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**The Persuasive Use of Presupposition: A Pragmatic Study of
Obama's Inaugural Speech**

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Abstract

Pragmatics has a lot of tools such as presupposition. Presupposition represents a fundamental role in the process of communication in general and in political speech in particular. Politicians tend to employ presupposition to accomplish various aims. Based on Barack Obama's' inaugural speech, January, 2009, this paper is concerned with analyzing the persuasive use of presupposition at both existential, lexical and structural levels, for the aim of exploring how Obama has succeeded in achieving his real political goals by employing presupposition willing to provide a participation to comprehend political speeches. This paper adopts Levinson Model of Presupposition Triggers (1983) as the analysis tool for the ex-president Barack Obama's inaugural speech in 2009. The taxonomy of presupposition has been analyzed to figure out the function of each type. Analyzing Obama's inaugural address is really great, because he was the first African-American president of the USA and who confronted great economic political and social problems both in the USA and the rest of the world and his speech must reflect his concern with these issues to get domestic and international support. As a conclusion, presupposition been employed in political speech for the purpose of persuasion and to gain the audience's support to the side of the speaker thus he can achieve his intentional goals..

Key Words: Presupposition, Barack Obama, Political Speech.

1- Introduction

Jucker (1997, p. 121) states that political speech is characterized by its trial to have the audience accept the speaker's point of view through the employment of different strategies. Therefore, language becomes so crucial to politicians who depend fundamentally on it to be their gate to be in touch with people during their campaigns, elections, inauguration, or governance (Taiwo, 2009). Furthermore, Moreover, Kempston (1975, p.164) believes that the language of politics is the Language of the power of influencing thought, controlling people's behavior, and molding their ideology. Also, Beard (2000) claims that "language of politics helps us to understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power".

2. Presupposition

In pragmatics, presupposition refers to the implied presumption about a background belief relevant to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted by both the speaker and the listener. Presupposition is defined as “the common ground” implanted in an utterance that is taken for granted by all the participants of a discourse (Levinson, 1983, p.3). Presupposition also refers to the

embedded assumptions stuck to the direct meaning of a text or an utterance which is taken for granted (Richardson, 2007, p.63). Furthermore, Hudson (2000, p.321) states that presupposition has a vital role in making and understanding an utterance. While, Levinson (1983, p.186) points out that one of presupposition's main features is that it is accountable in the context where it is used. For example: "When did John leave?" presupposes that John left. Whereas, Widdowson (1996, p.63) illustrates that presupposition is associated with the implied meaning by the speakers and thus the same utterance may have different meanings if uttered by different speakers, in different situations, to different audience. According to Zare (2012, p.336), presupposition is defined as "one of the properties of language which impinges on readers or listeners' understanding of facts and events through using subtle linguistic devices and constructions is considered an argumentative concept in CDA". Also, Khaleel (2010) clarifies that the concept of presupposition was first introduced by the prominent German logician Frege in 1892 and that it refers to "the implicit information of a proposition embedded in a sentence or an utterance. A sentence like "It was Margaret who broke the keyboard" presupposes that someone broke the keyboard (Then it asserts that Margaret broke the keyboard) then common ground includes the proposition that someone broke the keyboard. One

natural source of pragmatic presuppositions may be semantic presuppositions associated with the sentence (Fintel, 2000, p.49). In addition, Stalnaker (1974, p. 447) believes that presupposition is mainly a characteristic of the addresser not of the utterances. He also states that one must differentiate between what is asserted and what is presupposed in a sentence. For example, the sentence "Sam regrets that he voted for Nixon" presupposes that Sam voted for Nixon and asserts that he feels bad about it (p. 457). Presupposition can be employed as a tool of avoidance because it let users of language not say all information and details related to certain topic, "if we had to spell out all the details every time we, then communicating would be an extremely lengthy and tedious" (Finch, 2000, p.165).

2.1 Test for verifying presupposition

Presuppositions can be verified by using the constancy under negation, question formation, conditional principles and modals such as may, perhaps, might, should, and must (e.g. John must stop smoking). According to this test, only semantic presuppositions remain true after negation, question and conditionals. For example :

- John's brother has not come back from Nigeria >> John has a brother

- Has John's brother just come back from Nigeria? >> John has a brother
- If John's brother has just come back from Nigeria, he would have taken a rest (Conditional). >> John has a brother

2.2 Levinson's Model of Presupposition Triggers

Levinson (1983, p. 160) defines pragmatic presupposition as "something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance". For example, the utterance "Mary's brother bought three horses", the addresser anticipates to have the presuppositions that a person called Mary exists. It also presupposes that she has a brother, only one brother who has a lot of money. Presuppositions can be differentiated from other linguistic constructions. There are some linguistic structures that writers or speakers can use to convey the implied information without stating them explicitly. These lexical classes or syntactic forms are called presupposition triggers. The large set of linguistic expressions or constructions that are said to "trigger" a presupposition includes definite descriptions (the), change of state predicates (stop, start, continue), additive particles (too), pseudo-clefts (it is X who...), or, factive verbs such as realize, discover, know, regret, and ignore.

