
A Corpus-Driven Pragmatic Analysis of Verb Presupposition Triggers in The Great Gatsby: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald has been extensively examined from literary and stylistic perspectives; however, its pragmatic dimensions, particularly verb presupposition triggers, remain underexplored. Factive and implicative verbs play a crucial role in conveying implicit assumptions, shaping narrative meaning, and maintaining discourse coherence. The lack of corpus-based pragmatic analysis limits a comprehensive understanding of how presuppositional mechanisms operate within literary texts, especially in cross-linguistic contexts. This study aims to identify and classify verb presupposition triggers in The Great Gatsby, with a specific focus on factive and implicative verbs, and to examine how these triggers contribute to the construction of implicit meaning and narrative coherence. Additionally, the study seeks to propose a cross-linguistic, corpus-driven framework for presupposition analysis. A corpus-driven approach is employed by aligning the English source text of The Great Gatsby with its Chinese translations. The analysis draws on an established corpus of verb presupposition triggers in modern Chinese, enabling the systematic identification and classification of corresponding presuppositional verbs in English through cross-linguistic mapping. The findings reveal that factive and implicative verbs function as key pragmatic devices that embed background assumptions, guide reader interpretation, and enhance textual cohesion throughout the narrative. The corpus-based, cross-linguistic methodology proves effective in uncovering implicit pragmatic patterns that are not easily detected through traditional qualitative analysis. This study enriches the pragmatic interpretation of The Great Gatsby and demonstrates the value of corpus-driven methods in literary pragmatics. Moreover, it offers a replicable methodological model for constructing verb presupposition trigger corpora in English and other languages, contributing to broader research in corpus pragmatics and cross-linguistic studies.

Keywords: *Corpus-Driven Approach, The Great Gatsby, Verb Presupposition Triggers*

A. Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* endures as a masterpiece of twentieth-century American literature, widely celebrated for its stylistic innovation and critical portrayal of the Jazz Age. Previous analyses have highlighted the novel's thematic complexity, symbolic structures, and narrative strategies—including corpus stylistic examinations of lexical and syntactic patterns (Ju, 2023). However, research into the pragmatic dimensions of *The Great Gatsby* remains relatively limited. Pragmatics, particularly linguistic presuppositions as implicit background assumptions in communication, plays a significant role in how meaning

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is constructed in narrative texts (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). Verbal presupposition triggers—such as factive and implicative verbs—are linguistic elements that conventionally signal assumptions taken for granted by both writers and readers, yet their function in literary discourse has rarely been investigated in a systematic, corpus-based manner.

While traditional literary and stylistic research has enriched the understanding of *The Great Gatsby* through qualitative methods, pragmatic inquiry into presupposition triggers is underdeveloped. Some scholars have explored syntactic presupposition triggers in the novel's characterization (e.g., adverbial clauses and non-factive constructions) and found that presuppositions contribute to thematic and narrative expression (Beni-Suef International Journal of Linguistics, Translation and Literature, 2024). In general pragmatics scholarship, presupposition triggers have been extensively categorized—from definitive descriptions to factive and implicative verbs—and are recognized as crucial for understanding implicit meaning in communication beyond literal content (Levinson, 1983; Keenan & Karttunen, in Levinson, 1983). However, these findings have not been fully integrated into literary analysis, and corpus-based cross-linguistic investigations remain scarce.

This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating verb presupposition triggers in *The Great Gatsby*, with a specific focus on factive and implicative verbs, using a corpus-driven, cross-linguistic approach. By aligning the English source text with its Chinese translations and utilizing an established corpus of Chinese presupposition triggers, this research systematically identifies and categorizes corresponding English verbs that function as presupposition triggers. This method not only facilitates the empirical mapping of presuppositional patterns but also enables stronger generalizations about the pragmatic mechanisms that underpin narrative coherence and the construction of implicit meaning in literary texts.

The significance of this research lies in its dual contribution to literary pragmatics and corpus pragmatics. First, by foregrounding verbal presupposition triggers as drivers of implicit narrative meaning, the study deepens understanding of Fitzgerald's narrative techniques. Second, by proposing a replicable cross-linguistic methodology for constructing verb presupposition corpora, this research addresses an urgent methodological need in pragmatics and cross-linguistic presupposition studies. Thus, the study enriches both the interpretation of *The Great Gatsby* and broader linguistic frameworks for analyzing implicit meaning in diverse languages.

