

Factual and Non-Factual Expression

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Abstract:

This paper has found out some particular aspects of factivity versus non-factivity. (Non)factivity is a phenomenon that embed presuppositions about the truth of the proposition. It means that presuppositions provide implicit information about facts assumed to be true in an utterance. The author has not only compared the standard of words marked by factivity or non-factivity, but considered syntactic and semantic structures to make clear the proposition.

***Key words:** (non) factive/factivity/factual, proposition, presupposition*

Introduction

In a state of affairs, a speaker typically asserts a true proposition or does not say the truth of the proposition. According to linguists, the standard analysis of factivity contains a factive predicate such as, know, realize, discover, comprehend, regret, love, hate, resent. These words are also called “factive verbs” which the speaker carries a presupposition of a true proposition. For example, “I know he has just arrived”. The verb “know” in this statement is the strong speaker’s commitment to the truth of what he is saying because this statement presupposes that “he has arrived”. In contrast, other verbs like “believe, think, say, seem, doubt, assume, assert, guess, suppose, bet, fear”, which are not accompanied by a similar presupposition, are called “non-factive verbs”. For instance, “I believe he has already arrived”. The verb “believe” is a very weak commitment of the speaker to the truth of what he is saying because this sentence presupposes “he hasn’t arrived yet”. Also, there are other word formations such as adjectives like “happy, glad, nice, pleasant, sad, certain, proud, lucky” to presuppose the true proposition

whereas, other adjectives like “willing, afraid, uncertain, eager, ready” don’t represent the true proposition. For example, “I was happy to see my mother”. This sentence expresses a factivity of the true proposition since this sentence presupposes “I saw my mother” while the sentence “I am ready to go” doesn’t represent the truth of proposition because this sentence presupposes that “I haven’t go yet.” In addition, factivity and non-factivity are expressed by modal verbs. The author will discuss this issue in the theoretical background.

From these views, it is clear that Vietnamese learners, who are studying English, find hard to reconize the difference between factivity and non-factivity when they are in communication. Factivity or non-factivity is not only lexically determined but also dependent on its syntactic and semantic realization. Some verbs are always used factively while, other verbs are not. However, there are some situations the words may be ambiguous. Let’s see the following circumstances.

(1a) I remember Andrew closed the door.

(1b) I remember Andrew closed the door, but actually he didn’t close the door.

In (1a) “remember” is factive, but “remember” in (1b) is non-factive because of the contrastive connection which follows.

The aim of this paper is first to provide a picture of factivity and non-factivity with practical knowlegde to help learners get useful information about factivity versus non-factivity and use them successfully in communication. Secondly, the study provides learners some basic knowledge about syntax and semantics in using a piece of language because the syntactic and semantic attitude of sentential complement clauses under what have traditionally been called factive and non-factive predicates in English. They note that there are two classes of predicates, those that presuppose the truth of their sentential complements (factives) and those that do not (non-factives). Last but not least, the study is primirily concerned with semamtic rather than pragmatic meaning. On the one hand, the author is intereested in the semantic structure of sentences, namely factive and non-factive verbs.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The paper before makes clear some terms of presupposition, factivity and non-factivity to help an explicitness in language.

Presupposition is “what a speaker or writer assumes that the receiver of the message already knows.” [Richards et al, 1987: 228]. For example, ‘Would you like another beer?’

presupposes that the hearer in this situation has already had at least one beer. Thus, Presuppositions are inferences about what is assumed to be true in the utterance rather than directly asserted to be true. Consider another definition, “what is presupposed is what the speaker takes for granted and assumes that the addressee will take for granted as part of the contextual background.”[Lyons 1977: 606].

