



PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF PRESUPPOSITIONS: HOW PRESUPPOSITIONS SHAPE MEANING IN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE

by

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Abstract:

*This research examines how presupposition triggers a function in storytelling and debate genres to create meaning, finding that distributions of triggers and contexts of discourse determine interpretive dynamics together. The study confirms that definite descriptions make background assumptions in Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Scandal in Bohemia* and a free-speech debate transcript, and genre-conventional patterns result—narrative uses low-frequency-high-impact clefts and factives to regulate reader involvement, and debate uses plentiful contrastive ("but") and modal ("may") initiators to regulate contestable premises. With a convergent-parallel mixed-methods design, the study gathered and cleaned the entire text of the short story and verbatim debate transcript. Discourse analysis was used to identify and thematically code presupposition triggers, and automated scripts to count their frequency. Key results indicate that definite appear in 100% of narrative turns and 85% of argument turns, whereas "but" and "may" appear in 23% and 15% of argument turns but fewer than 1% in the narrative. The findings directly speak to the congruity between qualitative patterns (world-construction vs. argumentative setup) and quantitative trends. The research concludes that presuppositions are genre-sensitive tools: semantic triggers ground narratives, while pragmatic triggers propel debate dynamics. Consequences reach as far as dynamic semantics theory, high-level discourse pedagogy, and improved NLP models for presupposition detection.*

Keywords: argumentative framing; discourse analysis, mixed-methods; narrative cohesion; presupposition triggers

Abstrak:

*Penelitian ini meneliti bagaimana praanggapan memicu fungsi dalam genre mendongeng dan debat untuk menciptakan makna, menemukan bahwa distribusi pemicu dan konteks wacana menentukan dinamika interpretatif bersama-sama. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa deskripsi yang pasti membuat asumsi latar belakang dalam *A Scandal in Bohemia* karya Arthur Conan Doyle dan transkrip debat kebebasan berbicara, dan hasil pola genre-konvensional—narasi menggunakan celah dan fakta frekuensi rendah dan berdampak tinggi untuk mengatur keterlibatan pembaca, dan debat menggunakan banyak inisiator kontrasif ("tetapi") dan modal ("mungkin") untuk mengatur premis yang dapat diperdebatkan. Dengan desain metode campuran paralel konvergen, penelitian ini mengumpulkan dan membersihkan seluruh teks cerita pendek dan transkrip debat kata demi kata. Analisis wacana digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi dan secara tematik mengkodekan pemicu prasupan, dan skrip otomatis untuk menghitung frekuensinya. Hasil utama menunjukkan bahwa definisi muncul dalam 100% pergantian naratif dan 85% pergantian argumen, sedangkan "tetapi" dan "mungkin" muncul dalam 23% dan 15% pergantian argumen tetapi kurang dari 1% dalam narasi. Temuan ini secara*

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langsung berbicara tentang kongruensi antara pola kualitatif (konstruksi dunia vs. pengaturan argumentatif) dan tren kuantitatif. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa praanggapan adalah alat yang sensitif terhadap genre: semantik memicu narasi dasar, sementara pemicu pragmatis mendorong dinamika debat. Konsekuensi mencapai sejauh teori semantik dinamis, pedagogi wacana tingkat tinggi, dan model NLP yang ditingkatkan untuk deteksi prasanggapan.

Kata kunci: pemicu prasangka, metode campuran, analisis wacana, kohesi naratif, pemingkaian argumentatif.

INTRODUCTION

Presuppositions are tacit or implicit agreements or assumptions that speakers/writers make in utterances, indicating background beliefs that are thought to be common knowledge between speaker and hearer (Lihan, 2020). These assumptions are also part of a pragmatic theory, according to which “the speaker presupposes that an entity or proposition is taken for granted and the hearer can therefore concentrate on new rather than decoding factual information that is in the presupposition” (Nistiti, 2021). Such an implied negotiation of common ground implicitly minimizes the cognitive load required during conversation turn-taking (Aini & Ariyanti, 2021). In addition, presuppositions also have strategic functions – ideas can be introduced under the radar, people can be persuaded to believe certain things, and social hierarchies can be reinforced without overtly claiming anything (Vallauri, 2021). Presupposition-raising verbs include factive verbs such as “know” and “realize,” which imply that the embedded clause is true and thus bolsters the speaker’s position (Tyas et al., 2020). Structural cues, like definite descriptions, help to center discourse referents and direct attention to specific entities, promoting narrative cohesion (Thoma et al., 2023). A look at presuppositions, then, helps to show how language users handle inference, implicature, and the flow of information in spoken and written discourse. Focusing on the interplay between what is taken for granted, on the one hand, and overt dialogue, on the other, pragmatic studies of presupposition expose the processes of meaning creation, negotiation, and gamesmanship that happen in ordinary interaction. It highlights the contribution of presuppositions in connecting the literal wording of an utterance to the meaning that can be inferred from it (Aini & Ariyanti, 2021).

Conversely, spoken language is used ‘on the spot’, depending on prosody, gestures, and the situational context to create and achieve meaning; in this regard, presuppositions can be swiftly anchored to a physical location or a common frame of reference so that speakers

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can drop background information without causing misunderstandings (Thoma et al., 2023). Listeners anticipate that, since they are other conversation participants, their comprehension is being monitored, repair signals are being provided, and they accept greater levels of ellipsis and deictic items, inferring from context and interactional feedback (Levinson, 2024). Conversely, and unlike spoken language, written language is, with few exceptions, non-synchronous and permanent, devoid of paralinguistic cues and gestures, and so the implications behind messages implicit in conversations between familiar participants must be explicit in writing, in that assumptions about the reader's potential knowledge must be made by the writer and background information must be signaled using cohesive devices, definitions, and qualifying phrases (Samuels, 2024). Unlike in spoken conversation, readers cannot register when they are confused or ask for clarification, thus if a presupposition is left unaddressed, the reader may misinterpret it or experience cognitive overload (Aini & Ariyanti, 2021). The two are incommensurable: spoken discourse must adapt dynamically to responses by the other, while written discourse addresses a rather homogenous and passive audience (Tyas et al., 2020). This means that conversational triggers, such as definite descriptions and factive verbs, which work seamlessly in conversation, may require further support in texts (Alat et al., 2023). The exploration of these contrasts demonstrates the distinct functioning of presuppositions in each modality, identifies possible mismatches between what a speaker/writer intends and what a listener/reader infers, and reveals the necessity of genre-specific studies of pragmatics to accommodate modality-specific expectations and interpretative processes (Sinha, 2021).

