

April 22, 2010 – PRESUPPOSITION

1.

Did you get a good look at my face when I took your purse?

2.

- (a) Abraham Lincoln is the current president of the USA.
- (b) The Eiffel Tower is in Paris.
- (c) A car is an automobile.
- (d) Have a cookie.
- (e) Be careful of the crumbs.
- (f) Where was Abraham Lincoln born?
- (g) How much did the car cost?

3.

Where has Faye looked for the keys?

`Faye has looked for the keys.'

Did you buy this awful wine?

`This wine is awful.'

Don't sit on Annie's sofa. Stop being lazy.

`Annie has a sofa.' `You are being lazy.'

Lucy knows that George is a crook.

`George is a crook'.

4.

“Faye has looked for the keys” directly asserts “Faye has looked for the keys”

“Where has Faye looked for the keys?” presupposes “Faye has looked for the keys”

“Annie has a sofa” directly asserts “Annie has a sofa”

“Don't sit on Annie's sofa” presupposes “Annie has a sofa”

5.

1(a) Mike might find the chocolate cake in the kitchen.

1(b) Mike might find a chocolate cake in the kitchen.

2(a) Is Mike giving Annie that chocolate cake?

2(b) Is Mike giving Annie a chocolate cake?

3(a) Did Mike hide a chocolate cake?

3(b) Did Mike hide Annie's chocolate cake?

6.

You'll want DomeBeGone, my revolutionary cure for baldness.

7.

Did Mike smash the television?

When did Mike smash the television?

I was eating popcorn when Mike smashed the television.

Why did Mike smash the television?

I don't understand why Mike smashed the television.

I wonder if Mike smashed the television.

I wonder how Mike smashed the television.

8.

(a) Steve regrets buying a dog.

(b) Meredyth pretends she's a rock star.

(c) Ed should stop eating raw oysters.

9.

In each case assume that the judge has sustained an objection to the question. What presupposition(s) might have been objected to?

- (a) How did you know that the defendant had bought a knife?
- (b) How long have you been selling cocaine?
- (c) When was your bracelet stolen?
- (d) Did you see the murdered woman before she left the office?
- (e) How fast was the car going when the driver ran the red light?
- (f) At what time did you telephone your lover?
- (g) Have you stopped being an active gang member?

- (h) Why did you leave the scene of the crime?

10.

In each of the following advertisement extracts, what claim or claims are being made by presupposition rather than directly asserted? (The names have been changed to protect the innocent.)

- (a) The secret to Blasee's effectiveness is Calming Fluid.
- (b) Look out for the distinctive packs in your local Bippo stockists and choose the one that's just right for you.
- (c) Watch all the puffiness and wrinkles disappear!
- (d) Increased protection against water spots.
- (e) Now you can get a really crisp professional finish.
- (f) It combines three potent skin perfecting discoveries in one gentle formula.

11.

Try your hand at being a tricky lawyer. Write some questions that attempt to sneak in the following 'facts' via presupposition. Here's a sample question for 'The defendant drove his car into a shop window': Did you brake before you drove your car into the shop window? Notice how if the defendant 'just answers the question', either Yes or No, he accepts the truth of the presupposition and admits that he drove his car into the shop window.

- (a) The defendant had a fight with his brother-in-law.
- (b) The defendant has three previous convictions.
- (c) The defendant belongs to a terrorist organization.
- (d) The defendant was speeding.

12.

Try your hand at being a tricky advertiser. Below are completely unsubstantiated claims about various products. For each one, write a line of advertisement that slips in the claim via presupposition. For the purposes of this exercise use full sentences. Your sentences can be declaratives, interrogatives or imperatives. In fact, you will find interrogatives and imperatives particularly useful in some cases.

- (a) ZONKO cures insomnia.
- (b) HappyHavens Inn has beautiful views. KISSGOOD eliminates bad breath.
- (c) NO-ANT kills ants.
- (d) Crook & Sons Ltd employ skilled workers. BLASTEX is not poisonous.
- (e) SHINO nourishes wood.
- (f) Dogs love YAPPY dog food.
- (g) Dentists use GRIN toothpaste.

13.

Since we have said that presuppositions arise from conventional interpretations, could we extend this to and? Here are some utterances to play with:

- (a) It was hot and very humid.
- (b) Ed ate the raw oysters and felt quite ill.
- (c) Ed got dressed and went to the office.

14.

Would you consider it unusual for a hearer to query an entailment?

15.

Do all of these utterances presuppose 'The boiler blew up'?

- (a) John got to safety before the boiler blew up.
- (b) John got to the safety valve before the boiler blew up.
- (c) John got to safety after the boiler blew up.
- (d) John got to the safety valve after the boiler blew up.