started smoking cigarettes."*

(8) *"Judy used not to smoke cigars."*

(9) *"Helen stopped seeing werewolves."*

(10) *"Layla used to see werewolves."*

The Modal of Presupposition Trigger: Karttunen (as cited in Levinson, 1983, and Yule, 1996)

Karttunen (as mentioned in Levinson 1983 and Yule 1996) categorises the modalities of presupposition triggers into three fundamental types:

1. The Existential (definite descriptions).
2. The lexical categories include implicative verbs, change of state verbs, evaluative verbs, counterfactual verbs, conventional expressions, and iterative forms.
3. The Structural (cleft constructions, Wh-questions, adverbial and comparative constructions, counterfactual conditionals, and non-restrictive phrases).

1. The Existential Presupposition

This form of assumption is manifested in possessive constructions. The existential presupposition is presumed to exist not only in possessive formations but also in any proper noun or definite noun phrase:

(11) *"Mary's dog is cute."*

(11a) *"There exists someone called Mary."*

(11b) *"Mary has a dog."*



As previously mentioned, Sentence (11) presupposes (11a), and (11b) presupposes the existence of an individual named Mary who possesses a dog. All definite names imply the existence of their referents. In contrast, non-definite names do not elicit an assumption as they lack references.

2. Lexical Presupposition Trigger

This kind of presupposition activates various sub-types, including implicative verbs, factive items, change-of-state verbs, evaluative verbs, and counterfactual verbs.

2.1 Implicative verbs:

Yule (1996: p. 28) elucidates that lexical presupposition fundamentally signifies that an individual succeeded in accomplishing a task. The verb 'managed' is crucial in establishing and implying meaning. The meaning of "arrested" differs from its presumed meaning. The former signifies that the individual achieved a particular task.

The latter, which presupposes meaning or (non-asserted), is that the person tried to do that something. Therefore, the verb 'managed' denotes asserting meaning, and the verb 'tried' denotes the presupposed meaning. These types of verbs are known as 'implicative verbs.' The following examples are proposed by Levinson (1983: P.181):

(12) "John managed to open the door."

(13) "John tried to open the door."

2.2 Factive items

Toruan (n.d.) notes that the term factive presupposition is expressed by some verbs, such as know, realize, regret, be, odd, aware, and glad.

(14) "Michael didn't realize that Cano was wrong. Cano regrets telling us."

2.3 Aspectual Verbs:

Saeed (1997) reveals that the aspectual verbs have a kind of switch presupposition that the new state is both described and presupposed not to have held before the change:

(15) "Judy started smoking cigars."

(16) "Judy used not to smoke cigars."

It is important to show many further examples of aspectual verbs: begin, continue, finish, take, leave, enter, come, and arrive.



2.4 Verbs of judging

Levinson (1983) demonstrates that the verbs associated with judgement encompass 'accuse, blame, and criticise.' These types of verbs are ascribed to the subject of the judgement verb, rather than to the speaker.

(17a) *"Agatha accused/didn't accuse Ian of plagiarism."*

b. *"(Agatha thinks) Plagiarism is bad."*

(18a) *"Ian criticized/didn't criticize Agatha for running away."*

b. *"(Ian thinks) Agatha ran away."*

3- Structural Presupposition Triggers

This type of presupposition triggers comprises specific syntactic constructions like 'It-Cleft, Wh-cleft, Wh- question, and adverbial clauses.'

3.1 It-cleft construction

Wales (2011: P. 57) asserts that an it-cleft is a grammatical construct employed to emphasise focus by dividing a simple sentence into two clauses. One includes a cataphoric pronoun, combined with the auxiliary verb be, while the other features a relative clause.

(19) *"It is nice that you could come."*

(20) *"It was the sparrow who killed Cock Robin."*

3.2 Pseudo- Cleft Construction

Shopen (1985: P. 358) notes that the basic function of the pseudo-cleft sentence is to split the sentence into two parts: the subject (theme) and the complements (Rheme). The following examples are proposed by Blackwell (2014: p. 70):

(21) *"Mary bought a first edition."*

(22) *"What Mary bought was a first edition."*

3.3 Wh-questions

This kind is understood with the assumption that the information following the wh-form is already acknowledged as true:

(23) *"Who has taken my umbrella?"*



The addresser presupposes that someone has snatched his umbrella. It would be abnormal for a speaker to state, "I know he took my umbrella, but who has taken it?"

3.4 Adverbial clauses

Biber et al. (1999) assert that adverbial clauses possess a degree of positional flexibility. They are often positioned either at the beginning or the end.

