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Lexical and Syntactic Presupposition Triggers in Selected Online English and Kurdish Political News Texts:

A comparative Study

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Abstract

This paper intends to analyze the presupposition triggers at both lexical and syntactic levels in selected online English and Kurdish political news texts. This is for the purpose of figuring out how texts in political news are achieving their political intentions via the use of presupposition triggers. Presupposition as a feature of language use is commonly exploited by language users. Expressions and constructions carrying presuppositions are called “presupposition triggers”. Its role in the news text is of specific importance in that writers of text tend to make use of this property so as to create either a favorable or unfavorable bias throughout the text this is to manipulate readers’ view. A descriptive analytic method has been used in this study. The data of this study is the political news texts in online English and Kurdish news channels, then 18 political news texts, which are released in the first half of the year 2020, have been selected randomly. Based on Levinson (1983), Yule (2010), and He’s (2003) classification of presupposition triggers the data have been analyzed and compared. The result of this study has shown that both English and Kurdish political news texts basically use both lexical and syntactic items of presupposition triggers. As for the lexical triggers, English political news texts constituted 530 times of occurring and Kurdish political news texts constituted 361 times. Regarding the syntactic level, the frequency of occurrence has been 185 times in the English news texts while it is 99 times in the Kurdish texts. All the syntactic items were more frequently used in the English texts except for the counter-factual conditionals which was the same as the Kurdish texts occurring 11 times. Adverbial clauses have recurred 23 times in the Kurdish texts and therefore ranking first among the other structural triggers. Finally, in the English texts, implicative verbs were noted only 1 times while 11 occurrences were noted in the Kurdish texts.

1. Introduction

News writers use language to provide information, it is available in both the printed and electronic media. Newspaper, as a type of printed news, is still depended on by many people to know about the recent happenings. Furthermore, radio, television, and internet are also used as a source of knowing about the recent events. The news that can be updated every second or minute is called “online news”. Nowadays, people prefer reading the online news rather than the printed ones, this is because it is easier and simpler to read. Through writing the news, writers try to influence the reader’s understanding or opinion this is by the way of using language. Zare¹, Abbaspour, & Rajaei Nia (2012:734) try to support this idea by stating that “the use of language in the mass media has an important role by media writers to attempt consciously or unconsciously to influence the understanding of the news event”. It means that the writers can be bias in giving their opinion value when they write about an issue, the readers are brought out to trust or taken as granted. Pragmatics, especially presupposition, is the field of linguistics that have connection with the use of language in media.

Presupposition was originally studied in the philosophy of language and then introduced and came into the field of linguistics. As a general feature of language use, presupposition has been defined by Richardson (2007:63) as “the information triggered by certain linguistic constructions which is irrefutably credited as absolute truth by participants in an utterance in a specific context”. In fact, Bekalu (2006:153) claims that as an inherent part of the language, “it is virtually impossible to utter or write a single sentence of any consequence without making some kind of assumption”. Moreover, Yule (1996:25) points out that assumption is a way before making an utterance by a speaker, the assumption is called as a presupposition. This presupposition does not exist in the sentences but it only exists in the mind of the speaker or writer. Besides, presupposition can be used to analyze the text of news story. In using presupposition, the intended meaning is assumed to be true based on the speaker’s utterance or the writer’s statement and it is interpreted by the hearer or the reader. Though, this property of presupposition is not the basic concern to focus on. The truth of the statements that are assumed by the users of language on the behalf of the listeners or readers is what they

are really interested in. That is to say, sometimes, the assumed presupposition or knowledge lacks the truth. That is why, by this kind of presupposition, language users (speakers or writers) try to manipulate their listeners' or readers' opinion or understanding.

As the study of presupposition continues, it has been discovered that the use of lexical items or linguistic constructions are typically the producers of presupposition. These lexical items and linguistic constructions are named by "Presupposition triggers" (Levinson, 1983; Huang, 2007). Depending on presupposition triggers, the authors may well influence on the reader's interpretation or opinion of facts and events, forming either a favorable or unfavorable bias through their text.

