

## **A Semantic Analysis of Sentences, Utterances, and Presuppositions in the Short Story "Rules of the Game" by Amy Tan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aimed to examine how sentences, utterances, and presuppositions interact in Amy Tan's short story "Rules of the Game." This paper analyzed twenty of data to uncover patterns in structure and meaning. Each data point was categorized by sentence types such as simple sentence, compound sentence, or complex sentence, utterance function such as declarative, interrogative, or imperative, and presupposition category such as existential, structural, or lexical. The results showed that compound and complex sentences added depth to the narrative, utterances revealed interpersonal dynamics, and presuppositions uncovered shared cultural expectations. These findings highlighted how linguistic forms shape deeper meanings, offering new insight into themes of identity, tradition, and generational conflict.*

**Keywords:** semantics, utterance, sentence, presupposition.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language served not only as a tool for communication but also as a reflection of cultural values, identity, and relationships. Literary texts, especially narratives, offered a rich ground for analyzing how meaning was constructed and conveyed through linguistic structures. Amy Tan's short story *Rules of the Game* illustrated such dynamics by portraying the interplay between family, culture, and personal growth through language.

Previous studies on semantic analysis in literature focused on isolated features such as utterances or presuppositions, but few explored the integration of all three components: sentence structures, utterances, and presuppositions. Chandra and Damanhuri (2016) examined presupposition in *Fifty Shades of Grey* and emphasized how implicit meaning shaped character relationships. Suhartono (2020) analyzed utterances through pragma syntactic functions, underlining how imperative and declarative forms conveyed power and politeness. Meanwhile, Aziz et al. (2023) and Burhanuddin et al. (2018) investigated sentence structures and how they supported textual coherence.

This study aimed to fill the gap by comprehensively analyzing twenty data from *Rules of the Game* based on three linguistic elements: sentence types such as simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences. The next one is utterance types such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative. The last one is presupposition type such as existential, lexical, and structural. The study examined how these linguistic forms conveyed deeper themes including generational conflict, identity, and cultural values.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

### Approach

This research used a qualitative descriptive approach, which aimed to describe linguistic forms and meanings as they appeared naturally in literary texts. The qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to interpret how language conveyed cultural values, interpersonal dynamics, and thematic messages. Descriptive analysis was applied to reveal how specific sentence structures, utterances, and presuppositions contributed to the meaning-making process in the short story. The study did not involve numerical data but emphasized language function, context, and interpretation.

### data collection

The data were collected using purposive sampling, meaning the researcher intentionally selected sentences and utterances that were rich in semantic and pragmatic value. The source of data was Amy Tan's short story *Rules of the Game*. The researcher read the entire text carefully and then highlighted expressions that reflected sentence structures such as simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences. Utterance types such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Presuppositions such as lexical, existential, and structural. Only twenty data points that best represented these categories were chosen for in-depth analysis.

### Type Of Data

The data in this study were linguistic units taken from the short story. Each datum appeared in the form of a complete sentence, a spoken utterance, or an expression containing presupposition. These data were divided into three main types:

- Sentence data, which refers to the grammatical construction used to present ideas.
- Utterance data, which showed how speakers used language to perform actions or express intentions.
- Presupposition data, which included assumed or implied meanings embedded in the expressions.

This categorization allowed the researcher to analyze form and function across multiple linguistic levels.

### Instrument

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher, as this study required careful interpretation and subjective linguistic judgment. The researcher used several supporting tools, such as:

- A data classification sheet to identify each datum's linguistic category.
- Theoretical references from linguistic journals to guide analysis.
- A note-taking system to track narrative context and meaning.

No statistical instruments were used, as the study focused on in-depth textual and contextual examination of meaning.