B. Literature Review

Research on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* continues to inspire multifaceted scholarly interpretations, spanning thematic, stylistic, and narratological dimensions. Recent research highlights its intricate use of colour symbolism, where terms such as white, grey, yellow, and lavender are statistically significant and symbolically charged, reinforcing themes of socioeconomic disparity and moral decay (Wijitsopon, 2022). The novel's engagement with luxury is also philosophically examined through the lens of "comportment", illustrating how Gatsby's relationship with objects like his beautiful shirts embodies a performative, aspirational identity (Armitage, 2024). Temporality remains a critical focus, with scholars employing Bakhtin's chronotope to analyze Gatsby's doomed attempt to reclaim the past,

which is a struggle epitomized by symbolic moments such as the stopped clock (Castelli, 2023). Furthermore, cognitive linguistic approaches reveal how image schemas such as PATH and CONTAINER trace Nick Carraway's psychological movement from reserved observation to disillusioned judgment, mapping his evolving moral perspective (Zhou et al., 2023). The novel's geographic and cultural dimensions are also scrutinized: its regional symbolism, which contrasts East and Midwest, reflects national anxieties about identity and mobility (Halverson, 2024), while its use of "white jazz" and dance encodes racial and ethnic tensions, underscoring Gatsby's performative erasure of his origins (Kyzek, 2024). Another critical study examines race, sight, and witnessing in *The Great Gatsby*, highlighting the racial witnessing of white characters and the agency of characters of color (Gottlieb, 2022). Even in translation, the novel's stylistic and sentiment patterns exhibit both fidelity and divergence across Chinese retranslations, revealing complex intertextual dependencies (Ding, 2024).

Research on presupposition

The study of presupposition triggers can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, specifically to the German analytic philosopher and logician G. Frege, who published the article *On Sense and Reference* in 1892 (Frege, 1892). He was the first to propose and elaborate on the concept of "presupposition" (also known as "antecedent" or "premise") and argued that every assertion always carries an obvious presupposition, meaning that all simple or complex nouns in the assertion must have a reference. Presupposition, as a significant pragmatic mechanism, can be used to explain various phenomena in verbal communication.

Presuppositions are background propositions assumed to be mutually known by interlocutors, essential for coherent discourse (Stalnaker, 1973). They are triggered by specific linguistic elements known as presupposition triggers (Levinson, 1983). For instance, definite descriptions (e.g., "the prime minister") presuppose existence (Strawson, 1950), and factive predicates (e.g., "know") presuppose the truth of their complements (Karttunen, 1974). The projection of these presuppositions in complex sentences involves debates between incremental accounts, which emphasize left-right asymmetries (Heim, 1983), and symmetric accounts, which allow for bidirectional satisfaction (Chemla & Schlenker, 2012). Recent research further highlights the heterogeneity of presupposition triggers, demonstrating that they differ systematically in their discourse behaviour and processing. Presupposition triggers exhibit differential cancellability, challenging a strict soft-hard dichotomy. Abrusán (2016) argues that cancellability stems from contextual interactions, such as focus sensitivity and anaphoricity, rather than inherent presupposition types. Domaneschi et al. (2013) experimentally demonstrate that triggers vary in processing demands, with some requiring mandatory repair and others optional, depending on temporal and representational complexity.

Recent studies also examine the comprehension of such triggers in clinical populations, such as Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking children with autism spectrum disorders, which reveal that while children with ASD often perform similarly to language-matched typically developing peers, they exhibit specific deficits, particularly with temporal clauses and additive particles like "also" (An et al., 2020). Critically, triggers vary in their focus-sensitivity, which influences how their presuppositions are satisfied: focus-sensitive triggers (e.g., "too") require a linguistic antecedent in the discourse model, whereas non-focus-sensitive triggers (e.g., "again") rely on entailment from the common ground, leading to

differences in salience sensitivity and global accommodation difficulty (Göbel, 2022)[10]. Presuppositions are background assumptions triggered by lexical items (e.g., factive verbs) or particles (e.g., "too"), with comprehension in preschoolers improving with age and influenced by the balance between contextual satisfaction and accommodation demands (Domaneschi et al., 2022). Studies show that presupposition triggers such as "also" or "hai" influence referential scope and epistemic vigilance, with readers often preferring larger, more informative sets (Yang & Jiang, 2023).

