
PRESUPPOSITION AND COMMON GROUND IN GRETA THUNBERG'S SPEECH ON TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE AT THE YOUTH4CLIMATE CONFERENCE 2021

Hilwa Mubarak^(a*), Sari Rejeki^(a), Agnes Setyowati^(a)

Universitas Pakuan, Bogor, Indonesia

(*Email correspondence : hilwamubarak033@gmail.com

Article history : accepted : May, 12 2022 revised : June, 16 2022 approved : July, 18 2022

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study are to analyze the presuppositions and common ground in Greta Thunberg's speech at the 2021 Youth4Climate conference. This study uses the descriptive-qualitative method. By using Yule's theory, the utterances in Thunberg's speech were analyzed into presupposition types. The classification of presuppositions helps to conclude the background belief, relating to an utterance that must be mutually known or assumed by the speaker and addressee. The results reveal that all types of presupposition exist in Thunberg's utterances. The presuppositions are related to the tackling of climate change by world leaders. The common ground also illustrates a similar issue.

Keywords: presupposition; presupposition types; common ground; climate change.

I. BACKGROUND

Greta Thunberg, a young environmental activist from Sweden, is known for her bravery in educating people to fight climate change. At the age of 15, she skipped school to start her first climate protest in front of the Swedish parliament building on Friday in August 2018. Her protest inspired many students to follow her lead. This is how the *Fridays for Future* movement began. In 2019, Greta Thunberg is named Time Magazine's Person of the Year. She also received other honors and awards. Even though many people support her action, there are many who oppose it. Some world leaders like the Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro once called Greta a 'Brat' and Donald Trump also mocked her on twitter in 2019 (Britton, 2019).

Despite the bad responses, Thunberg kept fighting for climate justice. She strongly believes that climate change is a serious threat to the world. At Youth4Climate conference 2021, one of the pre-event of COP26, she was given the

opportunity to deliver a speech. In her speech, she talked about the recent tackling of climate change by world leaders. Thunberg's consistency and strong voice, even at a young age made her famous throughout the world.

In Pragmatics, the assumptions in Greta Thunberg's utterances can be analyzed using presupposition. Levinson (as quoted by Siagian, Pangaribuan, & Toruan, 2015)(Siagian, Pangaribuan, & Toruan, 2015)) stated that a presupposition is a background belief, relating to an utterance which must be mutually known or assumed by the speaker and addressee or utterances to be considered appropriate in context. According to Yule, presupposition means something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance. Yule (1996) categorizes presupposition into; existential presupposition, lexical presupposition, factive presupposition, non-factive presupposition, counterfactual presupposition, and structural presupposition. The theory of presupposition are related to common ground or common

knowledge. This study analyzes presupposition and common ground in Greta Thunberg speech at the Youth4Climate conference 2021.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method applied in this study is descriptive-qualitative. Bogdan and Taylor in Nugrahani (2014) stated that qualitative method refers to research procedures which produce descriptive data containing spoken or written words from the people and the behavior that can be observed. Furthermore, this research uses three kinds of data collection techniques; uninvolved conversation observation, note-taking, and library research technique. The steps of data analyses involve the following:

1. Listening and transcribing Greta Thunberg speech at Youth4Climate Conference 2021.
2. Finding data which consist of presuppositions and identifying its' type.
3. Analyzing the presuppositions of the utterances and explaining the common ground.
4. Drawing the conclusion.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study reveals 13 utterances which consist of presuppositions. All six presupposition types were also evident in the data. The presupposition all contain similar notion, which is climate change. The common ground also shows identical topics. 6 utterances from Thunberg's speech will be discussed below.

Data 1

Our hopes and dreams drowned in their empty words and promises.

The utterance above is classified as existential presupposition because it indicates the existence of entities. Yule (1996) stated that existential presupposition is not only assumed to be present in possessive constructions, but more

generally in any definite noun phrase. The presuppositions in utterance (1) are *We have hopes and dreams* and *They have empty words and promises*. The common ground of the utterance is *There are hopes, dreams, empty words and promises*. The *hopes and dreams* refer to a safe future, climate action, and climate justice. This is proven in what Thunberg previously stated in her speech. "*And we, we the people, we want a safe future. We want real climate action, and we want climate justice*" (Thunberg, 2021). Meanwhile *empty words and promises* refer to the action and broken promises of the world leaders related to climate change. Quoting Uechi (2021):

Thunberg's uncharacteristically corporate-sounding lines, it turned out, were meant to show the emptiness behind politicians and business leaders' slogans when they speak about climate change.

Data 2

"They say they want 'solutions'".

Utterance (2) is classified as factive presupposition because the presupposed information follows a verb which can be treated as facts. Verbs which have factive presuppositions are *realize*, *regret*, *odd* and *glad*. In utterance (2), the presuppositions are *Some people want something. They want solutions*. The presupposed information is concluded from the verb *say*.