### Data Interpretation

The data were interpreted using semantic and pragmatic frameworks. For sentence structure analysis, the researcher referred to Aziz et al. (2023) and Jackson (1982, as cited in Burhanuddin et al., 2018). Utterance types were interpreted following Suhartono (2020), who categorized utterances into declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Presupposition analysis used classifications from Yule (1998, as cited in Suhartono, 2020), and was supported by Adisutrisno (2008) and Yanti (2010), as cited in Chandra and Damanhuri (2016). Each datum was interpreted in its narrative context, considering how the structure revealed implicit meaning or supported character interaction, identity, and cultural values.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed twenty data points from Amy Tan's short story *Rules of the Game* to uncover how sentence structure, utterance type, and presupposition functioned semantically and pragmatically. Each datum was classified based on its linguistic form and interpreted in light of relevant theories. The results revealed consistent patterns in how Amy Tan used language to reflect personal growth, cultural expectations, and interpersonal dynamics.

### Sentences Structures And Narrative Function

The analysis identified that sentence structures played a key role in shaping the narrative. Among the data, simple, compound, and complex sentences were all used purposefully. Simple sentences, such as “We lived in San Francisco’s Chinatown” and “Vincent got the chess set,” conveyed clear, factual information and served to build narrative exposition. These structures consisted of a single independent clause, as defined by Aziz et al. (2023), and supported by Jackson (1982, as cited in Burhanuddin et al., 2018), who noted their role in clarity and progression.

In contrast, complex sentences appeared where more detail and contextual layering were necessary. Sentences like “I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength” embedded adverbial clauses to provide background and emotional nuance. According to Burhanuddin et al. (2018), the presence of dependent clauses enhances narrative depth by expressing time, reason, or consequence. Relative clauses, such as “My mother named me after the street that we lived on,” added specificity and personal history to the sentence.

Compound sentences, while less frequent, were used to indicate accumulation or consequence. The sentence “I lost many games and many Life Savers” combined two ideas using coordination to emphasize the cost of learning. Aziz et al. (2023) stated that compound sentences typically join independent clauses to show logical connection, which was evident in this example.

### Utterances Functions And Cultural Dynamics

Utterances in the story reflected social relationships, emotional states, and power dynamics, particularly between child and parent figures. Three major types of utterances were found: declarative, interrogative, and imperative, following Suhartono’s (2020) framework.

Imperative utterances were frequently used by the mother, such as “Bite back your tongue” or “Next time win more, lose less.” These expressions omitted explicit subjects and used base verbs, reflecting authority and discipline. As explained by Yule (1998, as cited in Suhartono, 2020), imperatives often reveal control and expectations within hierarchical relationships. Such utterances aligned with traditional values of obedience and restraint in Chinese-American households.

Interrogative utterances, including “Ma, what is Chinese torture?” and “Why can’t they move more steps?”, often emerged from the child’s curiosity. However, their function extended beyond seeking information, they also reflected identity negotiation and subtle challenges to authority. Suhartono (2020) emphasized that interrogatives may carry rhetorical or ironic force, especially when used to question cultural assumptions or social norms.

Declarative utterances like “This is a game. These are the rules.” or “Meimei play, squeeze all her brains out for win chess.” served to assert knowledge, explain values, or express opinions. Some were metaphorical, aligning rules of chess with life strategies, while others conveyed pride or resistance. These utterances demonstrated how declarative forms were used not only to report facts but also to build character relationships and internal perspectives.

## Presupposition And Implicit Meaning

Presuppositions in the data revealed underlying assumptions and cultural expectations. The types identified such as structural, lexical, and existential were interpreted using theories from Yule (1998, as cited in Suhartono, 2020), Adisutrisno (2008), and Yanti (2010), as cited in Chandra and Damanhuri (2016).

Structural presuppositions were embedded in sentence construction, as in “Strongest wind cannot be seen” and “Is new American rules.” These expressions implied accepted truths or background knowledge without asserting them explicitly. Adisutrisno (2008, as cited in Chandra & Damanhuri, 2016) noted that structural presupposition occurs when grammatical frames lead the listener to accept information automatically.