The Presupposition-triggers refer to words or specific structures that can elicit presuppositions. Verbal presupposition-triggers can be categorized into factual verb presupposition-triggers (also known as "fact-type verb presupposition-triggers"), implicit verb presupposition-triggers (also known as "implicit verb presupposition-triggers"), state change verb presupposition-triggers, directional verb presupposition-triggers, performative verb presupposition-triggers, relational verb presupposition-triggers, and other verb presupposition-triggers that have the meaning of "repetition" or "recurrence" in the forms of "re+X".

Factive verbs, also known as assertive verbs, originated from the article "Facts" by Kiparsky & Kiparsky (1970). The article refers to expressions such as "be odd", "be exciting", and "be significant" as "factive predicates", asserting that the subjects of these predicates (subject clauses) must represent one or more facts. Furthermore, during the course of practical research, expressions like "be aware", "be sorry that", and "be proud that" were also identified. The article also points out that the objects (object clauses) of verbs such as "regret", "realize", and "know" must also represent one or more facts. Based on whether facts can be presupposed, verbs can generally be divided into two categories: factive verbs and non-factive verbs. Factive verbs are those that can presuppose that what their objects (object clauses) state is a fact. Non-factive verbs are those that cannot presuppose that what their objects (object clauses) state is a fact. State change verbs refer to verbs that denote or reflect changes in the state of things. Factive and non-factive verbs exist in a relationship of opposition and unity; they belong to the same category of verbs (unity) while also being distinct and in conflict with each other. Implicative verbs refer to words that carry certain implicit meanings. For example, the implicative verb "forget" used with the structure "to do", as in the verb phrase "forget to do", implies that "someone should have done something but did not". In contrast, when the implicative verb "forget" is used with the structure "doing", as in the verb phrase "forget doing", it conveys the meaning that "someone did something but forgot the fact that it was completed". Similarly, the implicative verb "manage" used with the structure "to do", as in the verb phrase "manage to do", implies that "someone managed to do something (which has not been accomplished yet)". The past tense of the implicative verb "manage", and "managed", used with the structure "to do", as in the verb phrase "managed to do", indicates that "someone has accomplished something".

C. Methods

The methodology employed in this study is fundamentally corpus-driven and cross-linguistic, focusing on the identification and analysis of verb presupposition triggers in the literary text of *The Great Gatsby*. In line with corpus-driven research principles, the study adopts a descriptive and analytical design that allows linguistic patterns to emerge inductively from the data, rather than testing pre-formulated hypotheses (Sinclair, 1991; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). This approach is particularly suitable for pragmatic inquiry, as it

enables the systematic uncovering of implicit meaning encoded in authentic language use. The primary objects of investigation are factive and implicative verbs, which have been widely recognized as core lexical presupposition triggers in pragmatic theory (Karttunen, 1971; Levinson, 1983).

The primary research instrument is an established corpus of modern Chinese verb presupposition triggers, which serves as a reference framework for identifying and classifying corresponding English presuppositional verbs. Drawing on insights from cross-linguistic pragmatics, the study leverages this pre-existing corpus to facilitate contrastive alignment between Chinese presuppositional verbs and their English equivalents in the source text (Aijmer & Altenberg, 2013). Data were collected from Fitzgerald's original English novel alongside multiple authoritative Chinese translations, forming a bilingual parallel corpus that supports systematic comparison of presuppositional structures across languages (McEnery & Xiao, 2007).

Data collection involved extracting sentences containing potential verb presupposition triggers from both the English and Chinese texts. The analytical procedure was multi-layered and iterative. First, presuppositional verbs were identified in the Chinese translations based on the established corpus. These instances were then aligned with their corresponding English clauses in the source text. Each identified trigger was subsequently categorized as factive or implicative, following established classifications in presupposition studies (Karttunen, 1971; Yule, 1996). Pragmatic analysis was conducted using negation tests and contextual inference, both of which are standard diagnostic tools for uncovering presupposed content (Levinson, 1983; Stalnaker, 1973).

