# Presupposition and Deixis-In the Conversations of Nigerians

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## Abstract

Language is a powerful tool of expression. In its use, a writer or a speaker tries to alternate, vary or avoid repetition by making use of some items in place of another. In some expressions, a speaker that shares same knowledge of something with the hearer or listener hence, the speaker's expression may exclude what is assumed the listener already knows. It is on this basis that the study examined Presupposition and Deixis –In the conversations in Anambra State. In the course of this research, the researcher drafted two research questions that guided the study- the researcher went to the area of study, Diocese on the Niger Secretariat at Onitsha North L.G.A.,

P.G. Common room, Unizik, interviewed and observed the selected sample. The selected samples were selected using simple random sampling and qualitative research design was employed in the study. The study examined presupposition reflected in speeches and dietic expressions. Justice was also done to the types of the two concepts.

**Keywords**: Presupposition, Deixis, Conversation, Nigerians

## Introduction:

When a speaker uses referring expressions like this, he or Shakespare in normal circumstances, he or she is working with an assumption that the hearer knows which referent is intended. In a more general way, speakers continually design their linguistic messages on the basis of assumptions about what their hearers already know. These assumptions may be mistaken of course, but they underline much of what we say in everyday use of language. Some of these assumptions are made outside the physical context, while making use of expressions that require the context to understand them. This leaves the hearer with no other option but to seek how to link the utterance to its context.

To this end, the problem of this study lies on the fact that some people do not accept the phenomena that sometimes assumptions are misunderstood and mistaken for a different thing and be courteous of that in conversations despite their level of conviction on the hearer's knowledge of the already existing thing.

It is obvious that perfect interpretation of a speaker's statement is very essential in communication, but sometimes, items embedded in an expression pose barrier in achieving perfect interpretation. This unveils what is behind mistaken and misunderstood utterances and write ups. Perfect interpretation and linking of an utterance to its contexts aids easy interpretation of the utterance. For this reason the importance of this research work cannot be over emphasized because lexemes that pose this barrier would be exposed, effectiveness in their usage promoted and misinterpretation reduce to the bearest minimum. Two research questions guided the study which are: how does mutually shared knowledge promote implicit assumptions? To what extent does an expression's absence of the context of use hinder intelligibility?

In addition, the study will investigate presupposition and deixis amongst Diocese on the Niger Diocesan Workers, All Saints Cathedral Secretary, Ozalla Road, Onitsha North Local Government Area Onitsha and 2021/2022 Masters students studying language in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, all in Anambra State.

The study employed qualitative research design in the study. This design is concerned with collection and analyzing of non-

numerical data, interview and observation techniques were used to gather data. The target population is all secretariat diocesan workers and all the 2021/2022 masters students studying language. The sample was selected through simple random sampling where all the members of the population were given equal chance of being selected. 70 percent of the members of the Diocesan Staff were selected and out of the Nnamdi Azikiwe post graduate students 30 percent of the Masters Students studying language were selected.

The researcher went to Nnamdi Azikiwe P.G. Common room, the Diocesan Secretariat, Diocese on the Niger and asked the students and the staff the questions directly. This was after she diplomatically observed the students during a speech event.

**Meaning/concept of Presupposition**

Yule,(1996:132), opines that "What a speaker assumes is true or is known by the hearer can be described as a presupposition". From this it can be said that if someone tells you, "Your sister is waiting for you outside", there is an obvious presupposition that you have a sister. Affirming this stand, Ezeifeka (2018:71) states that "Presuppositions are implicit assumptions derived from mutually shared

background Knowledge between the speaker and the hearer" It involves what the speaker assumes his /her listener already knows. To buttress this, if you are asked the following question, there are at least two presuppositions involved: "When did you stop taking alcohol?''. In this kind of question, the speaker presupposes that you used to take alcohol and that you no longer do so. Questions of this nature with built-in presuppositions are very useful devices for interrogators or trial lawyers. If a defendant is asked by a persecutor thus "Mr. Okafor, how fast were you riding your car when you ran the red light?" There is a presupposition that Mr. Okafor did, in fact, run the red light. If he responds to the how fast part of the question, through giving a speed, he is acting as if the presupposition is right.

"One of the test used to check for presuppositions underlying sentences involves negating a sentence with a particular presupposition and considering whether the presupposition remains true" Yule, (1996:132). For instance:

1. My car is a wreck
   Now take the negative version of the sentence:

 2 My car is not a wreck

The two sentences have opposite meanings, the underlying presupposition, "I have a car", remains true in both. This is called the constancy under negation test for presupposition. If somebody says, "I used to regret marrying her, but I don't regret marrying her now", the presupposition(I married her) remains constant irrespective of the fact that the verb regret changed from being affirmative to being negative.