(24) *"She wrote the book when she lived in Boston."*

(25) *"She lived in Boston."*

Data Analysis

Extract (1)

The Shadow-Line

"Captain Giles was at the head of the table. I exchanged a few words of greeting with him and sat down on his left. Stout and pale, with a great shiny dome of a bald forehead and prominent brown eyes, he might have been anything but a seaman."

The example above contains one type of presupposition trigger, which is called 'Existential Presupposition', in particular, the definite description. In the above italic example, the author presupposes the existence of a man called 'Captain Giles' and his position was at the head of the table.

Extract (2)

The Shadow-Line

"It was tacitly understood in the port that John Nieven was a fierce misogynist; and the absurd character of the sally convinced me that he meant to be nasty—very nasty—had meant to say the most crushing thing he could think of."

It is clear from the example above that the italic sentence comprises one type of presupposition trigger. The structural type, specifically the It-Cleft sentence. The author presupposes that what is tacitly understood in the port is a fierce misogynist. The author employs the It-Cleft sentence as a linguistic device to convey this type of presupposition.

Extract (3)

The Shadow-Line

"He gave me a searching look, and in a benevolent, heavy-uncle manner asked point blank: "Why did you throw up your berth?"



In the example above, the author adopts one type of presupposition trigger, which is termed 'Structural Presupposition.' In particular, the 'Wh-question', the author is purportedly assuming that someone has vacated his spot.

Extract (4)

The Shadow-line

"What I really needed was to be alone for a bit. I seized this opening hastily. My bedroom was a quiet refuge in an apparently uninhabited wing of the building."

The above italic example comprises one type of presupposition trigger, which is labeled as 'Structural Presupposition,' particularly the Pseudo-Cleft sub-type. The author presupposes that the only thing he needs is to be alone. The author uses the Pseudo-Cleft sentence as a linguistic choice to express this type of presupposition.

Extract (5)

The Shadow-Line

"I regret to say I stopped before going in. There had been a revolution in my moral nature. He waited open-mouthed, breathless, while I looked at him for half a minute."

In the above italicized example, the author adopts the lexical presupposition trigger, specifically the factive items. The author presents an assumption or presupposition by employing the factive verb (regret).

Extract (6)

Heart of Darkness

"He reports dryly, 'I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals,' meaning the uncle and his fellow explorers."

It is clear from the quote above that the author presupposes that something is true by employing one of the factive items, which is the verb 'know.' The trigger presupposition in the above quote is 'the fate of the less valuable animals.'

Extract (7)

Heart of Darkness

"He describes his fireman as believing an evil spirit lurks inside the boiler of the ship; later, he begins to wonder if that description, meant to illustrate a native's lack of scientific understanding, might not be accurate after all."



In the aforementioned italicised example, the author demonstrates the aspectual verb 'begin' to illustrate the trigger assumption within the sentence. The author assumes that the individual began to question the accuracy of the depiction intended to depict a native's deficiency in scientific comprehension. The author was unaccustomed to wonder.

Extract (8)

Heat of Darkness

"When I thought of the West's television and cinema and newspapers, about books read in its schools and out of school, of churches preaching to empty pews about the need to send help to the heathen in Africa, I realized that no easy optimism was possible."

It is obvious from the above italic example that the author employs the factive verb 'realize' to presuppose a particular idea in the example. The trigger information, 'No easy optimism was possible.'

Extract (9)

Heat of Darkness

"When I thought of the West's television and cinema and newspapers, about books read in its schools and out of school, of churches preaching to empty pews about the need to send help to the heathen in Africa, I realized that no easy optimism was possible."

It is obvious from the above italic example that the author employs the factive verb 'realize' to presuppose a particular idea in the example. The trigger information, 'No easy optimism was possible.'

Extract (10)

Heart of Darkness

"I asked myself sometimes what it all meant. They wandered here and there with their absurdly long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed."

The quote above contains the sub-types of the structural presupposition triggers, which are termed 'Wh-question.' The author is presupposing of taking for granted that they have wandered in the area for a particular reason. The example above analogizes the sentence 'I know that they had wandered, but what did this mean?'

Conclusion



This study has demonstrated many presupposition triggers employed in two Joseph Conrad books, 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The Shadow-Line.' The study examines eight quotes randomly picked from these two works. The analytical results indicate that the Modal of Presupposition Trigger: Karttunen (as referenced in Levinson, 1983, and Yule, 1996) has been effectively utilised in literary works. Furthermore, the study has revealed that various assumption triggers are present in these texts.

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