



CROSS-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PRESUPPOSITION IN CHRISTIE’S WORK

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Abstract. *This study analyzes how presuppositions—unstated assumptions crucial for building suspense and plot—in Agatha Christie's detective novels are translated into Uzbek and Russian. Using linguistic theories and translation models, it finds that differences in language structure and culture often weaken or alter these hidden meanings. The research concludes that effectively translating such elements is vital, as changes can impact the mystery and intrigue, requiring a balance between faithfulness to the original and readability in the target language.*

Keywords: *Agatha Christie; presupposition; pragmatics; cross-linguistic analysis; translation studies; suspense; lexical triggers; structural presupposition; pragmatic equivalence; Uzbek translation; Russian translation.*

INTRODUCTION.

Presupposition is one of the core concepts of linguistic pragmatics, and its development is closely tied to the logical tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The phenomenon was first brought into academic discussion by Gottlob Frege, who argued that the comprehension of a statement requires certain background assumptions to be already in place. Later, Strawson linked presupposition to reference and the conditions under which an utterance can be considered true or false, emphasizing that truth-value depends on the context of use. Stalnaker further conceptualized presupposition as part of the “common ground” shared by interlocutors, asserting that mutual background knowledge determines how presuppositions function in communication. Thus, presupposition emerged as a pragmatic mechanism that supplies a hidden yet essential layer of meaning in discourse.

Agatha Christie’s fiction demonstrates one of the most fascinating applications of presupposition in literary language. In her detective novels, language, logic, and pragmatics operate in close interaction: characters’ utterances, pauses, assumptions, suspicion cues, and subtle hints all function as tools to guide or mislead the reader. Presuppositions in Christie’s dialogues not only build informational background but also serve as essential components of suspense, intrigue, and detective reasoning. Translating such presuppositions from English into Uzbek or Russian poses significant challenges, as semantic and pragmatic nuances often shift across languages. A cross-linguistic perspective is therefore crucial: structural presuppositions (wh-questions, cleft constructions), lexical presuppositions (e.g., *know*, *regret*, *stop*), and pragmatic presuppositions do not have identical equivalents in Uzbek and Russian, and some may partially or completely disappear. Contextual elaboration, stylistic strengthening, and grammatical restructuring in translation frequently result in transformation of presuppositional meaning. The significance of this research lies in the fact that presupposition in Christie’s stylistic system is a central mechanism for constructing the plot. The aim of the article is to identify presupposition types in Christie’s works, compare their transformations in translation, and explain the pragmatic shifts occurring across English, Uzbek, and Russian. Accordingly, the study addresses the following questions: How is presupposition constructed in Christie’s texts? To what extent is it preserved or altered in



translation? What semantic and pragmatic shifts occur in Uzbek and Russian versions?

Presupposition refers to background information that must already be assumed by the interlocutors for an utterance to be meaningful. Scholars such as Levinson, Yule, and Stalnaker define presupposition as an underlying condition, background assumption, or “common ground” element. Various types of presuppositions arise from different linguistic forms. Lexical presuppositions occur when a lexical item inherently presupposes a prior state or event. Verbs such as *stop*, *continue*, *regret*, and *know* implicitly signal preceding situations; for example, *She stopped crying* presupposes that she had been crying. These triggers frequently invoke past events in Christie’s narratives. Structural presuppositions emerge from grammatical forms such as wh-questions (*When did he arrive?*), cleft constructions (*It was John who saw her*), and temporal clauses (*Before he returned...*), all of which presuppose specific background information. Factive verbs (*know*, *realize*, *be aware*) presuppose truth, whereas non-factive constructions express doubt or uncertainty. Existential presuppositions assume the existence of a referent (e.g., *The killer escaped*). Counterfactual presuppositions rely on unreal but logically inferred scenarios (*If he had known...*). Pragmatic presuppositions, as defined by Stalnaker, depend on shared social knowledge, cultural norms, and contextual assumptions. These mechanisms differ significantly across English, Uzbek, and Russian. English tends to rely on formal structures; Uzbek foregrounds contextual and semantic cues; and Russian combines syntactic and intonational strategies. Cultural knowledge also plays a substantial role: British cultural elements such as tea-time, social hierarchy, and understatement may not constitute automatic presuppositions for Uzbek or Russian readers, prompting translators to modify or clarify implicit information.

The present study demonstrates that presupposition constitutes a central pragmatic mechanism in Agatha Christie’s detective fiction, shaping suspense, character interaction, and narrative logic. Comparative analysis of English originals and Uzbek and Russian translations shows that presuppositions are highly sensitive to linguistic structure and cultural context. English relies heavily on formal presupposition triggers—cleft constructions, wh-questions, factive verbs—while Uzbek and Russian often express presuppositions through context and semantic association, resulting in significant transformations during translation. Pragmatic equivalence is rarely achieved automatically.