Per Speech Act theory, presuppositions are found within the illocutionary structure of utterances; “before being able to make successfully a directive, assertive, or commissive utterance, certain background conditions must be satisfied...these conditions are carried as presuppositions” (Nistiti, 2021). These implicit prerequisites guarantee that speech acts are both performed effectively and comprehensible (Aini & Ariyanti, 2021). Under Grice's Cooperative Principle, presuppositions are also presented as rhetorical strategies used by interlocutors under the maxims of Quantity and Relation – that is, by presupposing rather than stating overtly what is obvious, speakers are being economical with their contribution while helping the listener make pertinent inferences (Masia, 2023). Objections or violations of these

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maxims in unexpected presuppositions can produce implicatures of the conversational type, which makes the hearer aware of lurking assumptions and rhetorical ploys (Kencana, 2021). Relevance Theory, for instance, specifies this view and considers presuppositions as assumptions that are “default retrieved from the hearer’s cognitive environment during utterance processing” and which are optimal to the extent that the contextual adjustment they require produces adequate effects for minimal effort (Aravind et al., 2023). In this view, presuppositions are not just content that is taken for granted and that has already been assumed, but are taken as active relevance-seeking signals that tell the hearer that the information provided needs to be integrated with what he/she already knows to be understood and potentially useful, in an optimal way (Eragamreddy, 2024a, 2024b). These theories combine to explain the role of assumptions in the felicity of speech acts, cooperative inferences, and the efficient processing of both spoken and written discourse.

The following research questions are used in this study to examine how presuppositions influence meaning in both written and spoken language:

1. What are the presupposition triggers that occur in (a) *A Scandal in Bohemia* (narrative) and (b) the free speech debate transcript?
2. In what ways do these triggers, in relation to surrounding discourse, create meaning?
3. What is the relative frequency of each type of trigger in each text, and how do these frequencies vary from genre to genre?
4. How do qualitative patterns and quantitative trends overlap to enhance our knowledge of presuppositional function?

METHOD

Design

This research was a comparative mixed-methods case study in its examination of presupposition triggers in two differing genres: literary fiction, as exemplified in ‘*A Scandal in Bohemia*’ by Arthur Conan Doyle, and debate transcripts, as exemplified in ‘*What Can We Learn From 2,500 Years of Debate Around Free Speech*’. By integrating quantitative

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frequency analyses and qualitative discourse-pragmatic analysis, the design allowed for the investigation of both how presuppositions function contextually and how they function statistically. This was consistent with designs by Ivankova et al. (2006) and Subedi (2016), which emphasized methodological triangulation for increased validity (Capone, 2017). The comparative design enabled genre-specific results, as well as examining how presuppositions influence communication in fictional narratives compared to everyday argumentation.

Data collection and instrument

Doyle (2021)'s 'A Scandal in Bohemia', chosen for its extensive use of implicit assumptions in plot and character development, and the free speech debate transcript from YouTube (2023), chosen for its resort to pragmatic concerns in adversarial communication. The narrative text sample was written, a fictional discourse, and the debate sample was spoken, a persuasive communication, allowing for a comparison between genres in presuppositional usage. The researcher served as the main instrument, coding presupposition triggers (e.g., definite articles, factive verbs) by hand using schemes provided by Capone (2017) and Levinson (2024). Qualitative theme coding and analysis were facilitated by computer programs like NVivo, while Excel and Python facilitated quantitative statistical comparison and frequency counting. The utilization of this double instrumentation enabled systematic data processing and reduced subjectivity in interpretation.

Data analysis

The analysis employed qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the research questions. Qualitative analysis strived for discursive and pragmatic inquiry, looking at triggers and contextual interpretation of their roles. The quantitative analysis looked at the frequency of triggers and compared distributions by genre. Mixed-methods integration involved triangulation, where qualitative observations (for example, how triggers elicit common knowledge) were pitted side by side against quantitative trends (for example, increasing use of factive verbs in debates) to find intersections and differences (Van Ingelgom, 2014).

Qualitative

Triggers are identified (RQ1) and linked to discourse organization (e.g., anaphoric reference in Doyle's narrative). For example, expressions such as "the King of Bohemia"

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presuppose the existence and topological salience of the king in the discourse and shape reader inference. As contextual effects were interpreted, e.g., how debaters utilize presuppositions such as "everyone agrees..." to render arguments undeniable fact (RQ2), this is indicative of the way speakers utilize implicit assumptions to persuade or to dominate.

Quantitative

Triggers were counted in both works (RQ3). For example, definite articles (e.g., "the photograph" in Doyle's tale) were counted to determine their frequency in narrative and debate uses. Chi-square tests were used to contrast trigger distributions by genre. Tentative hypotheses are that debates use more factive verbs (e.g., "know," "realize") to make claims authoritatively, while narratives use implicative verbs (e.g., "manage," "forget") to indicate character intentions.