To ensure analytical rigor, interpretations of presuppositional meaning were validated through cross-checking against co-textual and broader discourse contexts, thereby reducing subjectivity and enhancing reliability. This structured yet flexible corpus-based procedure not only enables systematic classification of verb presupposition triggers but also reveals their narrative and coherence-building functions within literary discourse. Ultimately, the methodology offers a replicable model for constructing verb presupposition corpora in English and other languages, contributing to the advancement of corpus pragmatics and cross-linguistic presupposition research.

D. Results and Discussion

The same Chinese presupposition triggers verbs that correspond to a specific English expression. The literal translation is one method of Chinese-English translation. Through the Chinese translation, by utilizing the research on Modern Chinese Presupposition Triggers and the established corpus of modern Chinese verb presupposition triggers, one can directly identify modern Chinese verb presupposition triggers, and correspondingly derive the English verb presupposition triggers, thereby understanding the meaning of verb presupposition triggers in the context of both English and Chinese.

(1) Original: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.

In the example (1), the verb presupposition trigger in the Chinese translation of this sentence is "criticize", which belongs to the factual type of verb presupposition trigger, meaning "to provide opinions on shortcomings and errors". The negative form of "Whenever

you feel like criticizing anyone” is “Whenever you feel like not criticizing anyone”, with the presupposition being “others have done certain things or presented certain viewpoints”. This is because the action or attitude of “you” evaluating whether to criticize only occurs after others have indeed done something or presented viewpoints; it is unreasonable for “you” to criticize solely the existence of “others”.

Furthermore, we can also understand the meaning presupposed in this sentence from another perspective. The implication is a form of presupposition, which here assumes that the father has many reasons to convey to Nick. This process, where “though the words may be few, the intentions are mutual, allowing the listener to grasp the implied meaning, thus making communication truly effective”, can be regarded as the positive and effective role of presupposition. In daily life, many similar experiences and shared knowledge exist between speakers through various means, which we can refer to as the “presupposed concepts” of mutual communication. Although the exchange between this father and son consists of only a few short sentences, it indicates that Nick and his father will share many similar experiences or have observed certain events, almost forming similar values. Therefore, when the father imparts some abstract principles to Nick, he is also able to understand the implications. This also provides us with insights and references for our daily lives and learning objectives. For instance, when others disagree with us, we can try to consider things from their perspective; the experiences and viewpoints of individuals differ, meaning that “presupposed concepts” vary. If we can think from a rational perspective provided by a presupposition, the frequency of conflicts will decrease, and people will become more united and friendly, leading to a more harmonious and orderly society. This is the philosophical significance and is also beneficial for the development of a real society.

(2) Original: It came about that in college, I was unjustly accused of being a politician.

As shown in (2), the verb presupposition trigger in the Chinese translation of this sentence is “accuse”, which belongs to the category of other verb presupposition triggers, meaning “to blame or complain about someone incorrectly due to a misunderstanding”. The negative form of this sentence is “During college, someone did not accuse me like a politician”. The presupposition is “there are politicians who engage in political activities for personal gain”. This verb carries the conventional implication that someone has committed a wrongful act, regardless of the truth value of the accusation itself. The key to identifying the presupposition lies in constructing the negative form: “In college, I was not unjustly accused of being a politician.” Crucially, even in this negation, the underlying assumption that “being a politician is a negative attribute” remains intact. This reveals that the verb “accuse” does not presuppose the truth of the accusation (that the speaker was a politician), but rather presupposes the social stigma associated with politicians. Specifically, it implies that they are perceived as engaging in self-serving political activities. Therefore, the presupposition triggered by “accuse” is the existence of a shared cultural understanding that “politicians act for personal gain”, which forms the necessary background for the accusation to carry any meaning or force, whether justified or not.

(3) Original: I bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew.