Lexical presuppositions were found in utterances like “We do torture” and “Sometimes you need to lose pieces to get ahead.” These relied on verbs such as “do” and “need,” which assumed prior actions or embedded beliefs. As stated by Yanti (2010, as cited in Chandra and Damanhuri, 2016), such verbs signal that the speaker considers the action understood by both speaker and listener, even if not overtly stated.

Existential presuppositions appeared in data like “This American rules,” where the existence of the subject was assumed. These presuppositions revealed contrasts between Eastern and Western cultural logic. The expression implied a recognition and critique of dominant cultural frameworks, which Tan’s narrative often engaged with through irony or subtle resistance.

## RESULT

**Tabel 1**

No	Data	Types	Analysis
1.	"I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength."	Sentence	<p>This sentence consists of one main clause, “I was six”, and one subordinate clause, “When my mother taught me the art of invisible strength.” The second clause is an adverbial clause that provides temporal context for the main clause. It explains when the speaker was six years old, giving background to the development of the narrative. The relationship between these clauses indicates subordination, where one clause depends on the other to complete the meaning.</p> <p>According to Aziz et al. (2023), the relationship between two clauses through subordination creates a complex sentence. Burhanuddin et al. (2018) also stated that a complex sentence consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses that may explain time, reason, cause, or condition. This structure allows the narrative to unfold with layered information.</p>
2.	"Bite back your tongue," scolded my mother..."	Utterance	<p>This utterance is imperative, as indicated by the verb “bite” in its base form and the absence of an explicit subject. The imperative mood is often used to issue commands, instructions, or advice. Here, the mother issues a command as a way of exerting authority over the child, enforcing a rule of silence or emotional control. The utterance reflects the mother’s disciplinary style and cultural values about restraint.</p>

			<p>According to Suhartono (2020), imperative utterances are used to give orders or instructions and often reflect hierarchical relationships. Furthermore, Yule (1998, as cited in Suhartono, 2020) argued that imperatives signal power dynamics in conversation, particularly within family interactions. This utterance demonstrates not just a syntactic structure but also a cultural expectation of obedience.</p>
3.	"We lived in San Francisco's Chinatown."	Sentence	<p>This is a simple sentence that contains one independent clause with the subject "we" and the predicate "lived in San Francisco's Chinatown." It conveys a complete thought that introduces the setting of the story. The sentence is straightforward and factual and provides foundational information necessary for the reader to understand the context in which the story unfolds.</p> <p>According to Aziz et al. (2023), a simple sentence is made up of a single independent clause that contains a subject and a predicate and expresses one idea. Burhanuddin et al. (2018) noted that simple sentences are essential in narrative exposition, as they help build the reader's understanding of the character's environment and circumstances.</p>
4.	"Strongest wind cannot be seen."	Presupposition	<p>This sentence demonstrated an existential presupposition, which implied that "the strongest wind" existed without asserting it directly. The use of the definite noun phrase "strongest wind" presupposed that such a thing was already known to both speaker and listener. The syntactic form of the sentence led the reader to accept this assumed truth, which also carried metaphorical meaning. The statement conveyed a life lesson about unseen strength, tying it to cultural values or inherited wisdom.</p> <p>According to Chandra and Damanhuri (2016), existential presupposition occurs when a sentence uses definite noun phrases to imply that the referent already exists in the discourse. Such expressions are interpreted as background knowledge by the hearer or reader, allowing the sentence to carry unstated assumptions accepted as true.</p>
5.	"My mother named me after the street that we lived on."	Sentence	<p>This is a complex sentence composed of the main clause "My mother named me after the street" and the subordinate clause "that we lived on." The subordinate clause functions as a relative clause that modifies the noun "street." This structure enables the sentence to present not only a naming act but also an embedded memory and significance attached to place and identity.</p> <p>According to Burhanuddin et al. (2018), a complex sentence consists of one main clause and at least one dependent clause, often used to elaborate or describe elements within the main clause. Aziz et al. (2023) supported that relative clauses like "that we lived on" are markers of subordination, contributing to syntactic and semantic complexity.</p>
6.	"Ma, what is Chinese torture?"	Utterance	<p>This utterance is an interrogative sentence, introduced with the WH-word "what" and structured using subject-verb inversion. The speaker, a child, poses the question innocently, yet within the social context, the utterance subtly challenges a cultural stereotype heard</p>