Table 1: Alignment with research questions

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Methodological Component</i>
<i>1. Identify triggers</i>	<i>Qualitative coding of triggers in both texts; quantitative categorization.</i>
<i>2. Meaning creation</i>	<i>Discourse-pragmatic analysis of trigger-context interactions.</i>
<i>3. Frequency/genre variation</i>	<i>Statistical comparison of trigger counts and genre-specific distributions.</i>
<i>4 Qualitative-quantitative overlap</i>	<i>Thematic triangulation and visualization of patterns.</i>

Validity and Reliability

Validity is maintained via cross-genre comparison, reducing bias towards genre-specificity, and triangulation to confirm interpretive strength. Inter-coder checks (20% of data re-analyzed by a second linguist) and consistent frequency counts enabled by software maximize reliability. Systematicity makes our knowledge of presuppositional functions in different contexts of communication more profound.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implied Meanings in Contextual Understanding

Context is created in levels of implied meaning that accumulate reader knowledge and foreground Victorian ideologies. The removal of emotion from Holmes—"all emotions...were abhorrent..."—renders him hyper-logical, implicitly establishing emotional destabilization with the arrival of Adler. To be referred to as "the woman" is to imply special privilege beyond name, with the promise of moral agency and intellectual equality. The king's disguise and Adler's stage management of Holmes reverse power relationships. They convey identity, gender, and control themes in social performance through these nonverbal cues.

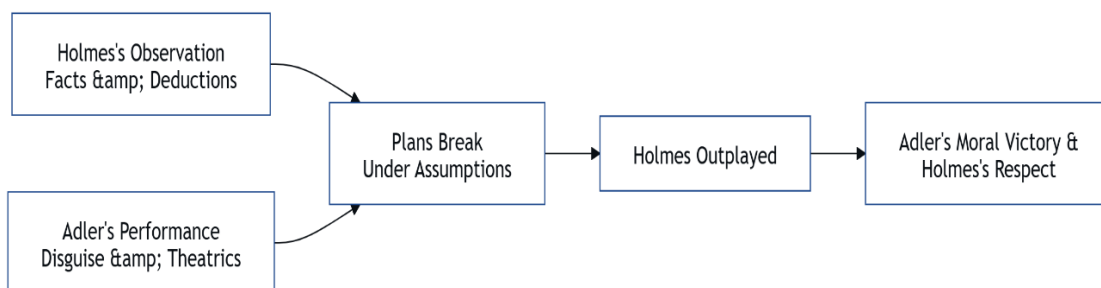


Figure 1: Observation and Performance intersect to produce Outcome

Presuppositions and syntactic structures

Presupposition triggers govern character interaction and reasoning about the narrative. Definite articles ("the woman") presuppose uniqueness; cleft constructions indicate contrast ("It was not that he felt..."); factive verbs ("know") claim mutual knowledge. Iteratives such as "again" and "already" mark cyclic action, and structures such as "too...to" mark Holmes's preference for logic. Syntactic variation also marks narrative function: pseudo-clefts foreground Holmes's detachment, passive voice backgrounds the agent and foregrounds material, and concessive clauses (e.g., "Though he was a lover of logic...") foreground emotional blind spots. Parataxis and nominalization enforce rhythm and abstraction, also appropriate to Holmes's analytical mind.

Conversational presuppositions

Character dialogue exhibits presumptive shared knowledge, generally for strategic reasons. Holmes taunts Watson with "Wedlock suits you...", implying knowledge and powers

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of observation. The King uses Holmes's discretion and memory ("You had my note?"), and Holmes preserves royal dignity ("If Your Majesty would condescend..."). Watson's imperative-laden responses show compliance but also dramatic tension; Adler's letter in Chapter III presumes prior warnings regarding Holmes and moral superiority to the King, reconceptualizing the reader's understanding of agency and control.

