

SOME LAKHOTA PRESUPPOSITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Three classes of utterances in which Lakhóta 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.

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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 púnched him.

*John hit Mary, and then she kissed him.

John hit Mary, and then she kíssed him.

Similarly, Paul Larreya (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."

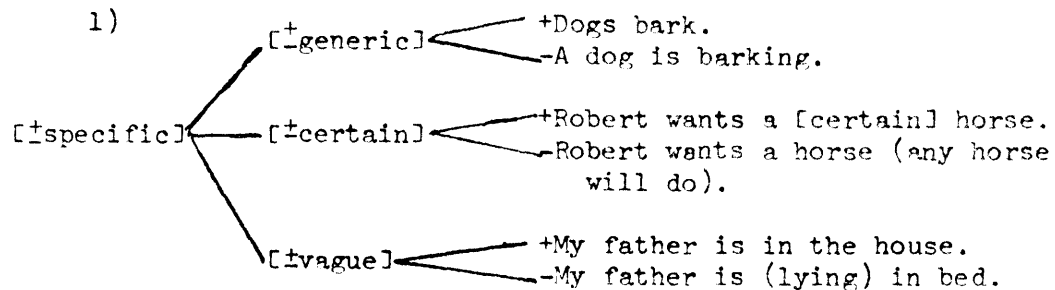
From the point of view of the generation rather than the interpretation of sentences, these "culturally defined conditions" must be made explicit. In particular, since my interest in these matters is primarily pedagogical, teaching non-speakers to produce appropriate Lakhóta sentences requires exposition of those presuppositions which a Lakhóta speaker expresses as he talks. Put another way, in a modified statement of the linguistic relativity hypothesis, part of the difference between English and Lakhóta 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 Lakhóta utterances in which the speaker's presuppositions are necessarily revealed; in these instances, the foreign speaker of Lakhóta 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 Lakhóta which differ from English, rather than presenting a full description of the Lakhóta phenomena.

-Ba4-

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.



Since the difference between generic and specific is the same in English and Lakhóta, 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 [\pm certain] distinction is marked in indefinite pronouns: kto-to means 'a certain someone' while kto-nibud' means 'someone or other'.

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

5)	+certain	-certain
mass	eyá	etá
count pl.	eyá	etá
count sg.	wá	wáží
indefinite pronouns	wá	wáží

6)

- a. Robert šúkawakhá wáží čhí. 'Robert wants a horse' (any horse will do).
- b. Robert šúkawakhá wá čhí. 'Robert wants a [certain] horse.'
- c. Robert šúkawakhá etá wícháchí. 'Robert wants some horses (any will do).'
- d. Robert šúkawakhá eyá wícháchí. 'Robert wants some [certain] horses.'

-Pa6-

- e. Iná kɪ phežúta etá yuhá iyéčheča. 'Mother ought to have
some (kind of) medicine.'
- f. Iná kɪ phežúta eyá yuhá iyéčheča. 'Mother ought to have some
[specific] medicine.'
- g. Wakháyeža kɪ táku wə yuhá škáta hə pi he?
'Are the children playing with something [specific]?'
- h. Wakháyeža kɪ táku wəží yuhá škáta hə pi he?
'Are the children playing with anything?'
- i. Wakháyeža kɪ táku yuhá škáta hə 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 [ivague]. In Lakhóta I have so far found this manifested only in the description of

-Ra8-

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 Lakhóta 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 Lakhóta 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. Lekšíʔwya pi kɪ tókhiya iyáya he? [+vague, +Q] 'Where is Uncle?' (Literally, 'Where did uncle go?')
- b. Lekšíʔwya pi kɪ masʔóphiya ektá ũ. [+vague, -Q] 'Uncle is at the store.'

c. [-vague] verbs:	+animate	-animate
contained	—	ʔŭ
standing	názɪ	hÁ
sitting	yakÁ	yakÁ
lying	yukÁ, ĥpáyA	ĥpáyA
scattered	—	hiyéyA

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, Lakhóta 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 Lakhóta 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 Lakhóta translations for 'There were a lot of people at the dance' illustrate the difference between él 'at speaker's location' and ektá 'away from speaker's location.'

9)

- a. Wačhípi él wičhóta. 'There were a lot of people at the dance
(and I am remembering it as it was when I was there).'
- b. Wačhípi ektá wičhóta. 'There were a lot of people at the dance
(but I am thinking about it from here).'