			<p>from a classmate. It invites not only an answer but also reveals intergenerational and intercultural gaps in understanding.</p> <p>According to Suhartono (2020), interrogative utterances are syntactically marked by inversion and semantically used to request information. They may also carry additional functions such as expressing doubt, testing knowledge, or conveying irony. In this case, the utterance functions pragmatically as a question and socially as a reflection of identity negotiation.</p>
7.	"We do torture. Best torture."	Presupposition	<p>This utterance reflected a lexical presupposition, primarily triggered by the verb "do" in the clause "We do torture." The use of the verb assumed that the action of torture had already taken place or was familiar to both the speaker and listener, even though the context was exaggerated or delivered with a humorous tone. The phrase "Best torture" further emphasized the assertion, functioning as a declarative statement that evaluated and reinforced the previous presupposition.</p> <p>According to Chandra and Damanhuri (2016), lexical presuppositions arise when particular verbs imply the existence of a prior action or habitual activity. Verbs such as "do" are categorized as lexical triggers, which signal that the speaker is referring to something already understood within the shared context of the conversation. In this example, the speaker presupposed that torture was already a known or practiced action, embedding cultural familiarity, even if expressed sarcastically. In addition, Adisutrisno (2008, as cited in Chandra &amp; Damanhuri, 2016), emphasized that these lexical triggers often convey background assumptions that do not need to be explicitly stated. The listener is expected to accept the truth of the implied action, making the presupposition effective in conveying cultural nuance, humor, and implied knowledge within a very short utterance.</p>
8.	"Vincent got the chess set."	Sentence	<p>This is a simple sentence containing a single independent clause with the subject "Vincent" and the predicate "got the chess set." It delivers one clear, complete idea and adds to the narrative by introducing the chess set, which becomes a central object in the story. The sentence is straightforward and contributes to plot development.</p> <p>According to Aziz et al. (2023), simple sentences express one complete thought and consist of only one independent clause. Burhanuddin et al. (2018) noted that such structures are foundational in narrative writing because they convey key events clearly and effectively.</p>
9.	"This is a game. These are the rules."	Utterance	<p>These are declarative utterances, each consisting of a subject-verb-complement structure. "This is a game" and "These are the rules" are both statements that convey factual or asserted information. On the surface, they refer to chess, but metaphorically, they reflect life and societal expectations. The tone is instructive, and the speaker uses the statements to assert authority and establish order.</p> <p>According to Suhartono (2020), declarative utterances are used to express facts, beliefs, or opinions and are commonly used in</p>