Originally developed in the field of semantics to account for truth or falsity of sentences, presupposition has been transported into pragmatics and so there are two types (Bright, 1992:263).

1.    Semantic presupposition (also called logical/sentence preposition) (Brown & Yule 1983).

2.    Pragmatic presupposition (speaker presupposition/pragmatic accommodation).

**Semantic Presupposition-**

This is a presupposition which the truth value the speaker takes for granted while making a statement. It is basically an assumption or implicit meaning that is derived logically from the forms and lexical items in a particular sentence.

My sister is married

This presupposes that the speaker has a sister. This presupposition will generally remain a necessary assumption whether the utterance is an assertion – a positive statement (as above), a denial – a negative statement (as in my sister is not married) or  a question – interrogative statement (as in is my sister married?). According to bright (1992:263), a proposition P semantically presupposes another proposition of q if and only if q is a necessary condition for the truth of P, or equivalently if and only if q follows logically from both p and its denial.

**Example:**

The president of DON AYF is tall – proposition (p)

The president of DON AYF is not tall – denial proposition (p)

There is a president of DON AYF - : proposition (q) – semantic presupposition.

The above proposition (p) can be verified as either true or false if actually DON AYF has a president who is tall. If actually DON AYF has a president or a president who is tall, then there is a truth – value gap and therefore a presupposition failure (plainer 1981 :167)

**Types of semantic presupposition:**

As listed by Muhammad Sheroz (2016) there are:

1. Existential

2. Factive

3. Non-Factive

4. Lexical

5. Structural

6. Counter-factual

Existential – As the name suggests, it is entities named by the speaker which are assumed to be present, to exist. They consist of referring expressions; of entities in the real world or any referent in the world shared by speakers. This type is usually ignited by noun phrases and possessive constructions.

**Examples:**

The table needs to be repainted: This presupposes the existences of the entity referred to as the table.

Joy's car is small: Joy exists and she has a car and the car is small.

Factive – This is the assumption that something is true because of the presence of some verbs like "know", "realize", "glad" etc. Examples-

I didn't realize she was unconscious.

She was unconscious

We regret marrying her

we married her

She wasn't aware that he was sick

He was sick

I am glad it's weekend

It's weekend

Non-Factive: An assumption referring to something that is not true. In other words the referred does not exist. It is triggered by verbs, such as dream, imagine, and pretend excetra. Examples: She dreamt, she made it. She did not make it He pretended to be great He is not great

Lexical – This type is made by the speaker that by using a specific word, another meaning will be understood. Example-

I stopped teaching  :  I was teaching before

You are sick again  :  you were sick before

Structural -This deals with the assumptions associated with the use of certain structures such as questions

constructions. The listener assumes that the information presented is necessarily true or intended as true by the speaker. Examples-

When did mother go to the market? Mother went to the market.

Why did you beat your sister? You beat your sister.

When did Obinna leave ? - Obinna left

Counter – factual: The assumption that what is presupposed is not only untrue or contrary to facts. Conditionals (Counter – factual conditionals) exemplified by if – clauses, are not true at the time the utterance was made.

Examples:

If I were an eagle, I would fly: I am not an eagle.

I would have dealt with death if I can touch it. Death cannot be touched

I wish I studied a professional course: I did not study a professional course.

Semantic presupposition triggers

These are lexical and grammatical attributes that can lead to potential presuppositions. Presuppositions are inextricably tied to particular lexical item.

**Some examples include:**

1.    Definite description: This involves a sentence with the definite article "the" modifying a word or phrase. Examples: I saw the woman with the red jacket (presupposition: there exists a specific woman with a particular red jacket)

2.    Factive Predicates (Verbs): This is the assumption that relational predicates have to do with knowledge such as "knows", "learn" "remember" and "realized" presuppose the factual truth of their object rather than a hypothesis, an assumption that has been criticized in some quarters. For example-

You know that she drank the juice (she drank the juice)

James knew that Evelyn passed (Evelyn passed). It was stated that her mum is rich (her mum is rich)

We realized too late that we couldn't have done that course (we couldn't have done that course).

Note – there is no such presupposition for "non-factive" predicates such as "likely", "believe" for example:

It is likely she drank the juice

I believe Evelyn passed

The two examples here above do not have the presupposition he drank the juice and Evelyn passed. Implicative verbs: They are verbs that imply certain action to be taken by the subject. For example-

1. Jenny forgot to close the gate (Jenny would have closed the gate, intended to close the gate).

   Chidi stopped going late to school (Chidi was going late to school).