2.2.1 Existential presupposition triggers:

Levinson, (1983, p. 359) believes that existential presuppositions represent the cornerstone for presupposition theory. Most obviously, the possessive constructions, in English give rise to a presupposition of existence; moreover the existential presupposition is not only assumed to be present in possessive constructions but also more generally in any name or definite noun phrase, i.e. definite description, in which the addresser is assumed to be committed to the existence of the entities named. The symbol ">>" is used to mean "presupposes".

(1a) Mary's dog is cute >> There exists someone called Mary and Mary has a dog.

Sentence (1a) presupposes that there exists someone called Mary and she has a dog. This means that all 'definite names' presuppose the existence of their referents. However, non-definite names do not trigger a presupposition since they lack reference.

2.2.2 Lexical presupposition triggers:

Certain kinds of verbs or lexical items trigger a presupposition as indicated below:

2.2.2.1 Implicative verbs:

Levinson, (1983, p.28) explains lexical presupposition by stating that in saying that someone managed to do something; the verb

'managed' carries asserted and presupposed meaning. The asserted meaning is that the person succeeded in doing something. So, 'managed' is conventionally interpreted as asserting 'succeeded' and presupposing 'tried'. Levinson, (1983, p.181) labels verbs such as: 'happened to' presupposes 'didn't plan or intend to'; 'avoided' presupposes 'was expected to or ought to', for examples:

(1a) John managed to open the door >> b. John tried to open the door.

(2a) John forgot to lock the door >> b. John ought to have locked or intended to lock the door.

2.2.2.2 Factive items:

Levinson, (1983, p.147) states that Factive items presuppose the truth of the proposition expressed through the clause. Thus, they are called 'factive' because they presuppose the truth of their complement clause, e.g.:

(1a) She didn't realize he was ill >> b. He was ill.

(2a) We regret telling him >> b. We told him.

Examples (1) and (2) illustrate that the presupposed information following the verbs 'realize' and 'regret' is treated as a fact and is described as factive presupposition. Other examples of this set

of verbs include: know; appreciate; saw; forced to; agree; make sense; amuse; bear in mind; etc. Factive predicators may involve other classes than verbs, i.e., adjectives and noun constructions, e.g.:

(1)a. I wasn't aware that she was married >>b. She was married.

2.2.2.3 Change of state verbs:

Levinson, (1983, p.99) indicates that Change of state verbs a kind of switch presupposition that the new state is both described and is presupposed not to have held prior to the change. These verbs include: start, stop, begin, continue, finish, take, leave, enter, come, go, arrive, etc. For example:

(1a) Judy started smoking cigars >> b. Judy used not to smoke cigars.

(2a) Michelle stopped seeing werewolves >> b. Michelle used to see werewolves.

2.2.2.4 Verbs of judging:

Levinson (1983, p. 182) explains that the implication in such presuppositions is not attributed to the speaker so much as to the subject of the verb of judging, e.g.:

(1a) Agatha accused/didn't accuse Ian of plagiarism >> b. (Agatha thinks) plagiarism is bad.

(2a) Ian criticized/didn't criticize Agatha for running away >> b.
(Ian thinks) Agatha ran away.

2.2.2.5 Counter-factual verbs:

Crystal (1997, p.147) elaborates that counter-factual constructions presuppose the falsity of the proposition expressed in the complement clause. Therefore, what is presupposed is the opposite of what is true, or contrary to facts, as in the verb 'pretend' that carries a counter-factive presupposition. E.g.

(1a) Max is pretending that he is sick >>b. Max is not sick.

2.2.2.6 Conventional items:

Palmer (1981, p.170) believes that the presuppositions of sentences can be seen as part of the conventional meaning of expressions, that is, tied to lexical items. Thus, the sentence I cleaned the room involves the presupposition that the room was dirty, due to the verb 'clean', and the sentence I killed the bird involves the presupposition that the bird was alive, due to the verb 'kill'. Also, some nouns carry such a conventional meaning. E.g.

(1a) John is a bachelor >> b. John is unmarried.

