SOME LAKHOTA PRESUPPOSITIONS

David S. Rood
University of Colorado

ABSTRACT

Three classes of utterances in which Lakhōta speakers reveal presuppositions include (a) statements and questions about the location of objects; (b) sentences utilizing indefinite noun phrases in so-called opaque contexts; and (c) sentences which include verbs of motion and goals of that motion. In the first class, presuppositions are about the orientation of the object in space; in the second class, they are about the specificity of the indefinite noun, and in the third class, they involve both the relevant mental position of the speaker with respect to the goal and the degree of his identification with the subject of the sentence.
The term *presupposition* has become multiply ambiguous in the past few years in linguistic discussions. In logic, it apparently refers to logical antecedents to an event, such as the necessity that Caesar be dead if I say 'Brutus murdered Caesar', but the absence of any such necessity when I say "Brutus tried to murder Caesar." In linguistic discussions, the term generally applies to the presence of information from outside the sentence, either as an aid to interpretation, or as an explanation for the rules used by the speaker. Thus Lakoff (1971:333) points out that the stress patterns on the following sentences are judged right or wrong depending on whether speakers feel that the verbs are equivalent or not:

John hit Mary, and then she punched him.

*John hit Mary, and then she púncched him.*

*John hit Mary, and then she kissed him.*

John hit Mary, and then she kissed him.

Similarly, Paul Barreya (1976:46) defines presupposition as "information which the speaker assumes or pretends to assume to be known to himself and to the addressee." These uses of the term have in common the fact that something more than the information inherent in the definition of words in the sentence is conveyed when the sentence is uttered.

More relevant to my discussion here is the notion of *pragmatic* presupposition put forth by Keenan (1971:49-50), particularly his statement that "certain culturally defined conditions or contexts [must] be satisfied in order for an
utterance...to be understood."

From the point of view of the generation rather than the interpretation of sentences, these "culturally defined conditions" must be made explicit. In particular, since my interest in these matters is primarily pedagogical, teaching non-speakers to produce appropriate Lakhôta sentences requires exposition of those presuppositions which a Lakhôta speaker expresses as he talks. Put another way, in a modified statement of the linguistic relativity hypothesis, part of the difference between English and Lakhôta lies in the particular observations of the world which the two languages require their speakers to make.

Here I want to describe three classes of Lakhôta utterances in which the speaker's presuppositions are necessarily revealed; in these instances, the foreign speaker of Lakhôta must be conscious of the kind of information he is providing his hearer.

There are several suggestions in the literature as to how to formalize the relations between presuppositions and sentences. I am going to adopt the relatively crude but clear device of syntactic features on appropriate nodes of tree diagrams, just so we can get on with the description of the facts without a lengthy digression into formalism. Moreover, I am going to concentrate on those features of Lakhôta which differ from English, rather than presenting a full description of the Lakhôta phenomena.
The first set of examples involves the feature "specific." Unfortunately, *specific* has at least three common meanings in linguistics, and all three are important. In Example 1 I have differentiated this term into 'generic', 'certain', and 'vague', and provided English examples of sentences with each feature.

1)  
- *Dogs bark.*  
- *A dog is barking.*  
- *Robert wants a horse (any horse will do).*  
- *My father is in the house.*  
- *My father is (lying) in bed.*

Since the difference between *generic* and *specific* is the same in English and Lakhōta, it presents no serious conceptual problems. However, the other two kinds of specificity do pose difficulties.

In calling the first of these [certain], I have drawn on the use of that modifier in English for disambiguating utterances such as Karttunen's examples, to which item 2 is similar.

2) I will check that with a philosopher.

That English sentence has two readings, depending on whether I know whom I plan to check with, or whether I have to find the right person first. If I say (3) or (4) instead, the ambiguity is resolved.

3) I will check that with a certain philosopher.

4) I will check that with some philosopher or other.

