

A Semantic Analysis of Sentence, Utterance, and Pressuposition in the Short Story "The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored the semantic elements of presupposition, sentence meaning, and utterance meaning in Edgar Allan Poe's short story The Black Cat. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the research analyzed how language in the narrative especially through the narrator's expressions reveals deeper psychological and thematic meanings. Sentences in the story often carry layered meanings that go beyond literal interpretation, while utterances reflect the narrator's unstable mental state and emotional contradictions. The study also identifies various presuppositions embedded in the text, which help uncover the narrator's assumptions and hidden guilt. The findings showed that Poe's use of language invited readers to question the reliability of the narrator, and that semantic analysis enhances our understanding of the story's dark, psychological depth. This research demonstrated that applying semantic theory to literary texts provided insight into character construction, narrative tension, and implied meaning.

Keywords: Semantics, Presupposition, Sentence, Utterance, The Black Cat, Edgar Allan Poe, Qualitative analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The act of communication between a speaker and a listener or a writer and a reader can take many forms, especially in literary texts where meaning is not always straight forward. Language was a medium through which humans convey ideas, emotions, and intentions, and its interpretation often depends not only on the literal meaning but also on contextual cues (Yule, 1996:3). As a linguistic system, language enables speakers to transmit messages using signs and symbols that are commonly understood by members of a speech community (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2011). Linguistics, as the scientific study of language, includes various subfields, among them semantics and pragmatics. Semantics referred to the study of meaning in language, focusing on how meaning is conveyed through words, phrases, sentences, and structures without dependence on specific situations (Saeed, 2016). On the other hand, pragmatics dealt with how meaning is constructed in context, including elements such as utterance meaning and presupposition (Birner, 2013).

Pragmatics examined how meaning varies based on context, allowed us to comprehend the relationships between sentences, spoken expressions, and underlying assumptions. A sentence represented only a grammatical format, whereas an utterance occurs when that sentence is articulated or written in a particular context by a speaker. In the realm of pragmatics, our focus is primarily on utterances since they revealed how context shapes meaning rather than merely the construction of the sentence. Presupposition plays a crucial role in pragmatics as it related to what a speaker believes the listener already knows or accepts when they express something. For instance, when someone asks, "Have you completed your homework? " it assumes the listener has homework to discuss. Therefore, pragmatics clarified how we utilize sentences as utterances for effective communication and how presuppositions affect the understanding between speakers and listeners. (Yule, 1996).

A sentence is a group of words that are used to communicated ideas in writing or speech. It represented a complete, independent unit of thought and consists of two main parts: a subject and a predicate (Cowan, 2016). Furthermore, a sentence must begin with a capital letter and end with a final punctuation mark in the form of a period, question mark, or exclamation point (Azar & Hagen, 2017). We can divided the kinds of sentences into simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences (Azar & Hagen, 2017). A Simple Sentence: consists of one independent clause that can stand alone as a sentence. *e.g.* I enjoy playing tennis with my friend every weekend. A Compound Sentence: consists of two independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction (*e.g.*, *and*, *but*, *so*, *yet*, *for*, *nor*, *or*), a sentence connector (*e.g.*, *however*, *therefore*, *otherwise*), or a semicolon. *e.g.* I want to continue my study, but I have to support my family too. The students study hard; therefore, they are successful. The sky is cloudy; the birds are flying. A Complex Sentence: consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. *e.g.* When foreign students come to the United States, they sometimes suffer from culture shock. When I found my dictionary, which I lost in my classroom, I felt very happy.

An utterance is a piece of language produced by a speaker in a given context for communication purposes. It refers to actual spoken or written language in use, not just its theoretical form (Griffiths, 2017). Declarative Utterance used to make a statement or convey information. Declarative utterances are the default sentence type used to state facts or provide information (Grundy, 2013). *e.g.* She is a doctor. The sky is blue. He studies linguistics. Interrogative Utterance Used to ask a question. Interrogative utterances are designed to elicit information from the hearer (Allan, 2014). *e.g.* Are you coming with us?, What is your name?, Did you finish your homework?. Imperative Utterance used to give commands, orders, or requests. These utterances aim to direct the hearer to perform an action (Birner, 2013). *e.g.* Close the door!, Please sit

down. Exclamatory Utterance used to express strong feelings or emotions such as surprise, excitement, or anger (Griffiths, 2017). e.g. What a beautiful view!, How awful that was!