2. Presupposition triggers

Many scholars have specified their effort and time in studying and explaining presupposition triggers. Starting with Levinson (1983) who listed thirteen forms of presupposition triggers basing on Karttunen's (1971) list that include thirty one forms of presupposition trigger. Levinson's (1983) list of presupposition triggers consist of; change of state verbs, definite description, imperative verbs,

iterative, verbs of judging, factive verbs, cleft sentence, implicit clefts with stressed constituents, comparison and contrasts, temporal clauses, counter-factual conditionals, non-restrictive relative clauses, and questions. In 2003, a scholar from china named He Ziran tried to reclassify Levinson's kinds of presupposition triggers and divided it into three general groups. He's presupposition triggers groups are verbs containing implicative verbs, factive verbs, change-of-state verbs, and verbs of judging; iterative and adjuncts such as "again", "another", "back", "either", "even", "'s", "too", and "the"; and phrases and clauses containing temporal clauses, comparisons and contrasts, non-restrictive relative clauses, cleft sentences, as well as questions. Then, Yule (2010) categorized presupposition triggers into six groups, containing lexical, existential, factive, non-factive, structural and counter-factual triggers. In this study, taken from Levinson (1983), Yule (2010), and He's (2003) idea about presupposition triggers, the presupposition triggers have been divided into two basic levels which are lexical and syntactic. The two levels of presupposition triggers are shown in the table below.

Table (1) Levels of presupposition triggers

Presupposition triggers	Classifications		Examples
Lexical level	Particles		Either, too, still, just, even, again...
	Existential	Pronouns	She, her, he, his, our, their...
		Definite and indefinite articles	A , an, the
	Verbs and adverbs	Iterative verbs (adverbs)	Restore, come back, again, return...
		Verbs of judging	Accuse, criticize, praise...
		Change of state verbs (aspectual verbs)	Begin, stop, continue...
		Implicative verbs	Manage, forget, avoid, remember, failed to...
		Factive verbs	Realize, regret, know, be glad that...
		Non- factive verbs	Dream, imagine, believe, pretend, assume ...
Syntactic level	Comparison and contrasts		As much as, comparative, more than, constructions...
	Counter-factual conditionals		Conditions contrary to fact
	non-restrictive relative clause		Which, who, when , where ...
	Temporal clauses		After, whenever, during, when, as...
	Questions		Rhetorical questions, yes-no questions, Wh- questions
	Cleft sentences		That/who... it is/ wasn't...

3. Methodology

To achieve the goal of this descriptive analytic study, The New York Times, BBC News, and CNN international were chosen as three samples of online English news channels, with Rudaw, PUK media, and NRT English representing the online translated Kurdish news channels. Then a total of 18 samples of political news texts are randomly chosen from the news channels which are released in the first half of the year 2020. Nine of these texts are randomly chosen from the mentioned online English news channels and the other nine from the translated Kurdish online news channels. After that, they were subjected to pragmatic analysis in terms of used presupposition triggers. Based on the presupposition trigger classification stated by Levinson (1983), Yule (2010), and He (2003), the frequency and percent of the occurrence of presupposition triggers were examined and counted. Ultimately, the frequently used presupposition triggers in the political texts of the two were identified, compared, and discussed.

4. Results

The results of analyzing the collected data in both lexical and syntactic levels of presupposition triggers in selected online English and Kurdish political news texts are shown below.

