Presuppositions

- Presuppositions are elements of the meaning of sentences that are necessary to make sense of the sentences at all.
- They are not ‘negotiable’.
- A test for a presupposition is that if you change the polarity of the sentence, the presupposition is still present.
Presuppositions

• A test for a presupposition is that if you change the polarity of the sentence, the presupposition is still present.

\[ p \rightarrow q \land (\neg p) \rightarrow q \]

“The police ordered the minors to stop drinking”

the police ordered the minors to stop drinking → the minors were drinking
the police **did not** order the minors to stop drinking → the minors were drinking
Presuppositions

• A test for a presupposition is that if you change the polarity of the sentence, the presupposition is still present.

\[ p \rightarrow q \land (\neg p) \rightarrow q \]

“Please take me out to the ball game again.”

Please take me out to the ball game again \(\rightarrow\) we went to the ball game before
Please **don’t** take me out to the ball game again \(\rightarrow\) we went to the ball game before
The difference between presupposition and entailment

Entailment

a. I saw my father today. \( p \)
b. I saw someone today. \( q \)

\[ p \text{ entails } q \]

if I saw my father today, then I saw someone today
if I did not see someone today, then I did not see my father today

\[ (p \rightarrow q) \land (\neg q \rightarrow \neg p) \]
The difference between presupposition and entailment

Entailment

a. I didn’t see my father today. \( \neg p \)
b. I saw someone today. \( q \)

\( p \) entails \( q \)

if I didn’t see my father today, then I may or may not have seen someone today

\( q \) can be T or F, we don’t know
The difference between presupposition and entailment

Presupposition

a. The mayor of Liverpool is in town. \( p \)
b. There is a mayor of Liverpool. \( q \)

\( p \) ‘entails’ \( q \)

if the mayor of Liverpool is in town, then there is a mayor of Liverpool

if there is no mayor of Liverpool, then he is not in town

\((p \rightarrow q) \land (\neg q \rightarrow \neg p)\)

presupposition failure
The difference between presupposition and entailment

Presupposition

a. The mayor of Liverpool isn’t in town today. \( \neg p \)

b. There is a mayor of Liverpool. \( q \)

\( p \) presupposes \( q \)

if the mayor of Liverpool isn’t in town, then actually we would normally still say that there is a mayor of Liverpool!

\( (\neg p \rightarrow q) \)
The difference between presupposition and entailment

**Presupposition**

- The mayor of Liverpool is in town.  
- There is a mayor of Liverpool.

**p entails q**

if the mayor of Liverpool is in town, then there is a mayor of Liverpool
if there is no mayor of Liverpool, then he is not in town

\[(p \rightarrow q) \land (\neg q \rightarrow \neg p)\]

**Presupposition**

- The mayor of Liverpool isn’t in town today.
- There is a mayor of Liverpool.

**p presupposes q**

if the mayor of Liverpool isn’t in town, then actually we would normally still say that there is a mayor of Liverpool

\[(\neg p \rightarrow q)\]

\[(p \rightarrow q) \land (\neg p \rightarrow q)\]
What are the presuppositions?

- The police ordered the minors to stop drinking.
- Please take me out to the ball game again.
- That her pet turtle ran away made Emily very sad.
- The administration forgot that the professors support the students.
- Did the United States invade Cambodia in 1970?
- Isn’t it strange that the United States invaded Cambodia in 1970?
We note from our records that you did not have an eye check-up as advised and we would recommend that you contact your eye doctor or Community Clinic for a test at your earliest convenience.

If you have any enquiries regarding this service please telephone 456-7890 and ask for the ophthalmalutory clerk.

NO FURTHER REMINDER WILL BE SENT.
### Presuppositions and Accomodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Presupposition</th>
<th>Entity/Fact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>our records</td>
<td>(we) have records</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we note that you did not have an eye test</td>
<td>you did not have an eye test</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a test as advised</td>
<td>we told you to have one</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your eye doctor</td>
<td>you have an eye doctor</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this service</td>
<td>this is a service</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the ophthalmary clerk</td>
<td>there exists an ophthalmary clerk</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Presuppositions are very difficult to negotiate:**
“When did you stop beating your wife?”

**More likely to evoke yes/no responses:**
“Did you see a broken headlight?”
vs. “Did you see the broken headlight?”