4. Change of state verbs: These are verbs that indicate states of being. Here they are changed. Examples

   Chief Odenigbo began going to church (Chief Odenigbo hadn't been going to church)

5. Iterative: A word used to show that an action is repeated. For instance:

i. APGA came to power again (APGA was in power before)

ii. She cannot experience rejection anymore (she was experiencing rejection).

6. Temporal clauses: Use of time duration as a presupposition trigger.

For example:

Before Chioma returned, her father was no more (Chioma returned)

Although their mother died, celebration has not ceased in their family (their mother died).

7. Cleft sentence: This type is the type where a single clause is divided into two separate sections, each with its own verb, one of which appears as dependent wh-clause (relative clause) crystal, 2003 :73.

Example:

It was the Bishop who made him venerable (someone made him venerable/the Bishop made him venerable).

8. Pseudo – Cleft construction – what Chisom is wearing is a new cloth.

**Semantic presupposition and Negation**

Presupposition is said to be constant under negation, also called "constancy under negation" (Palmer, 1981:167, Versehyeren, 2003:29). They are logically implied by both a positive sentences and its negative counterpart. For instance, in factive

predicates, which are associated with words as "significant" and "regret" look at these sentences:

1.  It is significant that Chioma reads for examination.

2.  It isn't significant that Chioma spoke there.

The presupposition "Chioma spoke there" is logically implied in (i) and (ii).

Sometimes negation tests do fail.

Palmer (1981: 168) suggests that the negation test may fail here and in fact in all cases of negation. Example-

She didn't boarder about his comment because he didn't comment.

The negation test failed because an embedding clause that cancels out potential presupposition was added.

## Features of semantic presupposition

1.  Semantic presupposition can be seen as either of these two, namely: actual presupposition and potential presupposition. An actual presupposition is any potential presupposition that is not cancelled by its context, while that of potential is one that is ignited by some part of an utterance (such as a subordinate clause) take in isolation, that

may or may not be a presupposition of the whole utterance.

Potential presuppositions can only become actual presupposition in context with speakers.

Example- Chibueze says that the president of DON AYE is tall.

The actual presupposition – there is someone identified as Chibueze

Potential presupposition – (there is a president of DON AYF, he/she is tall). The potential presuppositions can be cancelled by adding "but DON AYF has not got a tall president"

From the above, it is clear that actual presuppositions can become that only when the truth value is verified.

2.  Presuppositions are context – sensitive .Check these illustrations:

Emeka knows that the game will end at 5pm

He does not know that the game will end at 5pm

He does not know whether the game will end at 5pm.

The first and second examples have the same (potential) presupposition

that presupposition has been cancelled in the third sentences. This is because the context of the utterance (in the dependent clause) has cancelled it. This is referred to as defeasibility" a context –sensitive characteristic of presuppositions (verschueren, 2003:29) context – sensitivity of presupposition is called the "projection problem". This allows presupposition – carrying constructions that are embedded in a more complex structure to either retain their presuppositions or lose them as seen in the third example.

3. Presuppositions can be linked with the given and "new" information structure. Whereas the given information may be the actual presuppositions that may be interpretable from a particular utterance.

4. Presuppositions are also linked to "indexicality" – they met pragmatic signals/conditions of the context that constitute the shared or common knowledge or common ground. For instance: the clouds are heavy. Heavy cloud indexes/presupposes the imminence of rain.

This last is closely linked with the second type of presupposition pragmatic presupposition. This takes the interpretation of utterances beyond the text to the extra-text, the background knowledge of the world shared by the speakers and hearer.

**Pragmatic Presupposition** – the concept of presupposition was originally developed in the domain of semantics in order to account for the logic of the proposition in terms of truth or felicity, and are said to logically "hold" (be true) even if the sentence containing the presupposition is false or negative (constancy under negation) some weaknesses have been noticed in accounting for the extra linguistic shared background knowledge which has a lot of impact on interpretation of an utterance.

Truth – conditional definition of presupposition fails to recognize (i) that sentences, when spoken, cannot be considered in isolation from the speaker and the listener (s) who are relevant factors in any situation of language use (2) we do not live by truth – conditions alone; there are

sentences that cannot be explained by truth conditions or by semantic presupposition, except by reference to the contextual information or the world shared by the speaker and the hearer. Consider, for instance, this dialogue from Yule (1985:127)

A :     I have a fourteen – year old son.

A :     Oh well, that's alright.

B :     Oh! I'm sorry.