In modern pragmatics, presupposition is no longer viewed merely as a logical prerequisite for meaningful communication; instead, it is treated as a dynamic, context-sensitive phenomenon that interacts with inference, discourse structure, and the common ground shared by interlocutors. The shift from classical logic to neo-pragmatic approaches is largely shaped by scholars such as Levinson, Kadmon, Simons, and Roberts, who expanded Stalnaker’s foundational ideas and demonstrated that presupposition is a central mechanism in how speakers manage information flow in discourse.

Levinson (1983) emphasizes that presuppositions operate as “default assumptions,” shaping interpretation even when they are not explicitly stated. He argues that presupposition differs fundamentally from both implicature and entailment: entailment concerns truth-conditional consequences that hold regardless of speaker intention, implicature concerns meaning inferred indirectly through Gricean maxims, while presupposition encodes information assumed to be mutually known before an utterance is interpreted. Kadmon (2001) extends this view by highlighting the role of conventional lexical triggers and the speaker’s expectation that the hearer can accommodate missing presuppositions through context-based reasoning. According to Kadmon, accommodation allows communication to proceed despite gaps in background knowledge, revealing the adaptive nature of presupposition.¹

Simons introduces an influential proposal that presupposition should be viewed not as a precondition for truth but as “backgrounded content” — information that is not foregrounded for debate in the discourse. For Simons, the key property of presupposition is its resistance to challenge: speakers typically do not treat presupposed content as negotiable. This concept provides a bridge between presupposition and discourse coherence, particularly in narrative genres. Roberts further contributes to neo-pragmatic theory by integrating

¹ Abdul-Raof, H. (2006). *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*. Routledge.



presupposition into the broader model of discourse structure, where questions under discussion (QUDs) shape which information becomes presupposed, inferred, or asserted. In this dynamic model, presupposition emerges as a mechanism that maintains continuity between discourse segments.²

One of the central modern debates is the projection problem—how presuppositions behave under negation, questioning, conditionality, and modality. Classical examples show that presuppositions tend to “project” out of embedded structures: *John didn’t stop smoking* still presupposes that John used to smoke; *Did Mary realize she was late?* presupposes that Mary was late; *If he regrets leaving early...* presupposes that he left early. Neo-pragmatic theories explain projection through the idea of global discourse expectations rather than formal semantics alone. The hearer assumes that backgrounded information remains constant unless explicitly contradicted. This explains why presuppositions persist even when assertions are negated or questioned. Thus, modern pragmatics views presupposition as a flexible, inference-driven mechanism tied to discourse organization, speaker intention, and mutual knowledge. It is precisely this dynamic and layered nature that makes presupposition crucial in literary discourse, particularly in Agatha Christie’s detective narratives where hidden clues, incomplete information, and cognitive expectations are essential to storytelling.

Presupposition is activated not only by traditional lexical and structural triggers, but also by a broader set of linguistic mechanisms that shape how information is backgrounded, inferred, and projected in discourse. Modern pragmatics expands the classification of presupposition triggers, emphasizing iterativity, definite descriptions, adverbials, scalar expressions, and even prosodic cues as key contributors. These triggers are particularly relevant to literary texts, where subtle nuances of meaning function as narrative tools. Iterativity and habituality represent powerful presuppositional sources. Words and constructions that indicate repetition—such as *again*, *still*, *no longer*, and habitual markers (*used to*, *would*)—presuppose a prior state or event. For example, *He visited her again* presupposes at least one previous visit, while *She still suspects him* presupposes that she suspected him before. Christie frequently uses iterative triggers to hint at hidden patterns in a character’s behavior, implicitly guiding the reader’s suspicions without explicit exposition.

Agatha Christie’s detective fiction utilizes presupposition as a fundamental narrative device, engaging the reader’s cognitive expectations and inferential capabilities. The debate between philosophers Russell and Strawson highlights how definite descriptions convey presuppositions about existence and uniqueness, which Christie adeptly employs to focus attention on key elements. Adverbial and scalar presuppositions further shape narrative tension and emotional depth, while intonational cues enrich dialogue dynamics. Christie contrasts two detective paradigms: the deductive reasoning of Sherlock Holmes, reliant on observable evidence, and Hercule Poirot’s psychological inference approach, emphasizing hidden presuppositions and character motivations. This cognitive model invites readers to actively engage in filling narrative gaps and interpreting misdirection, often through subtle foreshadowing and the twisting of assumptions.

Conclusion. The conversion of wh-structures into declarative sentences, the neutralization of iterative markers such as *again* or *still*, and the need to explicate cultural realia may weaken, shift, or eliminate presuppositions. Conversely, translators occasionally add new presuppositions when clarifying unfamiliar cultural elements. Such shifts alter the cognitive load for the reader and reshape the perception of mystery and character motivation. Overall, translating presupposition in detective narratives requires a delicate balance. Excessive explication can undermine narrative ambiguity, while insufficient contextualization can obscure essential clues. Translators must therefore navigate between fidelity to Christie’s intricate narrative design and the pragmatic demands of the target language.

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² Catford, J. C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford University Press.



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