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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. Yŭkhə yá hĭ na yá hĭ na waná pahá wə
Then he-go ing and he-go -ing and now hill a
- {él} {hí.} Pahá kĭ akāl {hí}
{ektá} {í.} Hill the on {í}
at he arrived {coming}. he-arrived
{going}
- kĭ agnéčheya šŭk'ákayaka wə tuwá'yuma čha
nom. when, rider a different who-was

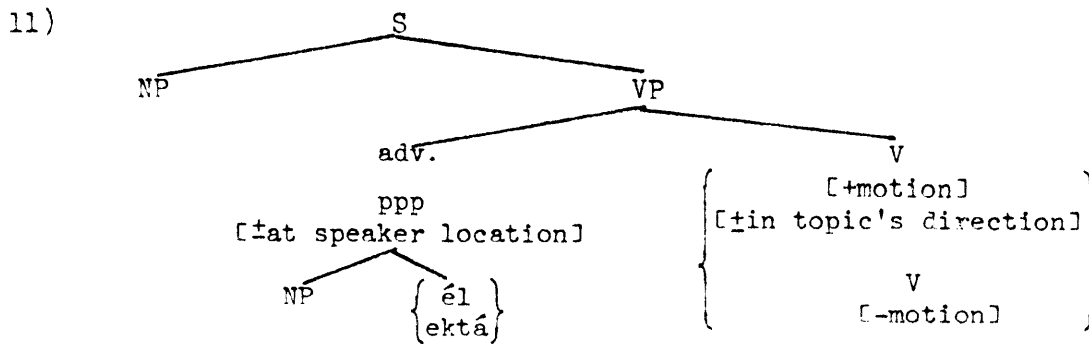
-Rail-

mayá	oǵná	$\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \acute{u} \\ yá \end{array} \right\}$	čha	wayáke
valley	along	$\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{come} \\ \text{go} \end{array} \right\}$	who	he-saw-him.

- d. 1...pahá wə éł hí. '...came to a hill (where I imagine myself)'
- 2...pahá wə ektá hí. '...came to a hill (away from where I imagine myself)'
- 3...pahá wə éł í. '...went and arrived at a hill (where I imagine myself)'
- 4...pahá wə ektá í. '...went and arrived at a hill (away from where I imagine myself)'

For the Lakshóta speaker, however, the first sentence in this narrative has not 2 possibilities, but 4, as illustrated in 10c and 10d. The postpositions éł and ektá 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 Lakshóta 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.

-Fal2-



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 Lakhóta set which includes ú and hí, and on the other hand between English 'go' and the Lakhóta verbs yÁ and í. But this correlation is not perfect, as we saw in the sentences in 10d.

The third feature of Lakhóta 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 Lakhóta, negative contexts are neither opaque nor transparent.

The importance of this distinction is its correlation with the possibilities for [±certain] NPs which we discussed at the beginning of this paper. We thus have, essentially, the

12)

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graph TD
    S --> S1["[+real]"]
    S --> S2["[-real]"]
    S1 --> NP1["NP"]
    NP1 --> NP1_1["[+def]"]
    NP1 --> NP1_2["[-def]"]
    NP1_2 --> NP1_2_1["[+certain]"]
    NP1_2_1 --> NP1_2_1_1["|"]
    S2 --> NP2["NP"]
    NP2 --> NP2_1["[+def]"]
    NP2 --> NP2_2["[-def]"]
    NP2_2 --> NP2_2_1["[+certain]"]
    NP2_2 --> NP2_2_2["[-certain]"]
    NP2_2_1 --> NP2_2_1_1["|"]
    NP2_2_2 --> NP2_2_2_1["|"]
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13) Šúkawahá _____ waží waḅláke. 'I saw [something
horse long pause that might have been]
a horse.'

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 wą in statements and ważí in questions, and indeed, that is the way we have approached this phenomenon pedagogically. After we discover, however, that wą 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.

-Pal4-

The only other effect of the [\pm real] distinction seems to be on the use of the indefinite pronoun and question word pair táku 'what', takúł 'what; something; anything' as illustrated in 14.

- 14) a. Táku yúte. 'He ate something.'
 b. Takúł yúta yo! 'Eat something.'
 c. *Táku yúta yo!
 d. *Takúł yúte.
 e. Táku yúta he? 'What did he eat?'
 f. Takúł yúta he? 'Did he eat something?'

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

In summary, then, some of the presuppositions which Lakhóta 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 Lakhóta speakers correlate their sentences with the observable world.

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