Presupposition is an assumption that a speaker makes when saying something and expected the listener to accept as true or given (Grundy, 2013). In other words, speakers often include information they assumed the listener already knows. Existential Presupposition This assumes that something or someone exists. e.g. "Anna's cat is very fluffy." → Presupposes Anna has a cat (Saeed, 2016). Factive Presupposition Triggered by certain verbs or phrases that suggested something is a fact. e.g. "She realized that she was wrong." → Presupposes she was wrong (Birner, 2013). Lexical Presupposition occurs when a word choice implies unspoken meaning. e.g. "He stopped smoking." → Presupposes he used to smoke (Griffiths, 2017). Structural Presupposition depends on sentence structure or form. e.g. "When did she leave?" → Presupposes she left (Allan, 2014). Non-Factive Presupposition not necessarily true; linked to verbs suggesting uncertainty or imagination. e.g. "I dreamt that I was flying." → Presupposes the flying was not real (Saeed, 2016). Counterfactual Presupposition used when speaking about situations contrary to reality. e.g. "If I had wings, I would fly." → Presupposes I don't have wings (Grundy, 2013).

This study is conducted to explore how Sentence, Utterance, and Presupposition interact in literary discourse, specifically in Edgar Allan Poe's short story The Black Cat. The story is a powerful psychological narrative that involves themes of guilt, madness, and supernatural suggestion. It presents rich and layered language that can be analyzed not only in terms of structure but also meaning both literal and implied.

The reason for analyzing The Black Cat is due to its intense first-person narration, which combines explicit statements with implicit meanings. The narrator constantly shifts between justification and confession, which makes it essential to examine not only what is said (Sentence), but how it is said (Utterance), and what is assumed to be true or accepted (Presupposition). This makes the text a fertile ground for semantic and pragmatic analysis, offering insight into the mind of the speaker and how meaning is crafted for the reader.

A semantic study of Edgar Allan Poe's The Black Cat might provided readers with a number of notable advantages. First, it improved their understanding of how literary texts generate meaning through implied meanings conveyed by sentence structures, utterances, and presuppositions, rather than just through literal sentence interpretation. By enabling readers to interact with the text on a deeper level, this helps them to understand the psychological and thematic nuances of the story. Second, the research increases readers' linguistic understanding by showing how literary analysis can benefit from the application of linguistic concepts, such sentence kinds, utterance functions, and presupposition categories. With this, readers, particularly those in literary studied or linguistics, will have useful tools for analyzing language usage in a variety of situations. Thirdly, it promotes critical reading skills by illustrating how an unreliable narrator uses language to influenced perception, thus inspiring readers to consider what is said against what is suggested. Lastly, by bridging linguistic theory with literary analysis, the paper aids readers in understanding the link between form and meaning, giving a deeper understanding of Poe's stylistic choices and the underlying horror and madness that characterize the narrative.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design, which aims to analyze and explain the data in the form of words and sentences rather than numbers. The object of this study was the semantic and

pragmatic **features** found in *The Black Cat* by Edgar Allan Poe, particularly in terms of sentences, utterances, and presuppositions used by the narrator and other characters.

Qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand individuals' or groups' meanings toward a social or human problem by emphasizing subjective experiences and the interpretation of context-specific phenomena. According to Creswell (2014), this approach focuses on the process of meaning-making through words, behaviors, and interactions rather than numerical analysis. It typically involves collecting data in natural settings using interviews, observations, or document analysis, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument.

The analysis was grounded in semantic theory, especially sentence and utterance analysis, and supported by Yule's (2017) classification of presupposition types, namely: existential, factive, lexical, structural, non-factive, and counterfactual presuppositions. The framework from Saeed (2016) and Birner (2013) is also employed to deepen the semantic interpretation of the utterances.

The data source is the short story *The Black Cat* by Edgar Allan Poe, and the data consisted of sentences and utterances that contain or imply presuppositions or significant semantic patterns. These were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus.

The data collection technique uses documentation, extracting utterances from the story that potentially contain semantic or pragmatic significance. These utterances are then categorized based on the types of presupposition or sentence forms. Irrelevant or repetitive data are omitted through a process of data reduction, focusing only on examples that reflect diverse sentence types and pragmatic implications.