In the exchange here above, nothing that is in the form of words or phrases that triggers what will lead us to retrieve the implicit meaning in A and B's utterances. As Yule (1985) states, our interpretation of this exchange requires analogous shifts in context or common ground, and involves shared world knowledge, that is, extra-linguistic context. It is with this shared knowledge that we can understand that the above conversation is between a prospective tenant and landlady. Where A understands B's first response as indirect affirmative that the accommodation is available

for him/her, and the second response as a subtle rejection.

It is because of this limitations of semantic presupposition to account for such utterances, a philosopher, Robert Stanaker, introduced the term "pragmatic presupposition" that goes a step further into asserting that the utterances need an extra linguistic context not just co-text in other to be appropriately interpreted. He illustrated this with the popular instance used by a good number of philosophers -the cat is on the mat.

The semantic proposition of the sentence above whether true or false presupposes that there is a certain cat and a certain mat, that is, the referring expressions (existential presupposition) exist but it failed to let one know what the cat sitting on the mat is to the speaker or the hearer, whether it suits the speaker or not, whether the speaker is informing the hearer, who might be looking for his cat, of its whereabouts, or of a stray cat that needs to be identified and sent back to the owner (May, 2001:186)

Looking at that, pragmatic presupposition not only concerns knowledge, whether true or false but also concerns expectations, desires, interests, claims, attitudes, or fears towards the world. It deals with the Meta pragmatic conditions that index the common ground or shared knowledge and the ways an utterance is to be understood in that shared background knowledge.

According to Bright (1992:263), pragmatic presuppositions states that: if at the time t, something is said that required presupposition P to be acceptable and if P is not presupposed just before t, then …… presupposition P comes into existence at t.

The assertion above reflects that pragmatic presupposition needs more information than the ones provided by the utterance or sentence. It needs to go into the world shared by the speaker and the hearer to discover not just what people say, but why they say them the way they do. For instance, in the need of a self contain? Call 08066527961

To interpret this text, it needs a meta pragmatic inquiry into the background knowledge of participants in the vicinity of the text, that in this environment there are particular types of lodgers who may need to share a room with others as they cannot affords a single- room accommodation.

**Meaning /Concept of Deixis**

Some words in language that cannot be interpreted at all unless the physical context, especially the physical context of the speaker is known. These are words such as here, there, this, that, now, then, yesterday, as well as most pronouns such as I, you, him, her, them. Some sentences in English are almost impossible to comprehend if someone does not known the person speaking, about whom, where and when the speaker speaks.

For instance, you'll have to bring that key tomorrow, because she isn't here now.

Outside the physical environment where the expression was made, the utterance is extremely vague. It

contains a large number of expressions (You, that, tomorrow, she, her, now) which for their interpretations depend on the immediate physical context in which they were uttered. Such expressions are very clear examples of bits of language which we can only understand in terms of speakers intended meaning. These are technically know is deictic expressions. (crystal, 1997) states: Every language has a set of words which can be interpreted only with the reference to the speaker's position in space and time. These are known as deictic expressions or deixis". These expression can only be perfectly explained or understood when the hearer refers to the physical environment of the speaker where the utterance was made. Gonging this, (Cann, 1993) opined that the purpose of deictic elements in meaning of the sentence containing them to the context in which it is uttered, either spatially, temporally or in terms of the participants in the discourse.

Deixis or indexical expressions are "pragmatically determined" and they depend for their reference on the person who uses them (Mey, 2001:54) These expressions are "pointing devices", all "indexing" or pointing is done by human beings, the person pointing is at the centre (deictic centre) and all pointing have to be related to the uttering person, pointing to a particular place and at a particular time.

For example, let us use this illustration in the dialogue below:

a    <u>She</u> came as <u>I</u> told <u>her.</u>

b    Emeka, <u>you</u> meant Joy came

a    You ought to know <u>me</u> now John

b    <u>I</u> trust <u>you.</u>

In the above dialogue, she, her as in "a" refer to joy, you as in "B" and "A" refer to John, me refers to Emeka, I refers to John and you refers to Emeka Yule (2010) defined deixis or deictic expressions as words in a language that cannot be interpreted at all unless the physical context (the context of situation) of the speaker is known. The meanings they convey are constant but their referents vary with the speaker, hearer, time and place of the utterance, style or register and purpose of

the speech act. Consider the following utterance as used before.

She came as I told her.

You ought to know me.

I trust you.

