The Use of *Too* as a Pragmatic Presupposition Trigger

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Abstract

This paper is intended to make a detailed study of *too* in the framework of presupposition. It aims to probe its use as a presupposition trigger bordering in semantics and pragmatics. In so doing, it is hoped to solve a great many problems which can not be convincingly pervasive in traditional grammar.

In pragmatics, *too* is considered as a pragmatic presupposition trigger. It can express the discriminational meaning in everyday conversation. At the same time, too also plays an essential role in textual organization and information flow in discourse.

Key words: Presupposition triggers; Pragmatic presupposition; Textual organization

INTRODUCTION

Too is always considered a common word from the perspective of traditional grammar. *Too* is used as an adverb, or a sentence adverbial. In the eyes of some traditional grammarians, *too* is of little importance for grammar study, because adverbs are the most peripheral elements. However, it is far from enough to explore the use of *too* in the framework of traditional grammar. Consequently, this thesis is dedicated to make a research on the use of too from a brand new angle – presupposition. It discusses the use of too as a pragmatic presupposition trigger and the discriminational meaning of too-triggered sentences.

1. PRAGMATIC PRESUPPOSITION WITH DISCRIMINATION IMPLICATURE

In the primary school even in the university, we can easily hear this kind of sentences in students' conversations:

(1) Can he become our monitor, *too*?

This sentence presupposes "he does not have enough ability to be our monitor". At the same time, this sentence reflects the ostensive attitude of discrimination toward "he", this discrimination is triggered by "*too*". There are many discriminations in our society, such as the discrimination to women, country and disabled men. Look at the following examples:

(2) a. Can a woman become a CEO, *too*?
b. Country girl goes abroad, *too*.
c. The disabled man established his own company, *too*.

(2a) presupposes "man can become a CEO" and reflects the discrimination "a woman should not be a CEO." (2b) presupposes "The girl in big cities can go abroad" and reflects the discrimination of "the country cannot go abroad". (2c) presupposes "the healthy men can establish his own company" and reflects the discrimination of "the disabled man cannot establish his own company." In these 3 examples there are obvious implicatures of discrimination which are expressed through pragmatic presupposition that is triggered by *too*.

The typical sentence pattern of this kind of *too* – carrying sentences with discrimination implicature is (XVP) YVP, *too*. In most of context, XVP does not appear and it serves as a standard of judge and reference. Only with this standard and reference can YVP have the implicature of discrimination. In example (2b), XVP is "The girl in big cities can go abroad". In comparison with this reference, YVP "Country girl goes abroad, *too*" has the implicature of discrimination to the country girl.

XVP does not express overtly mainly because the existed two strategies in discourse communication. The

first one is the Principle of Economy. According to Mey, in the process of communication, using language in an economic way should be a maxim. In this way, it can relieve the burden of the speaker. When the speaker can estimate in his remarks which are familiar to the hearer and which are unfamiliar to the hearer, he may consider the information that is familiar to the hearer as a kind of presupposition in order to prevent the tedious remarks. The second strategy is indirect Politeness Principle: Prevent direct remarks not to threaten the face of others and to prevent controversy. In (2b), if XVP is expressed directly, the comparison between country girl and city girl is apparent. This is bound to arouse the controversy and has the sense of politeness.

Generally speaking, the presupposition is not the important information in the process of communication. But it is usually employed by speakers to embed some unspeakable content into discourse. Keenan (1971, p. 252) said: "If we want to obtain the true meaning of many sentences in our communication, we must satisfy the requirement of some specific context in certain culture". Therefore, these contexts are naturally called the presupposition of these sentences. These expressions often appear in our life, such as talking between friends, even on TV or newspaper. We can say this kind of presupposition is the faith presupposition and embodies the faith of addressers. In addition, the addresser reckons the addressees will hold the same convictions. In our society, people can understand the meaning of these expressions and its presuppositional purpose. The addressees can obtain the information in the expressions because people the utterances like this. It indicates presupposition is not only a problem of an individual, but the negative factor existed in our culture.

To sum up, a person always uses a kind of expression with a purpose of his or her opinion to somebody or something. He renders the expression a certain meaning through some kinds of spirit activities. As a certain assumption, pragmatic presupposition must be the faith of the speaker, and at least is not disagreed by the two parts of communication, or accepted by the two parts. The language is a system of sign which is used by human beings in everyday interactions, and the choice of this sign is arbitrary. The language sign is "innocent", and various kinds of pragmatic color of language are given by the subject of society and language users – humans. The meaning does not exist in the language itself but in the mind of human beings. The language is affected by the society and is also a mirror of it. This mirror can reflect the social value and the thought manner of a nation. On the other hand, we cannot neglect the side effect of the language. Once the language sign enters interaction, it would produce a power and plays a key part in the communication. Any form of discrimination in language may isolate or offend certain members or groups of the community. Consequently, this will contradict the ideal aim of establishing an equal and harmonious society. Therefore, in the respect of sex, class and fault of body, we should try our best to avoid the discriminational language, especially the use of too. We should pay attention to its meaning of discrimination.