This feature is restricted to NPs, and there is a very high
correlation between the NP feature [-certain] and the sentence-
level feature [-real] which we will discuss later.

As Georgette Ioup [1976:54] has recently pointed out, this feature can logically be manifested only in indefinite NPs; definite NPs are automatically [+certain]. She cites Russian as a language in which the [+certain] distinction is marked in indefinite pronouns: kto-to means 'a certain some-
one' while kto-nibud' means 'someone or other'.

In Lakhôta every indefinite NP (in a non-generic sentence) is marked either [+ or [- for this feature; there are no sentences exactly like example 2. The Lakhôta articles are are given in example 5, and illustrative sentences are in ex-
ample 6.

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{mass} & \text{eyá} & \text{etá} \\
\hline
\text{count pl.} & \text{eyá} & \text{etá} \\
\hline
\text{count sg.} & \text{wą} & \text{wąží} \\
\hline
\text{indefinite} \\
\text{pronouns} & \text{wą} & \text{wąží} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

6)

a. Robert šůkawakhê wąží čhfį. 'Robert wants a horse' (any horse will do).

b. Robert šůkawakhê wą čhfį. 'Robert wants a [certain] horse.'

c. Robert šůkawakhê etá wícháčhfį. 'Robert wants some horses (any will do).'

d. Robert šůkawakhê eyá wícháčhfį. 'Robert wants some [certain] horses.'
e. Iná kį phežúta etá yuhá iyéčeča. 'Mother ought to have some (kind of) medicine.'

f. Iná kį phežúta eyá yuhá iyéčeča. 'Mother ought to have some [specific] medicine.'

g. Wakhỳyeža kį táku wà yuhá škáta hą pi he?
   'Are the children playing with something [specific]?'

h. Wakhỳyeža kį táku wæźí yuhá škáta hą pi he?
   'Are the children playing with anything?'

i. Wakhỳyeža kį táku yuhá škáta hą pi he?
   'What are the children playing with?'

It is interesting from a descriptive point of view to note that the unmarked sentences are those in which the NP is [-certain], which is to say that in those sentences where [-certain] is possible, the usual correlation seems to be [+definite, +certain] and [-definite, -certain]. From the pedagogical point of view, this means that the logical progression for presentation is first, the differentiation of sentence types into those which permit the [-certain] distinction, and then the presentation of [-certain] as normal. We will return to this subject at the end of the paper.

We have now treated two aspects of the notion of specificity, the feature I have called [generic], which applies to sentences or NPs, and the one I have called [certain], which applies only to NPs.

The third type of specificity I have identified involves the use of the feature I have labeled [vague]. In Lakhóta I have so far found this manifested only in the description of
location, and the feature seems to control two things: the choice of the verb used to state the location, and the choice of patterns for questions about location.

Here the feature seems to belong on the verb phrase node, or perhaps even more precisely, on the verb node itself. The doubt here stems from the difference between questions and statements, for in questions both the adverb and the verb are affected by the feature, while in statements only the verb changes.

Statements about location are also sensitive to the [+animate] feature of the located NP, and in fact there is a cooccurrence restriction which prevents [+vague] from occurring with respect to an inanimate NP. The restrictions attributable to the features of animateness and question limit the variety of locative sentences to those sketched in example 7.

7) a. 
   S
   / \ 
  /   
 NP VP
 [-animate] loc
 [-vague]

 Adv. V

 b. 
   S
   / \ 
  /   
 NP VP
 [+animate] loc
 adv. V

 [avague]/Q [vague] /

 Keep in mind that we are discussing pragmatic presuppositions, or culturally determined conditions required to explain utterances, and that we are trying to make these explicit. Thus it is necessary to observe that this [+vague] difference in Lakhôta is not the same as the choice between 'be' and various position verbs in English. English locative sentences with 'be'
seem to me to be simply neutral with respect to position; 'He is in bed' is actually less redundant than 'He is lying in bed,' and therefore preferable. The use of a [+vague] statement in Lakhôta apparently conveys very clearly the idea that 'I do not know what position the person is assuming in that place, or I would not use this verb.' Thus, in Lakhôta it is obligatory to say 'He is lying in bed', since the other meaning would be something like 'He is living in bed.'

