

Presupposition is an assumption or a belief that a speaker has about the world, which is taken for granted as true in order to make a statement meaningful. Unlike entailment, which is a logical consequence of a statement, a presupposition is a background assumption that remains true even when the sentence is negated.

How Presupposition Works

A classic way to test for a presupposition is to see if the assumption holds true in both a statement and its negative form.

Consider the following examples:

- **Statement:** "My brother **stopped smoking**."
- **Negation:** "My brother **didn't stop smoking**."

In both cases, the sentence **presupposes** that "My brother was smoking before." If this background assumption is false, the original statement is meaningless or infelicitous.

This is different from a simple entailment. The statement "My brother stopped smoking" entails that "My brother is not smoking now." However, the negation "My brother didn't stop smoking" does not entail that he isn't smoking now (in fact, it implies the opposite).

Triggers of Presupposition

Certain words and grammatical structures, known as **presupposition triggers**, reliably signal a presupposition. Some common types include:

- **Definite Descriptions:** Phrases like "the" + noun often presuppose the existence of the thing described.
 - *Sentence:* "The King of France is bald."
 - *Presupposition:* There is a King of France.
- **Factive Verbs:** Verbs that indicate knowledge or a fact presuppose that the clause following them is true.
 - *Sentence:* "She **regrets** quitting her job."
 - *Presupposition:* She quit her job.
 - Other examples: *know, realize, be aware that, be sorry that.*
- **Iterative Adverbs:** Adverbs that indicate repetition presuppose that the action has happened before.
 - *Sentence:* "She is **again** late for class."
 - *Presupposition:* She has been late for class before.

- Other examples: *again, no longer, return.*
- **Change of State Verbs:** Verbs that signal a change of state presuppose the prior state.
 - *Sentence:* "John **managed to** open the window."
 - *Presupposition:* John tried to open the window.
 - Other examples: *start, stop, continue.*

Presupposition is a key concept in **pragmatics** because it deals with the context and shared assumptions between a speaker and a listener, going beyond the literal meaning of the words to understand what is being communicated.