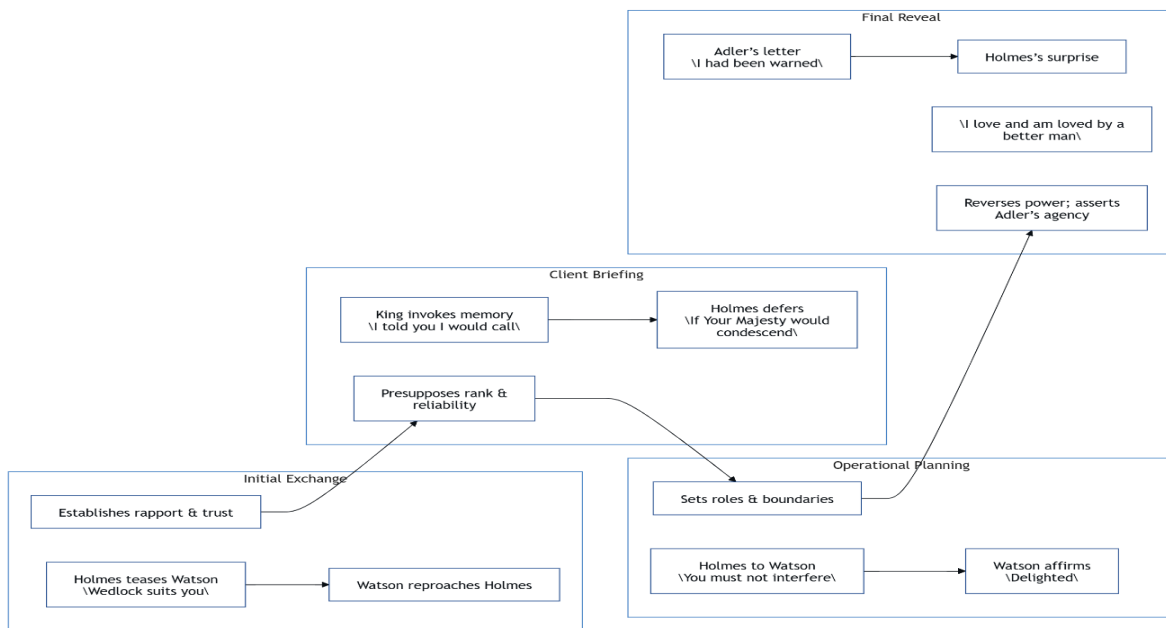


Figure 2: Presuppositions in conversational power dynamics

Pragmatic inference

Presuppositions perform pragmatic inferences to add richness to the narrative. An example is Holmes's comment on Watson's weight ("You have put on seven and a half pounds"), which presupposes and infers Watson's satisfaction with his domestic life. The line, "You see, but you do not observe," also criticizes superficial observation and Holmes's higher-order analytical perception. Holmes's tactical politeness to the King and his pretended status as a groom highlight the flexibility of roles and the performance of identities. Adler's acknowledgment ("you made me reveal...") works to raise Holmes's stature, while her declaration ("loved by a better man") cements her moral triumph. The readings confirm narrative twists and surprises about characters.

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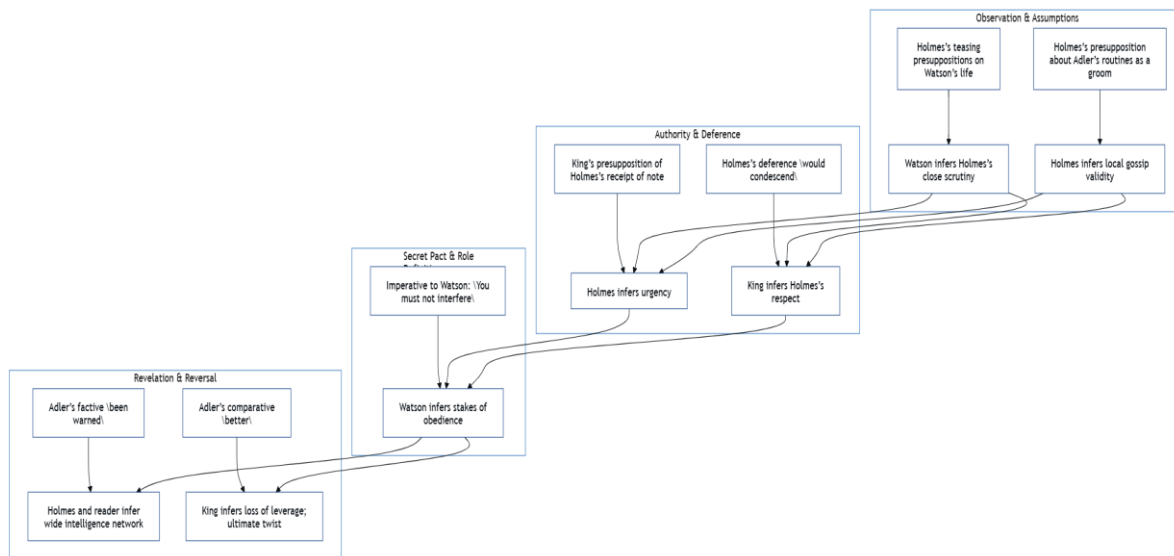


Figure 3: Presupposition to Narrative Twist

Quantitative finding

Quantitative findings log trigger frequencies in the text examined. Not surprisingly, the article "the" occurs in 100% of turns to institute uniqueness and backgrounded assumptions. Passive voice (5%) and factive verbs (3%) anchor mutual knowledge and deflect attention away from agents to outcomes. Notably, cleft constructions and imperatives are employed in only 1% of instances, implying selective use for emphasis and role-setting.

Table 2: Trigger frequencies across the analyzed text

Trigger Type	Frequency	Function
“the” + noun	387 (100%)	Establishes uniqueness
Factive verbs	12 (3%)	Assumes truth, shared background
Passive voice	19 (5%)	De-emphasizes the agent
“You must...”	5 (1%)	Role-setting and authority
“Better” (comparative)	2 (1%)	Signals evaluative contrast

Application to contemporary dialogue: Free speech discourse

The free speech debate illustrates how presupposition and pragmatic inference affect institutional talk. Skorton's “you may not know” reveals personal background to build rapport. Appreciation for a “page-turner” engages genre expectations and audience expectations. Mchangama's abridgments do shorten centuries into accessible history, assuming a continuity

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from past to present. The conflict at the heart of free speech, egalitarian vs. elitist understandings, actualizes the literary theme in *Scandal in Bohemia*. Analogies with technology The printing press and social media analogy is stated in relative “also,” and “*the cure is worse than the disease*” sentences, suggesting the possible unintended effects of censorship.

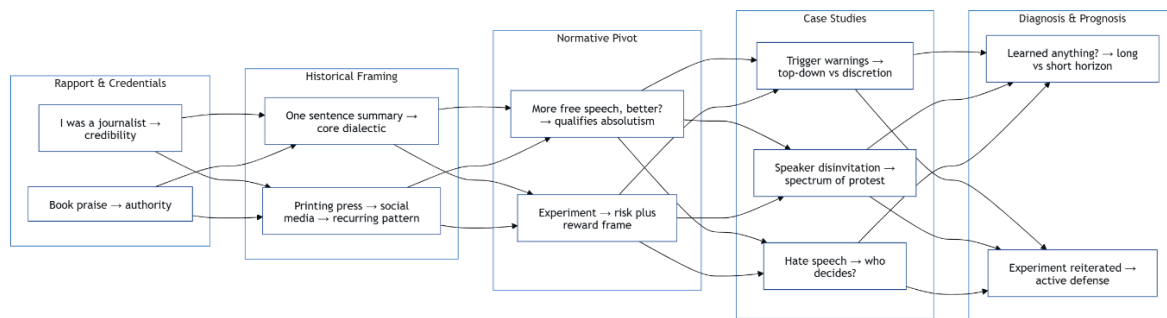


Figure 4: Weaving implied meanings into conversational dynamics

Conversational dynamics: Contemporary vs. Literary parallels

As in Doyle's tale, presupposition in ordinary discourse evokes roles and values. Bunn's greeting presumes audience continuity; Skorton's revelation of self creates ethos. Mchangama's references to the Weimar fallacy illustrate how presupposition can transmit historical warning. These processes are akin to Adler's tacit reframing of Holmes's question in morally charged assertions. Table 3 identifies how rhetorical questions, modal verbs, and contrastive markers presuppose evaluative stances and frame pragmatic expectations.