In the hierarchy in item 7, we see that [+vague] statements are limited to sentences with animate subjects, and that the adverb agrees in vagueness when the sentence is a question. Examples are in example 8.

8)  

a. Lekêt?wyæ pi kî tôkhiya iyâya he? [+vague, +Q] 'Where is Uncle?' (Literally, 'Where did uncle go?')

b. Lekêt?wyæ pi kî masôphiya ekta y. [+vague, -Q] 'Uncle is at the store.'

c. [-vague] verbs: | +animate | -animate |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>contained</td>
<td></td>
<td>yâ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standing</td>
<td>nâzî</td>
<td>hâ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sitting</td>
<td>yâkâ</td>
<td>yâkâ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lying</td>
<td>yâkâ, ūpâyA</td>
<td>ūpâyA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scattered</td>
<td></td>
<td>hîyâyA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The simplest case is the [+vague] interrogative about an animate subject: "Where is _____?" can only be asked by sentence 8a., which is more literally translated 'where did Uncle
go?'. The next simplest case, 8b., is the statement with the [+vague] verb.

As soon as the feature [-vague] occurs with locative predicates, Lakhota becomes quite complex, for now the speaker must choose a verb which indicates position for animate objects, or shape for inanimate objects, as indicated in the table for 8c. These choices are not the result of presuppositions, however, but are instead descriptive of specific situations. Only the choice of the feature [+vague] is a genuine presupposition.

To summarize so far, presuppositions about the specificity of Lakhota NPs control article selection, and similar ideas about the specificity of location of animate beings control the choices of verbs and question patterns. A second class of utterances involving presupposition contains descriptions of events in space.

Spatial orientation is expressed from two points of reference when the verb is one of motion, but only from the speaker's point of view if the verb is static. Thus in example 9, the two Lakhota translations for 'There were a lot of people at the dance' illustrate the difference between  ál 'at speaker's location' and ektá 'away from speaker's location.'

9)

a. Wachípi ál wičhóta. 'There were a lot of people at the dance (and I am remembering it as it was when I was there).'

b. Wachípi ektá wičhóta. 'There were a lot of people at the dance (but I am thinking about it from here).'
Note that the distinction is not one of the real, physical situation dictating the choice of description, but exclusively one of mind-set, or presupposition by the speaker. Either of these sentences can be uttered away from the dance location. For this reason, it seems to English speakers (as it seemed to us for a long time) that él and ektá are simply in free variation in these utterances. The discovery that the variation is not free at all serves as one more reinforcement of the suspicion that true cases of syntactic free variation are extremely rare in languages.

This distinction is similar to that associated with the English verbs 'come' and 'go', where the speaker is always the point of reference. In a narrative, such as 10a or 10b, English speakers are able to picture the situation from afar, as in (a), or from the center of the stage, as in (b).

10)

a. He kept on until he reached a hill. When he went to the top of the hill, he saw another rider going along the valley below.

b. He kept on until he came to a hill. When he came to the top of the hill, he saw another rider coming along the valley below.

c. Yúkhà γá hì na γá hì na wàhà pàhà wìg.

Then he-going and he-going and now hill a

\{ él \} \{ hì \} \{ f. \}

at he arrived {coming}. Hill the on he-arrived {going}

kì agnéchéya sìk?áqyaka wì tuváγìma čha

nom. when, rider a different who-was
mayá opmá {ü} čha wąyáke
valley along {come} who he-saw-him.

\begin{itemize}
\item d. 1...pahá wą ěl hř. '...came to a hill (where I imagine myself)'
\item 2...pahá wą ęktá hř. '...came to a hill (away from where I imagine myself)'
\item 3...pahá wą ěl f. '...went and arrived at a hill (where I imagine myself)'
\item 4...pahá wą ęktá f. '...went and arrived at a hill (away from where I imagine myself)'
\end{itemize}