In the example (3), the verb presupposition trigger in the Chinese translation of this sentence is “know”, which is a factual verb presupposition type, meaning “to know clearly”. The “Midas” mentioned in this sentence refers to the King of Virginia in Greek mythology

who has the ability to turn everything into gold; “Morgan” is a famous American financier and banker; “Maecenas” was an advisor to the Roman Emperor Augustus, and in the West, this name symbolizes wealth, generosity, and enlightened spirit—qualities associated with individuals of high status, position, and capability. Since the intention of this sentence is to emphasize that “Midas, Morgan, and Maecenas” possess a profound understanding and analysis of concepts related to currency, the presupposition cannot be interpreted as “the existence of these three individuals”. The method to identify the presupposition of this sentence is to write its negative form as “...ready to reveal to me the glittering secret that only Midas, Morgan, and Maecenas do not understand”. Regardless of whether “Midas, Morgan, and Maecenas” understand this secret, a glittering secret exists and is about to be revealed to “me”. Therefore, the presupposition triggered by the verb “knew” is “there exists a glittering secret/some secrets are glittering”.

(4) Original: And now I was going to bring back all such things into my life and become again that most limited of all specialists, the “well-rounded man”.

As shown in (4), the verb presupposition trigger in the Chinese translation of this sentence is “become,” which belongs to the category of other verb presupposition triggers, meaning “to turn into”. In this sentence, we first extract the phrase “I have become the most superficial type among all experts, namely the so-called ‘generalist’”, and its negative form is “I have not become the most superficial type among all experts, namely the so-called ‘generalist’”, presupposing that “the so-called ‘generalist’ is considered the most superficial type among all experts.”

If an adverb is added to the afore-mentioned adapted sentence, it becomes “I have once again become the shallowest type among all experts, namely the so-called ‘generalist’”, and the negative form is “I have not once again become the shallowest type among all experts, namely the so-called ‘generalist’”. At this point, the presupposition of the sentence is “I have previously been the shallowest type among all experts, namely the so-called ‘generalist’”.

The modern Chinese adverbs can be divided into modal adverbs and non-modal adverbs, among which non-modal adverbs are further classified into “qualitative adverbs, quantitative adverbs, manner adverbs, and relational adverbs”. “Again” is a frequency or repetition adverb within the category of quantitative adverbs, and similar adverbs include “still, yet, or, back and forth, repeatedly, often,” etc. Its main function is to refer to or state the scope, degree, time, frequency, or repetition of actions, behaviors, or phenomena. The meaning of “again” is “the second time or once more”, and it modifies the verb “become”, indicating that I have at least once become the most superficial so-called “generalist” among all experts. This example also illustrates the combined use of adverbs and verbs, where the verb modified by the adverb changes the meaning expressed in the sentence, and may even alter the presupposition. Additionally, in this sentence, “recollect” belongs to the “repetition” meaning of the “re+X” type of verb presupposition triggering words, thus presupposing that “I have previously picked up these things”.

E. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the significant theoretical and practical value of applying a corpus-driven, cross-linguistic approach to analyzing verb presupposition triggers in literary texts, specifically in *The Great Gatsby*. Theoretically, it contributes to the field of literary pragmatics by systematically uncovering how factive and implicative verbs operate as crucial

pragmatic devices, implicitly shaping narrative coherence and character interpretation. This moves beyond traditional literary analysis, which focuses on theme and style, to offer a more granular understanding of linguistic mechanics in narrative construction. In comparison with existing research, which has extensively explored symbolic, cognitive, and stylistic dimensions of the novel, this study provides a complementary pragmatic perspective. Its primary methodological advancement lies in leveraging a pre-existing corpus of Chinese verb presupposition triggers to identify and categorize corresponding English triggers through translation alignment. This offers a replicable model for building similar corpora in other languages, addressing a gap in English presupposition trigger resources.

Despite these contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The reliance on translation equivalence, while fruitful, may occasionally obscure language-specific pragmatic nuances. Furthermore, the current focus on factive and implicative verbs, though insightful, suggests the potential for future research to incorporate a wider range of trigger types, such as change-of-state verbs or iteratives. For future studies, it is recommended that this methodology be applied to a broader range of literary texts and genres to test its robustness. Expanding the analysis to include other languages would further validate the cross-linguistic framework. Moreover, integrating psycholinguistic experiments could explore how these triggers affect real-time reader processing and interpretation. Ultimately, this line of inquiry promises to enrich both linguistic theory and literary analysis, fostering a deeper integration of pragmatic insights into the study of narrative fiction.

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