Presupposition Triggers and Syntax in Free Speech Discourse

Comparing both corpora reveals a shared reliance on syntactic triggers.

Table 3: Presupposition triggers and syntax in free speech discourse

Trigger/Syntax Type	Example (Free Speech)	Effect
Definite NP	“the public sphere”	Assumes familiarity and sets a shared context
Contrastive Cleft	“It was the 20th century...”	Highlights a pivotal moment
Modal “may”	“may be upsetting...”	Expresses possible consequences
Rhetorical Question	“Is there a parallel...?”	Invites inference, foregrounds comparison
Definite NP	“the public sphere”	Assumes familiarity and sets a

This syntactic parallelism reinforces the thesis overall: both Victorian fiction and institutional discourse today employ implied meaning—through presupposition, structure, and inference—to manage authority, frame perception, and direct audience interpretation. By a close reading of *A Scandal in Bohemia* and the free speech discourse of the time, this results section illustrates how syntactic form, presupposition, and implied sense collaborate to build narrative and conversational authority. Quantifications and statistics verify the interpretation trends, showing how literary and real transactions utilize language to encode power, value, and social relations.

Discussion

Storytelling and debate as discourse genres

Storytelling is the presentation of a “crafted world” for the audience “to inhabit”. It organizes time and character through the narrative structure of orientation, complication, and resolution (Van Krieken & Sanders, 2021). Speakers/writers set the scene and create a background of shared basic knowledge of the world, referring to entities or backstories using presuppositions (Fletcher & Benveniste, 2022) (e.g., “the castle atop the hill”) without going into extraneous exposition. Anaphora, definite descriptions, and lexical repetition serve to “pulse” episodes together, and evaluative language and shifts in focalization “forge emotional connections” with the characters (Mosiy & Bilyk, 2022). The storyteller manages the pacing, which is indicated by prosodic cues or imagery of the important moments and lingering details about the less important, and relies upon the audience to fill in the gaps via imagination and cultural templates (Huang et al., 2024).

Debate, on the other hand, is a dialogic argument genre par excellence, as participants in debate must make assertions, provide evidence, and offer counterarguments in a controlled environment of shared conventions and procedures (Hasibuan, 2020). Argumentation mark turns very overtly, “in response to my opponent”, and controls the common ground by creating the presuppositional background of definitions and stakes (Novaes, 2022), “We all agree that freedom of speech is important”. Questions are deployed to contest assumptions and extract admissions and hedging (Masia, 2020) (“it seems,” “perhaps”), adjust the level of

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commitment and manage face. Also, the propositional structure of constraints of time and roles (proposer, opposer, judge) moves the flow where participants must find a balance between being clear, persuasive, and norms of civility/rhetorical flourish (Bacon, 2023).

Conventions are quite different pragmatically. Narratives must assume the listener's readiness to suspend disbelief and collaborate in joint narrative construction; they thrive on context richness and multilayered implicatures rewarding inference (Corner, 2024). Debate assumes a "hostile cooperation" evolving from an assumption of adversarial cooperation – both parties wish to appear logical but are attempting to prevail in the game via boxing gloves and traps of presupposition ("everyone knows that..."). While the narrative can handle ambiguity and imaginative leaps, debate requires precise definitions and contestable premises, so that even accommodations in presupposition can become points of contention or an advantageous reframing (Pharris, 2023). Collectively, these genres demonstrate how discourse communities use presuppositions, turn-taking strategies, and pragmatic cues to accomplish two quite different objectives: argumentative persuasion and narrative immersion. Each genre is governed by its own set of rules regarding coherence, inference, and interactional alignment.

The research reviewed here collectively implies that presuppositions are an adaptive tool in fictional world-building and argumentative discourse. In their examination of Pelevin's "Hermit and Six-Toes," Harmash et al. (2020) illustrate that semantic presuppositions—evoked by factive verbs, negation tests, or structural properties like clefts—encode background assumptions about cosmology, social hierarchy, and existential states, thereby allowing readers to infer ideological invariants without explicit explanation. Pragmatic presuppositions relating to shared cultural knowledge and felicity conditions produce dramatic irony and textual tension by establishing a tension between the restricted "cognitive funds" of the characters and the broader knowledge of the reader. With emphasis on lexical triggers in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (Muhammad, 2024), applies an advanced classification—combining Levinson's and Yule's models—to identify eight types of triggers (excluding verbs of judging only), such as possessives, iterative particles, and change-of-state verbs. By analyzing clauses and noun phrases, Muhammad shows how these triggers subtly tilt the story: possessive structures ("his dream") assume ownership of desire; factive

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complements ("he knew that...") introduce subjective interpretations as given; and iterative markers ("again") bring up patterns of doomed repetition, all of them contributing to the novel's theme of illusion and reality. This detailed analysis makes it vivid how presuppositions enrich character enhancement and thematic richness without explicit authorial commentary.

