Categorial Presupposition

Categorial presuppositions result from certain semantic properties of predicates. Some, perhaps most, lexical predicates impose certain conditions on the things which their terms stand for. Only when these conditions are fulfilled can the predicate be used to say something about those things which makes sense, and be true or false in the ordinary way. For example, to say of something that it is *waltzing* makes sense (and can be normally true or false) only if that something is capable of moving about rhythmically, preferably on two feet and with a partner. Normally speaking, only humans fulfill this condition. Such a condition can be called a 'precondition' of the predicate, to be distinguished from its 'satisfaction condition(s)' (see *Lexical Conditions*). Categorial presuppositions are those presuppositions of sentences that result from the preconditions of its main predicate.

Metaphor (see *Metaphor*) may disregard a precondition, as in the sentence *And the train was waltzing around the walls of Verona* (E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*). Here, the categorial presupposition 'The train was capable of moving about rhythmically' should be inserted post hoc (see *Accommodation and Presupposition*), but, if it is, it carries the hedge 'only for the interpretation of this sentence.'

The first to distinguish categorial presuppositions as a separate category (though not under that name) was Charles Fillmore (1971). Unfortunately, this publication suffered from terminological confusion—as the term 'presupposition' was used indiscriminately for a lexical precondition and for sentence presupposition—and from unclarities regarding the notion of presupposition. But even so, together with the work of Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1971), it brought about an awareness among linguists that presupposition was not of interest to philosophers alone, but was also highly relevant to linguistic, in particular lexical, theory.

The precise lexico–semantic description of categorial preconditions is no simple matter. It is part of the task of describing the lexical conditions of predicates, which, as

lexicographers know, is a very complex matter, both theoretically and practically. The distinction between preconditions and satisfaction conditions is based on that between presuppositional and classical entailments (see *Presupposition*). But beyond that, the usual problems of lexicography (see *Lexicography*) remain. For example, the predicate *bald* has the categorial precondition that what is referred to by its subject term should normally have hair, but possibly also textile pile, or tread (as with tyres) in prototypical places, particularly the top of the head (and in American English also vegetation on rocks or mountain tops), whereas the satisfaction condition is that that which is normally there is not there.

See also: Accommodation and Presupposition; Lexical Conditions; Lexicography; Metaphor; Presupposition.

Bibliography

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