The data were then analyzed using **content analysis**, where each selected utterance is examined in terms of:

1. Sentence structure (simple sentence, compound sentence, complex sentence)
2. Utterance meaning in context (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory)
3. Presupposition type (based on Yule, 2017)
4. The function or significance of the presupposition

The findings are presented descriptively, and each data point is followed by analysis and interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

This research looked at how Edgar Allan Poe used language in "The Black Cat" especially how meaning is delivered through Sentences, Utterances, and Presuppositions. The analysis is based on George Yule's theory of Presupposition, Sentence, and Utterance which includes:

Existential Presupposition, Factive Presupposition, Structural Presupposition, Simple Sentence, Complex Sentence, Compound Sentence, Interrogative Utterance, Declarative Utterance, Imperative Utterance, Exclamatory Utterance

| NO | DATA | TYPE | ANALYSIS |
|----|--|-------------------|--|
| 1. | "I married when I was very young, and I was happy to find that my wife loved all of our animal friends." | COMPOUND SENTENCE | This is a compound sentence because it contains two independent clauses joined by the coordinating conjunction "and" |

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| 2. | "I also knew that this wall was very thick. I could hide the body in the middle of it." | COMPLEX SENTENCE | This is a complex sentence because it contains one dependent clause and one independent clause. |
| 3. | "I have always loved animals more than anything." | SIMPLE SENTENCE | One complete thought with no additional clauses: subject + verb + object |
| 4. | "He was black, black all over, and very intelligent." | COMPOUND SENTENCE | Contains two independent clauses: "He was black" and "(he was) very intelligent", connected by "and" |
| 5. | "Our house was burning! I, my wife and our servant were lucky to escape." | COMPOUND SENTENCE | Two independent clauses: "The house was burning" + "we were lucky to escape", joined by "and" |
| 6. | "I married when I was very young." | EXISTENTIAL PRESUPPOSITION | The verb "married" presupposes that the speaker got married. This assumes the existence of the action itself |
| 7. | "I remember hanging the cat." | FACTIVE PRESUPPOSITION | The verb "remember" triggers a presupposition that the event being remembered (hanging the cat) indeed occurred |
| 8. | "I was deeply sorry." | FACTIVE PRESUPPOSITION | The adjective "sorry" implies regret for something that actually happened, assuming that the speaker made a mistake. |
| 9. | "These walls are strong, aren't they?" | STRUCTURAL PRESUPPOSITION | The question form presupposes that the walls are strong, and the speaker expects agreement. The structure of the sentence triggers the presupposition. |
| 10. | "I knew it was evil." | FACTIVE PRESUPPOSITION | The verb "know" presupposes that the evil of the action is true. |
| 11. | "You're not going to believe this story." | SIMPLE SENTENCE | This sentence consists of a single independent clause: "You are not going to believe this story." There is no subordinate clause or coordinating conjunction that would indicate an additional clause. Therefore, it is classified as a simple sentence. |

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| 12. | "Yes this story ends with my death tomorrow." | SIMPLE SENTENCE | Although the sentence contains compound objects ("my end, my death tomorrow"), there is only one independent clause. Hence, it is a simple sentence. |
| 13. | "What did I do?" | INTERROGATIVE UTTERANCE | Despite potentially functioning as a rhetorical question in context, the sentence structure is that of a WH-question. Therefore, it is an interrogative utterance. |
| 14. | "I caught the cat and hung him by his neck from a tree until was dead" | COMPOUND SENTENCE | This sentence includes two independent clauses: "I caught the cat" and "I hung him..." joined by the coordinating conjunction "and." Each clause can stand alone, making this a compound sentence. |
| 15. | "It was the shape of a large cat hanging by its neck" | EXISTENTIAL PRESUPPOSITION | The phrase assumes that such a shape exists and is observable, thus presupposes the existence of the form. |
| 16. | "I cannot tell you how happy I began to feel." | DECLARATIVE UTTERANCE | This is a declarative utterance because it conveys a personal emotional state as a factual statement |
| 17. | "I have always been a kind and loving person — everyone will tell you this." | DECLARATIVE SENTENCE | The narrator claims to be good, like someone insisting they're nice despite their actions. This irony raises questions about the nature of good and evil, revealing the complexity of human nature. |
| 18. | "How can I explain this fear?" | INTERROGATIVE UTTERANCE | The line question shows his confusion, similar to feeling overwhelmed and seeking clarity. This vulnerability contrasts with his later violence, highlighting themes of guilt and madness. |