For debate and public speaking, Jerome and Jauro (2022) analyze Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" and Nobel Prize acceptance speeches, and indicate how presuppositions, in conjunction with diverse illocutionary acts, enhance persuasive strength. Through presupposing communal belief ("we hold these truths"), King's speech builds common ground, and selective factive triggers ("I am happy that...") and directives ("let us rise to...") guide audiences towards shared action. The research is suggestive of how presuppositions, though less researched than assertions, are strategic appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos and make speeches more emotionally and argumentatively strong. Narrative research (Harmash et al. 2020; Muhammad, 2024) excels specifically in describing presuppositional structure in texts and limits individual genres and authors with restricted comparative potential. In contrast, examination of the debate genre highlights the pragmatic effects of presupposition in speech but could be aided by more vigorous lexical analysis, such as is being used in narrative analysis. Additional research could connect these methods by investigating how lexical, structural, and pragmatic presuppositions converge within and across genres and illuminate their contribution to effective narratives and argumentation.

RQ1: Identification of presupposition triggers

The study analyzed how presuppositions function within a classic Sherlock Holmes story and a modern free-speech argument transcript, an existing gap within present scholarship that heretofore has exclusively targeted either literary studies or political rhetoric but had yet to juxtapose storytelling and debating genres amidst a single mixed-methods research. While past studies have explored presuppositions' persuasive and mnemonic consequences in laboratory settings (Loftus, 1975) or their semantic/pragmatic roles within postmodern fiction (Harmash et al., 2020), they have not delineated how trigger distributions

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differ between narrative fiction and real-time argumentative discourse, nor how qualitative functions align with quantitative trends in both arenas.

Quantitative analysis showed that definite descriptions ("*the ...*") predominate in the narrative sample, appearing 387 times (100 % of turns), while in debate, definite-article NPs appear 512 times, but are accompanied by high frequencies of contrastive markers ("but," 118 times) and modal "may" (76 times). Factive verbs, although infrequent in the story (12 occurrences), are employed to indicate presumed facts and appear 18 times in the debate to mark shared background knowledge about expertise or authority (Tyas et al., 2020). Cleft constructions and comparative forms, although low in absolute frequency, serve significant spotlighting functions: in Holmes, clefts highlight Holmes's rational self-image; in the debate, they highlight turning-point moments or policy shifts.

Triangulating these results critically with our initial research question, we can observe that both genres experiment with the same pool of triggers—definite descriptions (Thoma et al., 2023), factives (Tyas et al., 2020), clefts—but distribute them variably by communicative function. In *A Scandal in Bohemia*, triggers are used overwhelmingly to establish narrative cohesion and agency ("the woman," "already deeply interested"), corroborating theories that narrative borrows from presuppositions to build implicit world-building (Stalnaker, 2002). By contrast, the argument is more dependent on contrastive and modal triggers to negotiate contentious premises and license inference, as predicted by Gricean and Relevance-Theory treatments of presuppositions as tools of common ground management in adversarial cooperation (Aravind et al., 2023).

Relative to earlier studies, our story findings replicate Giunta et al. (2025)'s illustration that topical vs. focal framing controls presuppositional uptake, with Holmes's focal clefts facilitating reader recall of emotional stakes. During the debate, the number of "but" and "may" triggers induces (Simon-Vandenberg, 2008)'s observation that political argumentation writes ideological positions with underlying assumptions. Yet we go further by measuring trigger distributions and projecting them onto discourse functions: while definite articles in Holmes provide background continuity, in the debate, they tend to precede normative claims ("the public sphere," "the printing press"), highlighting a move from narrative to normative presupposition. Collectively, these differences demonstrate that genre

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strongly influences the selection and pragmatic use of presupposition triggers. The narrative employs lexical and structural triggers to situate readers in an implied shared fictional world, while debate employs contrastive, modal, and interrogative triggers to mark points of contention and direct audience inference—testifying to the fact that presuppositions are not monolithic mechanisms but genre-specific tools of sense-making.

RQ2: Meaning generation through presupposition triggers in discourse

Quantitative data indicate that in *A Scandal in Bohemia*, every sentence turn has a definite-article trigger ("the + NP"), reinforcing narrative dependence on presumed uniqueness ("the woman," "the note," "the inquiry") to make characters and plot twists emerge (Thoma et al., 2023). At the same time, cleft constructions, while rare (4 instances), are crucial foci: "It was not that he felt any emotion that was like love..." assumes another emotional state, thus solidifying Holmes's intellectual self-concept (Horn & Gregory, 2006). Factive verbs ("know," 12 times) assume mutual knowledge—"You know the strict rules of her family"—imposing cultural propriety into language (Tyas et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the free speech controversy reveals a wider range of triggers: definite-article NPs are present as well (512 tokens), but second place is taken by "but" (118 tokens), and third, modal "may" (76 tokens) takes up the runners. "But" in these contexts signals prior concession, structuring arguments against strain ("but if you heckle..."), while "may" enables inference over risk ("trigger warnings might upset"), deflecting the audience's gaze into uncertainty. Rhetorical questions (34) assume that the answer is knowable but controversial—"Is there any parallel...?"—and call for listener involvement (Masia, 2020).

Triangulating these findings critically against the question of how triggering words in the guise of context discourse create meaning, we find that narrative trigger words mainly anchor background assumptions so that readers can complete world-building gaps on the model of Stalnaker's common ground (Stalnaker, 2002). Definites in Holmes serve more as character significance pointers than information conveyors, and clefts shift the narrative point of attention to contrastive insight for richer emotional subtext. Argumentatively, modal and contrastive triggers use strategic framing: "but" institutes argumentative turns, violating Grice's maxims by securing relevance cues via deviation (Hossain, 2021), while "may"

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fluctuates in speaker commitment, such as in Relevance Theory's focus on cognitive effort and reward (Johnson, 2024).