2. THE FUNCTION OF *TOO* IN DISCOURSE AND CONTEXT

In traditional grammar, the use of too in the frame of presupposition is always defined with the limit of sentence level. In this part, an attempt is made to put additive too in the discourse perspective and to investigate the presuppositional function of too at the supra-sentential level of language. Caffi (1994, p. 3326) states in the same direction that it is necessary to change the analysis of predicate to the discourse structure. Van Dijk (1985, p. 51) supposes that the purpose of the introduction of presupposition in linguistics is to settle the problems on the characteristics of discourse and contextual, which is beyond the reach of traditional sentential grammar. We shall take it for granted that the notion of presupposition required in discourse analysis is defined in terms of assumptions which the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge (Givon, 1979a, p. 50). French linguist Durot (1972, p. 94) pointed out that the basic function of pragmatic presupposition is establish a frame for the further development of discourse. As Vennemann (1975, p. 315) said, the presupposition in discourse limits the scope of the subsequent sentences. In other words, presupposition determines the appropriateness of a sentence or a paragraph in a specific discourse or context.

2.1 The Organizational Function

In discourse, the organizational function of presupposition is not only the requirement of discourse information flow, but also the result of the process in interaction and communication (Coulthard, 1977; Widdowson, 1984). In order to ensure the fluency of information flow in discourse, in the process of generating the discourse, the addresser needs to arrange the information properly according to his own assumption to the knowledge of addressees and the addressee's possible response. In the development of discourse, the assumption will embody in the organizational manner of discourse. This is why presupposition plays an exceedingly significant role in the organization of the discourse.

In the process of organizing the discourse, there are many facts that can enter the information flow of discourse. However, it is impossible for the addresser to arrange the unnecessary information into the information flow in the manner of assertion. Otherwise, the whole structure of discourse will become too disorder to read. So in the course of interaction between addresser and

addressee, for the sake of conciseness of the discourse and economy of the expression, the addresser will regard the information which the addressee has already known as the presuppositional information according to his own assumption.

From the perspective of information structure, presupposition is the starting point of information flow in discourse. In the development of discourse, one important function of presupposition is to produce the assertive information. On the other hand, the assertive information can be converted into presuppositional information and serve the production of next assertive information. Therefore, pragmatic presupposition is of great importance in the discourse cohesion. It can not only form the relationship of cohesion but also provide a starting point of producing the assertive information. Thus, it makes the discourse an integral part of cohesion. In the case of too, it has the above functions we have stated in discourse. For example:

(3) John was in Mary's bedroom last night. He was there the night before, *too*. (Allerton, 1979, p. 272)

This sentence is a typical example that the cohesion relationship by means of presupposition. The presupposition triggered by too in the second sentence repeats the proposition of first sentence, thus, it not only expresses the assertive information but also form the close relationship of cohesion.

2.2 The Cohesive Function

Halliday and Hasan (1976) pointed out: a text is a passage of discourse which is coherent in these two regards: it is coherent with respect to the context of situation...; and it is coherent with respect to itself, and therefore cohesive'. Similarly, there are two types of textual unity or connectedness: co-textual unity and con-textual unity. Cohesion (co-textual unity) involves connections within the discourse. Coherence (con-textual unity) involves connections between the discourse and the context in which it occurs.

In short, cohesion is a process leading from various formal signals in the co-text to the conceptual representation of the discourse being derived from a text, in conjunction with its context, by a hearer. Its essential role in this is to indicate either the current state of the discourse model, or to instruct the hearer to update it in certain specific ways. Coherence is the interpretative principle which understands tacitly use in order to integrate their interpretation of the current, incoming clause into this mental discourse model. More succinctly, Gestalt theory recognizes that the psychological whole is greater than the sum of its visual or auditory parts. But cohesion is not a sufficient, or perhaps even necessary, condition for guaranteeing coherence; this claim has in fact been widely recognized (Campbell, 1995, p. 78).

The function of *too* in discourse cohesion is revealed by its anaphoricity (Delin, 1992, pp. 296-299; van de Sandt, 1989; Zeevat, 1988, p. 396). That is, the presupposed proposition is seen as requiring an antecedent in the discourse context in order to be felicitous, in much the same way as anaphors. Like anaphora, presupposition trigger *too* sets up relations between different parts of a text, and collects entities form the environment in order to say new things about them. In many cases, there will be no antecedent to the presupposing *too*-accompaniment at the time of utterance, and one antecedent will have to be constructed in the context before the presupposing accompaniment can be interpreted.