			<p>instructive or authoritative contexts. These utterances also serve a metaphorical function in the narrative, representing how the protagonist begins to understand structured systems of control.</p>
10.	"Why can't they move more steps?"	Utterance	<p>This is a WH-interrogative utterance beginning with the word "why" and using modal-auxiliary inversion ("can't they"). It asks a question about the rules of chess but also carries implicit critique and confusion. The child's voice questions not only the logic of the game but symbolically challenges established rules and hierarchies.</p> <p>According to Suhartono (2020), interrogative utterances are used to seek information and may also be expressive of internal doubts or challenges. This utterance represents both a literal questioning of chess mechanics and a broader questioning of authority, serving as a site of resistance and critical thinking within the story.</p>
11.	"This American rules."	Presupposition	<p>This sentence showed an existential presupposition. Despite the non-standard grammar, the use of the phrase "This American rules" implied that a set of American rules already existed. The structure assumed the listener recognized what those rules were, making the utterance a reflection of cultural contrast or resignation to a dominant norm. The sentence's tone suggests an awareness of an imposed structure not originally part of the speaker's identity.</p> <p>According to Chandra and Damanhuri (2016), existential presupposition arises from the use of definite noun phrases that imply the presence or familiarity of an entity or concept in the discourse. The utterance "This American rules" used such a phrase to project a taken-for-granted reality about cultural systems.</p>
12.	"I found out about all the whys later."	Sentence	<p>This sentence is categorized as a simple sentence. It consists of a subject "I" and the predicate "found out about all the whys later," which straightforwardly conveys a single era. The sentence reflects a reflective tone and serves to transition the narrator's understanding from curiosity to realization. It marks a point in the narrative where the protagonist begins to internalize knowledge gained through experience.</p> <p>According to Jackson (1982, as cited in Burhanuddin et al., 2018), simple sentences are often used in storytelling to present reflective insights or personal conclusions. Aziz et al. (2023) also emphasized that such structures are essential in narration because of their clarity and precision in delivering central ideas.</p>
13.	"I lost many games and many Life Savers."	Sentence	<p>This sentence is identified as a compound sentence due to the coordination of two independent clauses with the conjunction "and." The clause "I lost many games" and the clause "(I lost) many Life Savers" are structurally parallel, creating a rhythm and emphasizing the extent of the narrator's early struggles in chess. The repetition of "many" adds rhetorical impact.</p> <p>According to Aziz et al. (2023), compound sentences consist of two or more independent clauses connected by coordinating conjunctions. Burhanuddin et al. (2018) also noted that compound structures are effective in expressing cumulative experiences or parallel events, especially in reflective or comparative contexts.</p>



14.	"Next time win more, lose less."	Utterance	<p>This utterance is imperative in form and function. It consists of two base-form verbs, "win" and "lose," each expressing a command or piece of advice. The omission of the subject is a typical marker of imperative sentences. The utterance is not just about chess strategy but also implies life guidance, urging caution and efficiency.</p> <p>According to Suhartono (2020), imperative utterances are syntactically formed by using base verbs and pragmatically function to direct behavior or provide advice. Yule (1998, as cited in Suhartono, 2020) further suggested that imperatives often carry authority, especially in parent-child relationships where social hierarchy is embedded in language use.</p>
15.	"Sometimes you need to lose pieces to get ahead."	Presupposition	<p>This utterance illustrated a lexical presupposition, triggered by the verb "need." The structure suggested that losing pieces was not just a possibility but a necessary action. The phrase "you need to lose pieces" presupposed that the act of losing was something already understood or anticipated in the context of strategic thinking. It implied that both speaker and listener shared a cultural or situational awareness of sacrifice as a step toward success. In chess, this could mean giving up pieces to gain tactical advantage; metaphorically, it reflected a broader life lesson about endurance, growth, and foresight.</p> <p>According to Chandra and Damanhuri (2016), lexical presuppositions arise from specific verbs that implicitly assume the occurrence of an action. The verb "need" was categorized as a lexical trigger, which signaled that the act of losing had already been anticipated, experienced, or socially expected. They emphasized that lexical presuppositions allow implied information to be processed by the reader or listener without the need for explicit justification, thus making it a powerful and subtle semantic tool. Furthermore, Yanti (2010, as cited in Chandra &amp; Damanhuri, 2016) stated that verbs like "need" carry an implicit sense of necessity, indicating that the action in question is embedded in a shared context. The utterance thus not only conveyed a tactical truth in chess but also a moral insight that success sometimes required personal loss reflection of intergenerational wisdom passed through linguistic presupposition.</p>
16.	"Better off lose less, see if you really need."	Utterance	<p>This utterance is imperative in form, consisting of base-form verbs "lose" and "see" without an explicit subject. The tone is advisory, offering strategic and reflective instruction. The first clause, "Better off lose less," functions as a condensed command that advises efficiency, while the second, "see if you really need," suggests evaluation before sacrifice. This kind of utterance reflects culturally embedded values such as thrift, caution, and foresight.</p> <p>According to Suhartono (2020), imperative utterances are marked by verb-first constructions and are commonly used to give instructions or express advice. These forms, especially in familial contexts, often reflect a speaker's role as an elder or authority figure. The structure also demonstrates indirectness, a common feature in pragmatic politeness within collectivist cultures.</p>