Out of context, that is the environment where the utterance is made, the above sentences are completely vague. It contains a large number of expressions like, she, I, her, you, me. Which for their interpretations depend on the immediate physical context in which they were uttered. They are referred to as the deictic attributes of the utterance because they make reference to the situation in which they occur and the hearer will not be able to understand the utterance unless they interpret these deictic elements appropriately by reference to the relevant features of the situation.

The words diexis is of greek origin articulated as "day –icksis" meaning "pointing" via language depicts that the deictic expressions are expressions used to point to person, location, place, time etc – this portrays the distinct types of diexis:

1. Person or personal deixis – this is any expression used to point to a person. The first, second and third person pronouns and forms of address belong to this class. Examples are (me, you, him, them, I, you, she, he and others). It identifies those involved in the discourse. The reference of the same personal deixis alternates between participants in the conversation depending on who takes the turn to speak at a particular time.

(a) Emeka: You ought to know me:

James: I trust you.

You, have two referents each. In (a) "you" refers to Emeka so it a applies to me and I: me refers to Emeka and I refers to James so will "you" will keep alternating in similar manner.

(b) Place or Spatial Deixis – Words used to point to location are instances of this type. They distinguish the position of the speaker in relations to other people or objects. They include demonstratives – this, that, these, those, locative adverbs – here, there, yonder, relational positions- in front of ,behind, directions-come, go, bring, take, etc. Place deixis denotes nearness, that which is near or close

or distance; that which is far relative to the position of the speaker.

Examples – this, her, come, give – are proximal or close to the speaker while that, there, go, take are distal or far from the speaker hence, someone can say: stay there or come here.

Time or temporal deixis – they are forms that are used to point to time. They distinguish time with reference to the speaker. Example are adverbials – next week, then, now, yesterday, tonight, lask week, various tense marks like.

She comes here often          – present

We came here on weekend    - Past

He prays earnestly          - Present

He prayed earnestly          - Past

**Note:** Sometimes who – where-when meaning may connote different meanings for speakers across the cosmos. This is because of the discrepancies in time and season between African and Europe.

Social Discourse – This marks social relationship in linguistic expressions with reference to the social status/identities or roles of the participants in the speech event. (Levinson, 1982), Social deixis are seen as

person deixis by some linguists. Distinctions between participants in terms of status and social standing. Utterances we make is organized and intricately linked to and influenced by our addressee's social rank in a given speech, event, for instance:

1. The French honorifics (tu /vous) – the expression indicates respect for the person being addressed.

2. Address terms are also included in this category such as ma'am, sir, madam, Dee etc.

3. Another form of social deixis are vocatives. For example, I see, madam, I am afraid, I can't help you.

   Considering this, social deixis could be said to add to politeness conversations in social interactions.

**Types of Social Deixis**

Absolute social Deixis -It deals with deictic reference to some social features of a referent (specifically a person) a part from any relative ranking of the referent. It does not show ranking between the speaker and the address. E.g. Mr. Chairman, your highness, Onye isi.

**Relational social deixis** – This is deictic reference to a social relationship between speaker and addressee, by stander or other referents in extra linguistic context. Expressions reflecting the rank, class, power even age of the addressee belong to this category.

## Discourse Deixis

Outside social deixis, proposition of another type of deixis was done by Levinson (1983) who proposed the term discourse deixis to account for an expression that refers to another expression in a text. It is also called "text deixis". This concerns a deictic reference to a portion of a discourse relative to the speaker's current location and defined in terms of the text section in which the utterance containing the deictic element occurs.

A situation where a specific linguistic expression in a given utterance is used in pointing to following, preceding or current utterances in the same written or spoken discourse, the product is a discourse deixis.

For instances:

The P.E.S. convened a meeting and the E.S. of Ogbaru was absent. The former queried such unofficial action but the latter failed to give cogent reasons for his action. This made his boso to fine him.

Here, we notice discourse deixis in the report above in that the former was used to point at the P.E.S. while latter pointed at the E.S so it applies to his which pointed to the E.S.

Discourse deixis could also be anaphoric expressions because from the expressions above, former and latter and other point to preceding utterance.s

## Conclusion

From the investigation and research engaged in, presupposition works with assumption; already know fact which makes a speaker say what is supposed to be comprehended by the addressee. The speaker has fore knowledge of what is imbedded in the utterance hence; there is need for the interlocutor to be very sure that his addressee has a background knowledge of what is talked about else there will be lack of understanding and the purpose of the communication will not be achieved. In the area of deixis, for correct interpretation of the utterance, the context of use must be depicted. The major limitation here is that without the physical context understanding is impaired hence, there is need for context –

relativity so as to necessitate and facilitate interpretations of deitic expressions otherwise they will be comprehensively vague and intelligibility will be impaired.

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