The evidence for the anaphoricity of *too*-accompaniment is of three types:

(i) *Too* reveals the relevant connection between one part of text and another;

(ii) *Too* enables the anaphoric relation upon which contrast and compare depend to be established, in contexts where information that is simply given does not have the same effect, and

(iii) *Too* makes information placed within the *too*-accompaniment appears to remind as well as inform.

First of all, it is said that the multiple roles of *too* in textual structure is to indicate the nature of the connection between the two parts of each text. Without the adverbials, each text is presented as offering two pieces of information (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 1468; Zeevat, 1992, p. 399). This effect of too (namely, binding the different parts closer together) is, in Halliday and Hasan's word, achieving COHESION. The following example is taken from Reading Course 1:

(4) I was ten years old, and I'd been caught in a lie, I stubbornly denied breaking a window in Harold Colby's barn, but my parents knew perfectly well that I had done it. In those days in the little town of Pultneyvill, N. Y., a broken window was a big deal, and *I was rather miserable. I suspected, too*, that my parents had told uncle Jim, whom I worshiped.

The italicized part I was rather miserable is connected by too with I suspected, revealing that the narrator was in a complicate state of mind: on one hand, he was in bad mood due to his bad deeds; on the other hand, knowing he committed mistakes and deserving punishment, he felt shameful for his behaviour. This further indicates that the narrator is a kind, integrated boy, and at the same time, lays a foundation for the boy's future correction. Without the presuppositional too, I was rather miserable and I suspected are just two separate pieces of information, and the boy's kindness and integrity would fail to be perceived.

The second anaphoric feature of too is their capability to establish contrastive relationships with preceding discourse. Contrast can be described as relationship of opposition or comparison between two discourse elements that operates on the basis of some predicate. It is recognized that contrast itself is a form of coherence since it relies on the link being established between two or more

elements for the purposes of comparison. For example, in the following case, a contrast holds between the too-sentence and its antecedent sentence.

(5) John was in Mary's bedroom last night. He was there the night before, too (Allerton, 1979, p. 272).

In this example, the compared parts in both sentences are John was in Mary's bedroom sometime and he was there besides that time. The contrasted parts are last night and the night before. It is just on the basis of compared parts that the contrastive parts can be perceived by the reader. The compared parts in the too-carrying sentences, i.e. the identical items are the starting information, while the contrasted parts, i.e. different items are the new information the author wants to convey to the reader. This case fits into the information increment accounted in the preceding section.

In the case of contrast, the antecedent serves the anaphoric function of pulling out a proposition in order to establish it as the basis for achieving a contrastive operation. It is clear, however, that this anaphoric effect is not unique to too-sentence: "Given" information of any kind, in as far as a coherent relation can be observed to hold between it and the preceding discourse, can achieve similar effects.

A third indication of anaphoricity in presuppositional too can be considered as combination of reminding as well as informing. As far as the informing (namely, adding new information) concerned, reminding means that too functions as a reminder. That is to say, besides introducing new information, too, at the same time, directs the reader's attention to some other information or parts, which has already been mentioned before. In some cases, notably those in which a hearer could have had prior access to the presupposed information but is unlikely to be thinking about it at the time of utterance, the effect of the too-accompaniment seems mark the information unambiguously as a "reminder". In this way, the antecedent in (4) bears much clearly the stamp of first mention, characteristic of an ordinary assertion, while too acts as a reminder – "Don't forget that before last night, he was ever in Mary's room."

So far in this chapter, the pragmatic presuppositional properties of *too* have been used to state the function of *too* in pragmatics. The discriminational implicature which is triggered by too is also discussed. Besides these performance made in sentence, presuppositional *too* also plays an important role in discourse. It is discussed that, as presupposition trigger, *too* is bound up with the flow of information in actual linguistic communication, and the examination of the antecedents of *too*-sentence in discourse could provide insights into both the mechanism of presupposition at discourse level, the organization and cohesion of discourse.

CONCLUSION

First, as a presupposition trigger, *too* can introduce the meaning of discrimination in the conversation. After that, it also plays an important part in context and discourse. At the context level, *too* contributes a lot to the whole organization of the text. At the discourse level, *too* has influence on the discourse information. *Too* reveals the relevant connection between one part of text and another; *Too* enables the anaphoric relation upon which contrast and compare depend to be established, in contexts where information that is simply given does not have the same effect, and *Too* makes information placed within the *too*-accompaniment appears to remind as well as inform.

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