Table (2) lexical level of presupposition triggers in English and Kurdish online news texts

No.	Presupposition triggers : lexical level		English online news texts		Kurdish online news texts			
			Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage		
1	particles		43	7.9%	20	5.5%		
2.	Existential	pronouns	14	436	80.9%	47	283	76.9%
		articles	29			236		
3.	Verbs	iterative	14	60	11.2%	14	65	17.6%
		Verbs of judging	17			18		
		Change of state verbs(aspectual verbs)	12			10		
		Implicative verbs	1			11		
		factive verbs	7			5		
		Non-factive verbs	9			7		
Total			539	100%	368	100%		

According to the results shown in table 2, all the lexical items have been detected and used in both the English and Kurdish texts. One can notice that the level of using the lexical items is more significant in the English texts (539 times), than the Kurdish ones (368 times). Starting with the particles, it has been detected in the English texts, occurring 43 times or constituting 7.9%, more than the Kurdish ones, occurring 20 times or about 5.5%. Then, in focusing on the Existential, the researcher found that the highest occurrence of both Pronouns and Articles is in the English texts scoring 80.9%. Pronouns has been detected 143 times and articles 293 times. This number declines in the Kurdish texts to become 76.9%, in which the occurrence of Pronouns is 47 times and Articles 236times. Generally, the mentioned kinds of verbs are used more in the Kurdish texts rating 17.6% than the English ones rating 11.2%. According to the nature of the texts, that are evaluative articles, the dominant used category in both the English and Kurdish political texts is verbs of Judging. In the English texts, it occurred 17 times and 18 times appeared in the Kurdish texts. But this rate changes in the use of implicative verbs in which a significant different of use is noticed. The Implicative verbs are used 11

times in the Kurdish texts while the number of its occurrence is only 1 time in the English ones. On the other hand, the number of using Iterative verbs found in the texts of both languages is 14 times. Change of State verbs (aspectual verbs) appeared 12 times, Factive verbs 7 times, and non-factive verbs 9times in the English political texts. Regarding the Kurdish texts, the numbers are 10, 5, and 7 times.

Table (3) Syntactic level of presupposition triggers in English and Kurdish online news texts

Table 3 shows the percentage of constructions of presupposition triggers in the level of syntactic. Similar to the lexical level, the occurrence of the syntactic constructions are higher in the English online political news texts than in the Kurdish ones. The frequency of the total use of syntactic constructions in the English texts are 185 times while 99 times has been rated for the Kurdish texts. In the English news texts, each items of Comparison and contrasts and temporal clauses, are scoring the highest occurrences of the syntactic constructions in which each one of them appeared 40 times or about 21.6%. Then each Non-restrictive relative clause and Cleft sentences has been used 37 times (20%). In addition to Questions that has been used 20 times or about 10.9%, Counter-factual conditionals has been used only 11 times or about 5.9%. In the Kurdish news texts, all the numbers are less except for the counter-factual conditionals that occurred 11times just like the English texts. The structure of comparison and contrast has been noted 15 times meaning about 15.1%. Non-restrictive relative clause is used 19 times (19.1%). While temporal clauses occurred 23 times or about 23.3%. Questions score the lowest number of occurrence which is only 5 times (5.1%) through the whole nine Kurdish texts. Then cleft sentences has been noted 26times or about 26.3%.

5. Analysis and Discussion

From the results of the selected political news texts, some findings have been revealed. One can analyze that writers of the English political news texts depend on the presupposition triggers, in

No.	Presupposition triggers :Syntactic level	English online news texts		Kurdish online news texts	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Comparison and contrasts	40	21.6%	15	15.1%
2.	Counter-factual conditionals	11	5.9%	11	11,1%
3.	Non-restrictive relative clause	37	20%	19	19.1%
4.	Temporal clauses	40	21.6%	23	23.3%
5.	Questions	20	10.9%	5	5.1%
6.	Cleft sentences	37	20%	26	26.3%
Total		185	100%	99	100%

both lexical and syntactic level, more than the writers of Kurdish political news texts. However, many similarities and differences have been found. In the lexical level, both English and Kurdish writers highly depend on the verbs of judging. Since verb of judging is related to the

opinion or evaluation and assessment, such as criticized, accused etc., then writers of both English and Kurdish political news texts express their opinion or critics by giving their ideas toward an issue or event that is being discussed. In addition, they try to attract readers and let them build their reactions, judgments or ideas from what they read, besides forming a bias thought or opinion through their text. As seen in the English datum “Netanyahu trail: Israeli prime minister faces Jerusalem support” (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-5186873>),

Case 1,000 –Fraud and breach of trust: he is *accused* of receiving gifts- mainly cigars and bottles of champagne from powerful businessmen in exchange for favors.