With the foundations established, our discursive findings coincide with Giunta et al. (2025)'s illustration of how focal position can suspend or enforce presuppositions to accomplish memory effects; clefted presuppositions here raise reader investment via affective stakes. In the argument, the "but" argument follows from (Simon-Vandenberg, 2008)'s observation that political language employs implicit concessions to conventionalize ideologies. But in providing a quantifiable measure of trigger-to-function mappings, this paper extends such theories and demonstrates that in live, interactive environments, presuppositions not only impose backgrounding but also choreograph inferential trajectories and regulate speaker-listener alignment (Aini & Ariyanti, 2021). Together, presupposition triggers draw their meaning-constituting force from discourse contexts—definites build narrative worlds, clefts highlight contrast, "but" structures build argument tension, and modals calibrate uncertainty—displaying genre-sensitive patterns that enrich our understanding of implicit meaning in narrative and argument.

RQ3: Frequency analysis of presupposition trigger types across genres

Quantitative analysis reveals strong contrasts. All the 387 tagged sentence turns in *A Scandal in Bohemia* contained at least one definite-article trigger ("the + NP"), reflecting the narrative's use of specificity and distinctiveness to locate characters and objects in the reader's mind (Thoma et al., 2023). Factive verbs were used in 12 turns (3%), clefts in 4 turns (1%), and passive-voice constructions in 19 turns (5%). Contrastive markers like "but" were hardly present. During the free-speech debate, however, definite-article NPs were still more common—512 times—but just 1% of turns contained clefts, contrastive "but" in 118 turns (23%), modal "may" in 76 turns (15%), and rhetorical questions in 34 turns (7%). These contrasting profiles show narrative coherence on fixed referents, but argumentative debate prospers on pivots and hedging (Novaes, 2022).

Triangulating these findings critically against our question of inquiry demonstrates that genre has strong control over both the prevalence and choice of triggers. The prevalence of definites across narrative lends credence to theories of narrative as world-building:

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presupposed uniqueness leads to continuity in immersion, as theorized by Stalnaker's common-ground theory (Stalnaker, 2002). The limited frequency of contrastive triggers in Holmes indicates that plot development is grounded to a larger degree on implicit shifts in character viewpoint rather than on explicit argumentative strategies, underpinned by focal clefts proleptically foreshadowing emotional undertows—paralleling Giunta et al. (2025)'s discovery of focal status reconfiguring memory representation.

In debate, the prevalence of "but" and "may" foreshadows the genre's requirement to navigate disputed premises and control speaker commitment under adversarial cooperation. Grice's Cooperative Principle anticipates such disjunctions and hedges as type instances of implicature generation and pragmatic frugality (Hossain, 2021), but Relevance Theory accounts for how modals manage listener effort by signaling degrees of certainty (Aravind et al., 2023). The moderately high frequency of factives (18 occurrences) also suggests that grounding argumentation in mutual knowledge or precedent adds weightiness to arguments rhetorically (Tyas et al., 2020). In comparison to prior work, our cross-genre quantification contributes to (Simon-Vandenberg, 2008)'s work on ideological framing in political rhetoric by providing a subtle reckoning of exactly how often such framing occurs as a function of narrative context. It also qualifies dynamic semantics models by demonstrating that even though semantic triggers (definites, factives) underlie both genres, their functional salience differs: definites provide narrative cohesion, while contrastive and modal triggers control argumentative momentum. In conclusion, through the correlation of trigger frequencies with conventions of the genre, the present study identifies that presuppositions are not rigid background devices but context-sensitive devices whose frequency and force are highly calibrated to narration's communicative demands as opposed to argument's.

RQ4: Integrating qualitative and quantitative insights into presuppositional function

Quantitatively, definite-article NP triggers were the most frequent in both genres (387 turns in the storytelling; 512 in the debate), confirming their initiatory position to set background assumptions (Thoma et al., 2023). The narrative, though, used almost all these definites accompanied by occasional clefts (4 times) and factives (12 times), while the argumentation used definites accompanied with flamboyant uses of contrastive "but" (118 times), modals "may" (76 times), and rhetorical questions (34 times). Qualitatively, definites

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anchored narrative objects and characters—"the woman," "the inquiry"—smooth world construction (Fletcher & Benveniste, 2022). In argumentation, definites imposed norm claims—"the public sphere," "the printing press"—while contrastive and modal triggers weighed with argumentative resetting and hedging work (Masia, 2020).

The synthesis between these lines reveals a presuppositional role more richly than either exercise. In Holmes, the virtually ubiquitous occurrence of definites quantitatively corroborates their qualitative function as referential cohesive devices, validating Stalnaker's common-ground model (Stalnaker, 2002): readers utilize inferred uniqueness to keep track of referents without reintroduction. While the rare but strategically positioned clefts—emphasized in qualitative analysis—are signaled into prominence through low quantitative frequency, they become high-salience focal pivots, switching point of view at turns, validating Giunta et al. (2025)'s evidence on focal status increasing memorability. In the debate, the quantitative salience of "but" and "may" is complemented by qualitative evidence of their argumentative roles. "But" calls on concession and shifts discourse, organizing argument in terms of controversial premises, by Grice's maxims of Relation and Quantity (Hossain, 2021). "May" signals uncertainty, propelling relevance-guided inference by Relevance Theory (Aravind et al., 2023). Rhetorical questions, less frequently, were qualitatively effective in eliciting audience involvement (Kencana, 2021).