2.2.2.7 Iteratives:

Levinson (1983, p.183) illustrates that another type of lexical presupposition is 'iterative' or 'categorical' presupposition. Iterative presupposition is associated with certain words, such as, another, again, anymore; returned; another time; to come back, restore, repeal, etc., e.g.:

(1a) Bill drank another cup of tea >> b. Bill had drunk at least one.

(2a) the flying saucer came /didn't come again >>b. The flying saucer.

2.2.3 Structural presupposition triggers:

Structural presuppositions form a type when certain sentence structures conventionally and regularly, presuppose that part of the structure is already assumed to be true. Addressers can use such structures to treat information as presupposed (i.e., assumed to be true), and, hence, to be accepted as true by the addressee.

2.2.3.1 Cleft constructions:

Bott and Chemela (2011, p.155) state that a clause can be "divided into two parts, each with its own verb". He adds that clefting is used to bring particular elements into focus. He classifies cleft constructions into two major types:

- It-clefts:

Levinson, (1983, p.159) illustrate that the it-cleft construction consists of the pronoun it followed by a form of the verb be and by "the specially focused element, which may be of the following types: a noun phrase, a prepositional phrase, and adverbial phrase, or an adverbial clause, and finally by, a relative-like dependent clause introduced by that, who, which, or zero", e.g.

(1a) It was his voice that held me >> b. Something held me.

Hence, sentence (1a) exhibits the it-cleft1 construction and the expression 'his voice' is the specially focused element which is of the type noun phrase. The occurrence of such a construction triggers a presupposition that presupposes sentence (1b).

- Wh-clefts:

Bott, and Chemela (p.159) point out that the wh-cleft construction consists of a clause introduced by a wh-word, usually what, a form of verb to be, and the especially focused element: a noun phrase, an infinitive clause, or a finite nominal clause, e.g.:

(1a) What I really need is another credit card >> b. I need a credit card.

Sentence (1a) exhibits the wh-cleft construction and it presupposes.

- Wh-questions:

Levinson (1983, p.181) argues that both constructions, i.e., the it-cleft and the wh-cleft constructions share approximately the same presuppositions. The wh-question constructions in English are conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that the information after the wh-form as is already known to be true, e.g.

(1a) When did he leave? >> b. He left.

(2a) where did you buy the bike? >> b. You bought the bike.

The type of presupposition illustrated in (1, 2) can lead addressers to believe that the information presented is necessarily true, rather than just the presupposition of the person asking the question. Therefore, in asking "Who has taken my umbrella?" The addresser is said to be presupposing or taking it for granted that somebody has taken his umbrella.

- Adverbial clauses:

Levinson, (1983, 194) indicates that adverbial clauses are used as adverbials in the main clause. Those clauses trigger presupposition. Therefore, sentence (1a) presupposes sentence (1b). E.g.

(1a) She wrote the book when she lived in Boston >> b. She lived in Boston.

- Comparative constructions:

Levinson (1983, p.183) argues that the use of comparisons and contrasts triggers presupposition. Thus, the comparative constructions (Adjective-er + than) and (As + adjective + as) signal the occurrence of a presupposition, e.g.:
• Adjective-er + than...

(1a) Carol is /isn't a better linguist than Barbara>> b. Barbara is a linguist.

As + adjective + as....

(1a) Jimmy is/isn't as gauche as Billy >> b. Billy is gauche.

- Counterfactual conditionals:

Yule (2010, p.29) states that a conditional structure of the type shown in (1) below, generally, presupposes that the information in the if-clause is not true at the time of utterance. E.g. (1a) If you were my friend, you would have helped me >> b. You are not my friend.

Presupposition triggers in Obama's inaugural address in 2009. Retrieved from:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>

There are many presupposition triggers employed in the inaugural address delivered by Obama. They include different types: existential, lexical and structural with their sub-genres. This paper provides an analysis of them. The type of trigger, form of trigger, trigger itself and presupposition are all illustrated in each sentence.

Table (1): Presupposition triggers in Obama's inaugural address

Trigger	Type of Trigger	Form of Trigger	Presupposition
Vice president	Existential	Definite description	There is a vice president of U.S called Biden
Each	Lexical	Iterative	They gathered before to inaugurate the former president
Bear	Lexical	Factive	They realize that they are witnesses.
Affirm	Lexical	Factive	They are sure of democracy promise.
			They have

Our	Existential	Possessive pronoun	democracy.
What binds us...	Structural	Wh-Clause	People are bound by one principle.
This nation	Existential	Definite description	There is a nation called America
What make us exceptional	Structural	Wh-cleft	American are exceptional due to a concept.
Continue	Lexical	Change of State	American will begin a new era.
while these truths are self-evident	Structural	Adverbial clause	Truth are evident
The patriots	Existential	Definite description	There are loyal people
Determine	Lexical	Factive	They realize the requirements of prosperity.
Discover	Lexical	Factive	They are aware of the rules of prosperous free market.
Resolve	Lexical	Factive	America is great due to its given attentiveness for the weak.
Life's	Existential	Possessive "S"	Life has hazards and people should be protected from them.