From the sentence above, it can be presupposed or assumed that he (Netanyahu) received gifts from powerful businessmen in exchange for favors. As for the Kurdish datum “Kurdish authorities in northeast Syria condemn ‘cowardly’ Afrin bombing” (<https://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/29042020>)

Turkish authorities, including the country’s defense ministry and vice president, *accused* the Kurdish people’s protection Units (YPG) of being behind the attack.

The word “accused” in the sentence above presupposes that there has been an attack. In the lexical level, the item of iterative is equally preferred to be used in both the English and Kurdish political news writers. According to Liang and Liu (2016) Iterative refers to “the verb and adverbs which presuppose the previous existence of the actions or states that are taking place now”. As in the English datum “Biden Calls Out ‘Anti-Semitism’ on the Left and Criticizes Israeli Policies” (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/us/politics/joe-biden-israel-anti-semitism.html>)

Mr. Biden said that “my commitment to Israel is absolutely unshakable” and pledged to reverse actions taken under President Trump, including *restoring* diplomatic relationships with the Palestinian Authority.

Through the iterative verb ‘restore’ it is presupposed that there were a diplomatic relationships before but it was cut there will be a diplomatic relationships again. The writer uses the word ‘restore’ to emphasize that there will always be a stored relationship with Palestinian authority.

The same kind of verb is used by the Kurdish writer in the Kurdish datum “PUK bloc meets Iraqi President and Minister of Defense and Interior”

(https://www.pukmedia.com/EN/EN_Direje.aspx?Jimare=59957)

Officials from the Kurdistan region, along with civilians in the disputed areas, have long called for the *return* of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces to their areas to fill the security gaps.

In the sentence above, through the word ‘return’, it is presupposed that the Kurdish Peshmerga were in the area before. The writer used ‘return’ to draw reader’s attention to the idea that Kurdish Peshmerga were in the disputed areas before and their existence is important for the security of the areas. writers of both English and Kurdish political news are trying to let readers know that a political action or decision has taken place before and now it is happening again either in their favor or not. In the syntactic level, the only similarity between the English and Kurdish political news texts is in the use of counter factual conditionals. Yule (1996:26) explains counter factual conditionals as what is presupposed is not only true, but it is also the opposite of what is true or contrary of facts. For that reason, the conditional structure that generally presupposes the information in the if- clause is not true or fact at the time of the speech or event. It indicates that writers are trying to

create a false image or idea in the mind of readers and they are not always telling the real truth.

On the other hand, one of the differences between the English and Kurdish political news is in the use of lexical presupposition triggers. English writers are trying to use particles more than the Kurdish writers, this is to shorten the words so as to avoid lengthiness and prolixity. In addition to that, English writers use particles to stress out the important information, more importantly, to help the reader understand the presupposed information in the political news. In the English texts, restrictive expressions are used more than the Kurdish texts. Generally, restrictive words refer to the words that are used to modify a noun phrase, including not only some definite and indefinite articles like “a” and “the”, but also some adjectival possessive pronouns. This indicates that English writer are more confidence and they are sure or definite about the existence of what they are writing about and they assume to make it known by the readers as well. Furthermore the result, of not being confident or not sure about what they are writing about or what exactly happened, leads Kurdish writers to depend on implicative verbs more than English writers. As in the Kurdish datum “NO

AGREEMENT YET BETWEEN KRG AND BAGDAD: SECOND DEPUTY SPEAKER”

(<https://www.nrttv.com/En/News.aspx?id=21351&MapID=2>)

Erbil is facing a severe budget shortfall because of historically low oil prices and a decision by Bagdad to freeze budget transfers because the KRG *failed to abide* its obligations under the 2019 law.