Factual or non-factual expression depends on assertion the speaker’s degree of commitment to the truth of proposition. However, the assertion has truth value: it is true or false. Consider the following sentences:

- (1) Andrew is sick. (factivity)
- (2) It is sad that Andrew is sick. (factivity)
- (3) I realize Andrew is sick. (factivity)
- (4) Andrew must be sick. (factivity)
- (5) Andrew may be sick. (non-factivity)
- (6) I think Andrew is sick. (non-factivity)

In (1), (2), (3) presupposes the truth of the proposition “Andrew is sick”. Assertion in (4) is true because it presupposes that “it is certain that Andrew is sick” whereas the assertion in (5) can be false because this sentence presupposes “it is possible that Andrew is sick”. In (6) is marked by non-factual verb “think”, so this sentence presupposes “Andrew is not sick”.

Factivity expresses a strong commitment of the speaker to the true proposition. It means that the speaker commits the state of affairs represented in the proposition is true. For example, “I regret that I made you bored.” In proposition of this sentence is true that “I made you bored”.

Non-factivity expresses a weak commitment of the speaker to the true proposition. The speaker has no enough evidence, consequently the speaker gives a different hypothesis about the state of affairs mentioned.

Lyons (1977) pointed out the contrast between factivity and non-factivity that the use of a non-factive predicator commits the speaker to the truth or falsity of the proposition expressed by its complement clause, while factive predicator commits the speaker to the truth of proposition expressed by its complement clause.

Also, Palmer (1977) stated that when a proposition is factive, it is presupposed to be true. When an event is actual, it is presupposed to have occurred or be occurring. On the other hand,

when a proposition is non-factive, the event is known or presupposed not to have occurred. Consider his examples and explanations in using a modal verb as follows.

(7) He could have done it by now.

(8) He could have done it. It is a shame he didn't.

In (7) expresses epistemic modality with “could” and is non-factive because the speaker doesn't know whether he has done it or not. “Could” in (8) is used deontic modality because, in this case, “could” something like disappointment that “it” was not done. To Palmer, he mentions the factual status of a sentence or complement, which can conveniently mean either the truth or falsity of the proposition it expresses or to the occurrence or non-occurrence of the event it refers to.

The semantic and syntactic differences between factivity and non-factivity are discussed as follows.

(9) I want to make clear the fact that I don't like her. (factivity)

(10) I resent it that people call me a pig. (factivity)

(11) Andrew supposed that Tom had arrived, and Anna thought so, too. (non-factivity)

(12) It seems to me that there is a stranger in my house. (non-factivity)

(13) Andrew regrets that he was late. (factivity)

(14) Andrew thinks that he was late. (non-factivity)

In (9) the noun phrase “the fact” is an object, “that-clause” is an object complement, and the verb phrase “want to make clear” is marked by a factive verb, so this sentence is the true proposition.

Like (9), in (10) pronoun “it” has a function of an object, “that-clause” is an object complement, and the verb “resent” is marked by a factive verb. Also, it is presupposed to be true that “people call me a pig”.

In (11) “that-clause” is an object, the verbs “supposed and thought” are marked by non-factive verbs. Also, factive complements cannot be substituted with the pro “so”, but non-factive complements can.

In (12) “that clause”, “that there is a stranger in my house” only can appear in object position. Also, the verb “seems” is a non-factive verb.

In (13), (14) “that-clause” can appear in a similar object position. But in (13) is marked by a factive verb while (14) is marked by a non-factive verb.

From these examples, the author sees that only factive predicates are followed by their object and an object complement (that-clause), while non-factive can't. Besides, both of them are followed by a "that-clause" which has a function as an object at the same position in a sentence.

Conclusion

All the phenomena discussed through this paper present a different picture between factive and non-factive verbs. Firstly, the author considers the standard analysis of factivity or non-factivity contains a factive predicate about the speaker's attitude towards the proposition of the utterance which can be judged as one of the basic motivations of the use of factive or non-factive verbs. Secondly, I look at a presupposition that it represents a necessary and sufficient condition for the truth of its complement sentence. Whether the speaker is committed to the truth of the complement sentence. If so, it depends on the composition of the main sentence. Thirdly, I shortly look through the position of the complement that will ultimately determine how the sentence is interpreted, thus whether the entire sentential complement is presupposed or not. Finally, this paper points out some particular differences between factivity and non-factivity to the (non) factual status of what is being said.

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