17.	"Meimei play, squeeze all her brains out for win chess."	Utterance	<p>This is a declarative utterance, although it uses non-standard grammar. The subject "Meimei" is followed by a compound predicate "play" and "squeeze all her brains out to win chess," indicating action and effort. Despite its informal structure, the utterance communicates admiration, highlighting the child's dedication and mental exertion in playing chess. The tone reflects a mix of pride and humor.</p> <p>According to Suhartono (2020), declarative utterances function to state facts or opinions. Even in non-standard or informal varieties of English, declaratives retain their pragmatic function when they describe actions, states, or assessments. This utterance serves to construct identity and praise within a cultural narrative that values effort and excellence.</p>
18.	"Is new American rules."	Presupposition	<p>This utterance represented an existential presupposition. Although grammatically incomplete, the phrase "Is new American rules" relied on a shared understanding that such rules existed. The definiteness of "new American rules" implied familiarity and presence, framing the utterance as a resigned acceptance of cultural change. This presupposition reflected how the character perceived cultural shifts as unspoken realities.</p> <p>According to Chandra and Damanhuri (2016), existential presuppositions are often signaled by definite noun phrases that guide the listener to accept the information as known and valid. The phrase "new American rules" was one such form, implying both the existence of those rules and the speaker's adaptation to them.</p>
19.	"I wish you wouldn't do that, telling everybody I'm your daughter."	Utterance	<p>This is a declarative utterance consisting of a main clause "I wish you wouldn't do that" and a participial clause "telling everybody I'm your daughter" that elaborates on the action. The utterance conveys emotional discomfort and resistance to perceived overexposure. It functions pragmatically to express identity tension between the speaker and her mother, reflecting issues of autonomy and social embarrassment.</p> <p>According to Suhartono (2020), declarative utterances are often used to communicate personal attitudes, emotional responses, or interpersonal conflict. The complexity of the structure enhances its expressive power, showing how syntactic choices reflect deeper themes of independence and familial pride.</p>
20	"I closed my eyes and pondered my next move."	Sentence	<p>Analysis: This is a simple sentence composed of one subject "I" and a compound predicate "closed my eyes and pondered my next move." The coordination of two actions indicates a reflective pause in the narrative, symbolizing internal deliberation. Although structurally simple, the sentence carries significant metaphorical weight, representing both physical and mental preparation.</p> <p>According to Jackson (1982, as cited in Burhanuddin et al., 2018) and Aziz et al. (2023), a sentence with one independent clause and a compound verb phrase still qualifies as a simple sentence. Such structures are often used in literature to convey introspection and control, essential in portraying themes like strategy, choice, and</p>

			growth. According to Aziz et al. (2023), simple sentences with compound predicates still maintain a single independent clause structure. This allows them to reflect on inner processes and emotional introspection while remaining grammatically minimal.
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## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of sentences, utterances, and presuppositions in Amy Tan's short story *Rules of the Game* to explore how linguistic forms contributed to the story's meaning. By analyzing twenty selected data points, the research identified how sentence structures shaped narrative flow, how utterances reflected interpersonal and cultural dynamics, and how presuppositions implied shared beliefs and assumptions embedded in the dialogue and narration.

The analysis showed that sentences functioned to organize information, present events, and develop the narrator's journey. Utterances revealed emotional depth, cultural hierarchy, and identity negotiation, particularly in the relationship between Meimei and her mother. Meanwhile, presuppositions uncovered implied meanings that helped frame social expectations, traditional values, and internal conflict. Each linguistic category played a distinct but interconnected role in conveying the story's deeper themes.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrated that language in literary works operated beyond grammatical structure. Sentences, utterances, and presuppositions interact to build context, reveal character motivations, and shape thematic interpretations. This study highlighted how meaning in literature was not only expressed through what was said explicitly, but also through the way it was constructed and implied. Through this semantic and pragmatic approach, the research offered a deeper understanding of how linguistic elements supported the narrative's exploration of identity, discipline, and generational tension.

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