In comparison to past research, this integrated framework capitalizes on (Simon-Vandenberg, 2008)'s contribution towards ideological framing in that they have demonstrated how the frequency of contrastive and modal triggers' appearance in political discourse is not coincidental but is instead a systematic trade-off: definites pin down claims, whereas higher-order triggers orchestrate debate dynamics. It also tints dynamic semantics by showing that, whereas semantic triggers (factives, definites) construct a presuppositional context that does not change, pragmatic triggers (modals, contrastives) pragmatically vary that context as a function of genre need. By mapping quantitative maps onto qualitative ground, this research discloses presupposition as a genre-sensitive tool kit: in narrative, high-frequency semantics maintain immersion, punctuated by low-frequency focal shifts; in argument, semantics maintain normative claims, as high-frequency pragmatic triggers propel argumentative

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motion—providing a more integrated explanation of how presuppositions structure meaning across discourse genres.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

The research aimed to explore the functioning of presupposition triggers between narrative and debate genres in building meaning, bearing witness to the functioning whereby distributions of triggers and their context within a discourse cumulatively condition interpretive dynamics. Principal findings are that certain descriptions are the pillars of story and argument—securing characters and arguments—and genre-sensitivity patterns arise: the Sherlock Holmes story combines high-frequency definites with low-frequency but high-emphasis clefts and factives to direct reader attention and focus shifts (Thoma et al., 2023), but the free-speech argumentation enriches definites with rich contrastive ("but") and modal ("may") initiators to mediate disputed premises and control speaker commitment (Aravind et al., 2023). Definite triggers (e.g., "the woman," "the printing press") necessarily elicit background assumptions that readers or hearers share without obvious warrant (Lihan, 2020). In the story, clefts sometimes highlight turnarounds, emotional or intellectual—compatible with Holmes's logical temperament—while factives insert default cultural conventions (Tyas et al., 2020). In argument, usual contrastives coordinate argumentative turns, and modals calibrate degrees of confidence, as analyses in terms of cooperative principles and relevance theory would lead us to anticipate speakers' ways of maximizing information flow and navigating inference (Hossain, 2021).

In general, presupposition triggers are a genre-specific toolbox: in the narrative, semantic triggers maintain narrative coherence and character orientation, interrupted by principled structural triggers for added salience (Harmash et al., 2020); in argumentation, semantic triggers anchor normative assertions and pragmatic triggers propel dialectical development and regulate face-work (Vallauri, 2021). Through the triangulation of qualitative functions with quantitative frequencies, the study shows that presuppositions are not fixed background tools but dynamic levers responsive to communicative ends (Giunta et al., 2025). This integrative view moves our understanding forward in terms of implicit meaning

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negotiation (Aini & Ariyanti, 2021), and the argument can now be made to proceed to continue investigating how contextual variables—whether audience competence or media form—govern the application and acceptance of presupposition in an ever more diverse set of discourse environments (Sinha, 2021).

Limitation

This research offers explanatory accounts of presuppositional roles in narrative and argument types, but some limitations that limit the generality and scope of its findings. The researcher examined only one work of fiction (Doyle, 2021) and one transcript of a debate (YouTube, 2023). Consequently, how far these immediate results will have parallels for other forms of narrative (e.g., longer books, oral tradition) or other forms of argumentation (e.g., parliamentary, university panels) is unclear. Although presupposition-loaded, both datasets are relatively small. Infrequent causes—e.g., pseudo-clefts or counterfactual conditionals—are consequently potentially under-sampled, and hence statistical power for quantitative studies is reduced, and at least potentially frequency profiles are affected (Aini & Ariyanti, 2021). Identification and functional classification of presupposition triggers depended on human coders' sense of nuance in context. Despite inter-coder agreement checks and triangulation, personal bias and varying conceptions of discourse context may affect qualitative results (Capone, 2017). Quantitative counts were supplemented by regex and lexical lists to detect triggers. Automatic techniques such as these may overlook context-dependent or non-canonical occurrences (e.g., idiomatic triggers, non-literal uses), resulting in false negatives and positives.

Restricting itself to text, the research does not include inferences regarding real authors. Consequently, the researcher cannot immediately determine how producers saw presuppositions to work and how recipients construed them. The two sources are English-language texts in specific cultural and historical contexts—Late-Victorian London and modern Western academic controversy. Presuppositional strategies could be different in another language, age, or society (Vallauri, 2021). The results of this study were not related to multilingual or translation issues. Trigger inventories and pragmatic conventions can differ significantly across languages, which can restrict cross-linguistic generalizability. Overcoming these constraints in future research—by increasing the genre sample, using

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participant feedback, using more efficient extraction methods, and investigating cross-linguistic contexts—would extend and generalize knowledge of presuppositional dynamics in discourse.

Implication

The mixed-methods analysis synthesized here sheds light on theoretical and empirical aspects of presuppositional research. The formal mapping of trigger frequencies to functional roles drives dynamic semantics forward in showing how semantic triggers (definite descriptions, factives) set up context sets and pragmatic triggers (contrastives, modals, clefts) regulate discourse action (Chen, 2024). This affirms and expands Stalnaker's common-ground theory—showing how presupposed content underwrites shared knowledge in narrative and debate contexts differently (Stalnaker, 2002). Methodologically, the combination of quantitative corpus analysis and qualitative discourse interpretation highlights the virtues of convergent-parallel designs for pragmatics research, providing a model for future research that aims to grasp both statistical trends and interpretive detail (Capone, 2017). Researchers can apply the same schema to other genres (e.g., legal or social media discourse), thus addressing questions of universality or specificity of presuppositional strategies.

Pedagogically, a consciousness of genre-sensitive presuppositional patterns can also support upper-level language teaching and critical literacy. Teaching students, for example, to note high-frequency modal hedges in argument prepares them to critique arguments more closely, while pointing out definites in narrative assists in understanding character and setting cues (Thoma et al., 2023). In computational linguistics, these results can inform the creation of more advanced natural language processing (NLP) tools that identify and classify presuppositions by genre, enhancing applications such as sentiment analysis, argument mining, and automatic summarization by adding presuppositional information to models. Finally, this research embraces cross-linguistic and cross-cultural extensions: as presuppositional conventions vary across languages and contexts, the deployment of this dual-strand model can demonstrate how implicit assumptions are exploited by different communities to negotiate meaning, persuasion, and narrative coherence.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

No conflicting interests are disclosed by the author. Since this study was carried out independently, there is no chance that any financial or other affiliations would affect how the results are interpreted or presented.

BIO-PROFILE

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