Society's ills	Existential	Possessive "S"	Society has ills that should be cured by cooperative efforts.
Our	Existential	Possessive pronoun	They have promising children
begun	Lexical	Change of State	They have a new state and new era
A decade of war is ending	lexical	Change of State	They will witness a new peaceful era
America's prosperity	Existential	Possessive "s"	America has prosperity
Economic recovery has begun.	Lexical	Change of state	American will witness economic flourishing phase
When	Structural	Adverbial clause	Families suffer from the brink of hardship due to low wages
Knows	Lexical	Factive	They realize that poor girls have rights.
Maintain our national treasure	Existential	Possessive pronoun	There is a national treasure and he'll work hard to keep it.
Renew	lexical	Change of state	The institutions will witness renewal in his phase.

Our brave men	Existential	Definite description	There are brave people who fight without fear of battle's flames.
We will defend our people	Existential	Definite description	There are people in his country and he will defend them.
resolve our differences with other nations peacefully	Existential	Possessive pronoun	They will accept and deal with differences peacefully.
lasting peace does not require perpetual war	lexical	Factive	He asserts that wars around must be ended up to enjoy permanent peace.
support democracy from Asia to Africa,	Existential	Definite description	There is democracy and he will support it to overwhelm from Asia to Africa
greater	structural	Comparative	No other country has more greatness than a powerful one
We are heirs of those who won peace	Existential	Definite description	Obama seeks to spread peace everywhere like some ancestors who cared for this.
's	Existential	Possessive "s"	This generation has a task to be accomplished

Better	Structural	Comparative	They should have a different way to welcome immigrants.
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Table (2): Number of Frequency of Presupposition Triggers in Obama's Inaugural Speech.

Type	Frequency
Existential	15
Lexical	13
Structural	6

According to the major types of presupposition triggers, as illustrated in table (2) and figure (1) above, existential presupposition triggers have got the highest scoring fifteen frequencies, followed by lexical presupposition triggers that got the second rank thirteen occurrences, while the structural presupposition triggers got the third rank. As existential and lexical presuppositions recorded the most frequently used types, they are showed to be the constant characteristics of political discourse. With its easy structure formed of possessive constructions or definite noun phrases, existential presupposition is thought the most readily credited for presupposition. Schmid (2001) also assured that “people are more likely to object to the

propositional content of that-clause that is represented as necessarily true than to the attitudinal meaning of the noun” (p, 154). As a matter of fact, existential presupposition is stronger or more difficult to detect in comparison to other categories. Schmid and Caffi are among the scholars who strongly confirm that existential presupposition is one of the least refutable presuppositions ever used. Interestingly, Bonyadi& Samuel (2011) concluded that existential or presupposition through nominalization is among the most frequently used presupposition triggers in political speech. Simply, Existential presuppositions represent the highest recurrences. As a matter of fact, by using these linguistic forms the speaker seems committed to the existence of mentioned entities. Lexical presupposition: as Yule (2010) points out, in lexical presuppositions the use of some forms with their stated meanings is interpreted as the presentation of some non-asserted meanings. Lexical presupposition can also be considered as one of the best method to express implicit proposition. Levinson (1983) postulates that existential presupposition triggers shows the commitment of the speaker to the entities he refers to, his loyalty and responsibility especially when he uses the definite description and possessive pronouns. He goes further to assert that lexical presupposition triggers are employed by speakers to create an image specifically when using "change of state verbs" to refer to a transition or

change of situation. Obama has employed the "change of state verbs" numerous times to make an indirect comparison between the former presidential phase and what he is going to do during his presidential term to gain people's support and to attract them to his side. Also, Obama has used factive verbs to speak about his beliefs and principle such as caring for spreading peace, equality among people, protecting the weak, considering the marginalized and immigrants, establishing democratic society, and giving a great concern to education and economy. All these points are worth to persuade people that he is the right person for the right place.

Conclusion

Based on an analysis of presupposition triggers found in Obama's inaugural speech, it can be concluded that presupposition triggers have been used for a persuasive better conveying his political intentions and thus getting the audience to his side. Presupposition triggers, including existential, lexical and structural ones, have succeeded to achieve their functions as persuasive tools in the political speech also they play a vital role in pinpointing important information, making language more concise and obvious, achieving the interaction with the audience and creating close relationship between the parties of speech, thus the speaker can accomplish his political goals.

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