Implicative meaning is related to an asserted meaning, this indicated that an implicative verb is presupposing an implied or asserted indication. The writer uses ‘failed to’ to implying the meaning of not being successful. For that reason, Kurdish writers are trying to let reader assert the meaning they would like and avoid the burden of saying what exactly is happening (truth) or the meaning of a political speech or event. This might be due to the violation that are made against Kurdish political news writers as opposite to English political news writers whom their right are preserved. As noted from the results, many differences are found between the two in the syntactic level. Starting with the item of comparison and contrast. The use of comparison and contrast signals the existence of a presupposition. This item is highly used by

English political news writers, this is to make readers understand the situation and to let them know the options that are made besides providing readers the political picture that they intend. Non-restrictive relative clause is also depended on by English writers since it gives them, flexibility to provide more or additional information about the noun referred to. Through their writings, they try to inform as much as essential information to readers about a political decision or news, this can be due to being more realistic and loyal to their job and their readers.

Levinson (1983:183) calls the adverbial clause temporal clauses, according to him this kind of clause is “related to expressions of time that can be placed in either initial or final position and it can be used to presuppose information”. This type of presupposition trigger was highly used by English political writers. English writers want to imply the truth of what exactly is happening and more importantly in showing the exact time of the news, unlike the Kurdish writer who tries to talk in general and avoid being adequate. Asking question usually indicates seeking to know the truth or to know more information. Besides, it presupposes that it leads the addressers to believe that the information is necessarily

true, rather than just presupposition of the person asking question (Yule, 1996:29). An example of it found in the English datum “Afghanistan: Taliban prisoner release amid Eid al-Fitr ceasefire” (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52791870?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/world/asia&link_location=live-reporting-story)

What will Taliban do after signing US deal?

Here, the writer wants to let readers know that ‘it is true that there is a deal but to think deeper and to question what will happen after that deal’. This kind of presupposition triggers is one of the strong points of the political news texts written by English writers, since they not only try to provide information but also try to question the information or the political speeches and decisions. This is to evoke readers to think about the questions, provoke their resonance and make them seek the truth of what is really happening. Unlike Kurdish writers who try to deliver information or what is happening as they are without trying to analyze or seek what is behind the political event or questioning politician’s decisions. Many Kurdish political writers have been tortured and then killed by anonymous people because of questioning or trying to question political decisions or actions in

their writings, this is one of the possible reasons behind preventing the use of the item of question by Kurdish political news writers. Cleft sentences are the last point of differences between the English and Kurdish political news texts in the level of syntax. According to Biber et al (1999:155) cleft sentence can be "divided into two parts, each with its own verb". They also state that cleft sentences are used to bring specific part into focus. Through the use of cleft sentences, English writers try to focus on certain important idea when they try to draw reader’s attention toward specific part of their writings. As in the English datum “Former Lindsey Graham donor backs his Democratic challenger after questioning Graham’s principles” (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/12/politics/lindsay-gramham-donor-support-challenger/index.html>)

Apparently, he feels *that it is OK to share government dollars* with those who don’t truly need the money, but

Here, the writer intentionally wants to draw reader’s attention through the idea of being ok to share government dollars with those who don’t truly need money through expressing the idea in a cleft sentence. This item of presupposition is not highly used by

Kurdish political writers compared to the English once.

6. Conclusion

This study is related to the lexical and syntactic level of presupposition triggers used in English and Kurdish online political news texts. The writer found that all lexical and syntactic items are used in all the selected texts. However, the frequency of presupposition triggers occurrence in the English online political news texts is more than the Kurdish one. The most dominant type of presupposition triggers found in English texts, in the lexical level, is the restrictive expressions occurring 426 times and each items of comparison and contrast and temporal clauses occur 40 times regarding the syntactic level.

From the results, analysis and discussions, one can conclude that writers of the English online political news texts provide many additional information to the reader by using relative clause. And they are more able to attract the reader with the use of presupposition triggers this is to make them understand the political situations, actions and to build specific idea or opinion while reading the political news. They have more freedom of writing and

more courage to ask questions and seek the truth through their writings.

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Appendix

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