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| 19. | "I had to hide the body." | IMPERATIVE UTTERANCE | The urgent statement reflects panic and desperation, illustrating his moral decay. It shows how far he has fallen from his former self and the horror of his situation. |
| 20. | "The clever animal! My wife was dead because of him, and now his evil voice was sending me to the gallows!" | EXCLAMATORY UTTERANCE | The expresses horror and blame towards the cat, recognizing it as a symbol of his downfall. This moment captures his chaotic emotions and deepens the psychological horror of the story. |

B. Discussion

In *The Black Cat*, Edgar Allan Poe masterfully employs sentence structures, utterances, and presuppositions to enhance the psychological complexity and horror of the story. The narrator's use of language is not merely descriptive; it served to draw readers into his disturbed mind and to manipulate how events and characters are perceived.

Sentence Structure

Poe used a variety of sentence types to reflect the narrator's shifting mental state. **Simple sentences** (e.g., "*I loved the cat.*") often appear at moments of clarity or when the narrator wants to present his statements as undeniable truths. These give a sense of certainty, even as the narrator becomes increasingly unreliable. In contrast, **complex sentences** (e.g., "*When I found myself overcome by rage, I knew not what I did.*") mirror the inner turmoil and moral conflict of the character, layering dependent clauses that reflect layers of justification or confusion. **Compound sentences** are frequently used to build tension, linking horrific actions with consequences or excuses (e.g., "*I struck the cat, and my soul felt immediate horror.*").

Utterance Types

The narrator predominantly used **declarative utterances** to assert his version of reality. Statements like "*I am not mad*" or "*The cat was a beast of ill omen*" are designed to convince the reader of his sanity and rationality, even as his actions prove otherwise. This use of declarative is manipulative, as the narrator positions himself as a voice of authority while revealing his guilt. **Interrogative utterances** appear when the narrator reflects on his own confusion or attempts to engage the reader in his justification, such as in rhetorical questions: "*What disease is like alcohol?*" These questions don't invite answers but served to draw the reader deeper into his twisted reasoning. There are moments of **exclamatory utterances** as well, typically tied to the narrator's heightened emotional states (e.g., "*What a madman I had become!*"), which show the break between his calm façade and inner chaos. **Imperative utterances** are rare, but when present (e.g., "*Look upon this image!*"), they are directed at the audience, demanding attention or judgment.

Presupposition Types

Poe's use of **presupposition** further manipulates the reader's perception: **Existential presuppositions** appear through phrases like "*my wife*" and "*the cellar wall*", which assume the existence

of people and objects central to the horror, without elaboration. This draws the reader into the world as if these elements are already familiar. **Factive presuppositions** are seen when the narrator refers to emotional states or realizations (e.g., "*I felt remorse*"), which presuppose certain truths about his experience and morality, even as his reliability is in question. **Structural presuppositions** are embedded in sentence forms that imply prior events (e.g., "*When I buried the body...*"), forcing the reader to accept the action as having already occurred, heightening the sense of inevitability and doom. **Lexical presuppositions** occur in verbs like *stopped* (e.g., "*I stopped mistreating the cat*"), suggesting past behavior without direct confession at first. **Counterfactual presuppositions** appear in the narrator's conditional reflections, such as "*If I had not been so impulsive, I might have spared myself.*" These underline regret and hypothetical alternatives to his destructive path. Overall, Poe's deliberated use of sentence forms, utterance types, and presuppositions serves not just to tell the story, but to shape the reader's interpretation of events and the narrator's psyche. The language choices compel the reader to piece together the truth beneath the narrator's unreliable account, creating a layered and chilling reading experience.

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the presuppositions found in The Black Cat by Edgar Allan Poe, it was clear that the use of presupposition played a significant role in building the narrative's psychological depth and suspense. The narrator frequently employs existential presuppositions, assuming the existence of entities such as the cat Pluto and later the second cat, both of which symbolize guilt and madness. Factive presuppositions arise through expressions of regret and realization, as when the narrator acknowledged his wrongdoing or loss of control, which invited readers to accept certain events as facts within the story's world. Structural presuppositions are also evident, particularly through rhetorical questions and indirect statements that imply prior actions or states, thus enhancing the tension and ambiguity. These presuppositions functioned not only to advance the plot but also to subtly manipulate the reader's understanding, drawing them into the narrator's unreliable perspective. Overall, presupposition in The Black Cat deepens the horror by embedding hidden assumptions that reflect the narrator's fractured mind and moral decay.

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