For the Lakhóta speaker, however, the first sentence in this narrative has not 2 possibilities, but 4, as illustrated in 10c and 10d. The postpositions ěl and ęktá reveal the speaker's placement of himself, while the verbs seem to be chosen more on the basis of the degree to which the speaker identifies with the topic character. Otherwise 10d3, which is apparently fully grammatical, makes no sense: it seems impossible for motion to be away from the speaker when the speaker imagines himself to be at the goal of the action. The Lakhóta speaker is thus exercising some elaborate mental gymnastics at this point, identifying himself as simultaneously at the hill and with the rider approaching the hill, and able to express both presuppositions in the same predicate. This pair of options is described in illustration 11 by marking the locative adverb for speaker location, while the motion verb is marked for the orientation of the speaker with respect to the topic.
Most of the time the speaker apparently identifies with the topic, so that there is a very high correlation on the one hand between English 'come' and the Lakhota set which includes ű and ḥí, and on the other hand between English 'go' and the Lakhota verbs yA and í. But this correlation is not perfect, as we saw in the sentences in 10d.

The third feature of Lakhota presupposition seemed, at an earlier period in our analysis of this language, to be an overriding, all important one for sentence construction. This is a sentence-level feature [+real]. [+real] sentences contain statements of accomplished events, while [-real] sentences include not only hypothetical and future-time statements, but also questions, imperatives, and sentences with verbs of wishing or information seeking. This distinction is similar to that which philosophers of language make for English between opaque (-real) contexts and transparent (+real) contexts, except that in Lakhota, negative contexts are neither opaque nor transparent.

The importance of this distinction is its correlation with the possibilities for [-certaın] NPs which we discussed at the beginning of this paper. We thus have, essentially, the
Some Lakhota Presuppositions

Published by CU Scholar, 1977

If the sentence is [+real], all indefinite NPs are [+certain], but if the sentence is [-real], there is a choice between [+certain] for the NPs. I was able to elicit one sentence in which [+real] cooccurred with [-certain] - example 13:

13) Ṣǔkawakhá wąžì wąbláke. 'I saw [something that might have been] a horse.'

But I suspect that wąžì is really a pronoun here rather than an article, and that pronoun has only this form.

The reason this feature seems so important at first is to be found in my remarks about the markedness properties of the feature [+certain]. I said that when the distinction is possible, the unmarked sentence is [-certain]. It thus seems, for example, that there is a regular alternation between wa in statements and wąžì in questions, and indeed, that is the way we have approached this phenomenon pedagogically. After we discover, however, that wa can occur in questions, too, the [+real] feature becomes one of classifying sentences according to their possibilities for further expansion, rather than one of controlling the choices among articles.
The only other effect of the [+real] distinction seems to be on the use of the indefinite pronoun and question word pair táku 'what', takūl 'what; something; anything' as illustrated in 14.

14) a. Táku yûte. 'He ate something.'
   b. Takūl yûta yo! 'Eat something.'
   c. 'Táku yûta yo!
   d. 'Takūl yûte.
   e. Táku yûta he? 'What did he eat?'
   f. Takūl yûta he? 'Did he eat something?'

Here, however, there are complications. The [+real] distinction correlates táku with [+real] and takūl with [-real] in 14a-d, but both 14e and 14f are grammatical, reflecting the fact that the [+certain] distinction is not automatic in [-real] contexts.

In summary, then, some of the presuppositions which Lakȟóta speakers express but which English speakers need not express are the reality of the sentence, the specificity of indefinite noun phrases and of locations, and the spatial orientation of a speaker with respect to an event. Once analyzed, none of this is particularly difficult or complicated, but analysis and exposition are essential if we are to describe the way Lakȟóta speakers correlate their sentences with the observable world.
REFERENCES