The common ground of utterance (2) is *There is a solution that someone wants*. The word *They* in the utterance, again refers to world leaders. As Thunberg stated; "*All this while, the media is reporting on what the leaders say that they are going to do instead of what they are actually doing.*" (Thunberg, 2021). The

solution refers to world leaders' actions for tackling climate change.

One of the solutions that the world leaders did to tackle climate change is by holding a conference concerning climate change in; Conference of Parties (COP). COP itself is decision-making body responsible for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which brings together the 197 nations and territories – called Parties – that have signed on to the Framework Convention (Fourment, n.d.). The first COP meeting was held in Berlin, Germany in 1995. The 21st COP, which was held in Paris in 2015, created a new international climate agreement known as Paris agreement. This agreement contains NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions), which embody efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change (UNFCCC, n.d.).

Data 3

(3) *Right now, we are still very much speeding in the wrong direction.*

Utterance (3) is classified as lexical presupposition. The sentence incorporates the verb *still*. According to Yule (1996), lexical presupposition is the use of one form where asserted meaning is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that another (non-asserted) meaning is understood. In Cambridge dictionary, the verb *still* means *staying in the same position; not moving*. Therefore, utterance (3) presupposes *We were moving in the wrong direction before. We are still moving towards the wrong direction now.*

The common ground of utterance (3) is *There is a wrong direction*. The 'wrong direction' refers to the action of tackling climate change

nowadays. Greta assumes there are still no valid action regarding climate change. She is skeptical that what world leaders are doing currently, will solve climate crisis. In her previous speech Thunberg stated:

“Our hopes and dreams drowned in their empty words and promises. Of course, we need constructive dialogue. But they've now had 30 years of blah, blah, blah, and where has that led us?” (Thunberg, 2021).

Agreeing with Thunberg's notion, the largest environmental organization in Indonesia, WALHI (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia) stated that COP 26 which took place in Glasgow did not succeed to meet their initial goal. The target was to keep the earth's temperature from exceeding the 1.5 degrees threshold Celsius.

Data 4

(4) *They continue opening up brand new coal mines, oil fields and pipelines, pretending to have ambitious climate policies.*

Utterance (4) is classified as non-factive presupposition because it uses uncertain word like *pretend*. Yule (1996) stated that non-factive presupposition is one that is assumed not to be true. Verbs like *dream*, *imagine*, and *pretend* are used with the presupposition that what follows is not true. In Cambridge dictionary, the verb *pretend* means *to behave as if something is true when it is not*. Thus, the presupposition of utterance (4) is *They don't have ambitious climate policies.*

The common ground of utterance (4) is *There are climate policies that are considered ambitious*. Those 'ambitious climate policies' refer to the Paris Agreement.

With the adoption of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) an ambitious agenda for mitigating climate change, fostering human development and protecting the biosphere has been set by the international community (Soergel, et al., 2021).

In the Paris agreement, each country has been advised to set ambitious targets to deal with the threat of climate change impacts. However, according to Lam, Harper, & Dodd (2021), several reports have been found that the promises made by countries on climate action (called Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs) are not ambitious enough to meet the Paris Agreement.

Furthermore, reporting to the page Merdeka.com, many countries have announced their ambitious targets to reduce emissions in order to tackle climate change. According to observers, recent announcements from several countries such as China confirmed their plan not to build coal-fired power plants abroad and the US, European Union, and other countries. They also stated that they will reduce methane emissions by 30 percent by 2030. This is proof that progress is being made. However, observers also said there are still major challenges to face. For example, the UK pledged to reduce as much as 78 percent of its emissions by 2035, but the government's latest plan is projected to deliver less than a quarter of the cuts needed to achieve that target.

Data 5

(5) *If this is what they consider to be climate action, then we don't want it.*

Utterance (5) is classified as a counterfactual presupposition because it uses the word *if*. The conditional *if* indicates something which is contrary to facts. According to Yule (1996), in counterfactual presupposition what is presupposed is not true. It is the opposite of what is true, or 'contrary to fact'. Thus, the

presupposition of utterance (5) is *There is climate action. People do not want the climate action.*

The common ground of utterance (5) is *There is climate action, but people do not approve of it.* Utterance (5) shows Thunberg's disappointment towards the climate action that is being carried out by the world's governments today. As Bir (2021) stated; *Speaking at a Youth4Climate meeting in Italy, the teen ripped politicians for not doing much.* Greta claimed that the world's governments only give words that sound great but have no real action.

"Words that sound great, but so far have led to no action. Our hopes and dreams drowned in their empty words and promises" (Thunberg, 2021).

At the end of her speech, Thunberg stated: *"We want real climate action, and we want climate justice"* (Thunberg, 2021).

Data 6

(6) *What do we want?*

Utterance (6) is classified as a structural presupposition because it is an interrogative sentence. The presupposition of this utterance is *We want something*. In structural presupposition, certain sentence structures have been analyzed as conventionally and regularly presupposing that part of the structure is already assumed to be true. For example, the *wh-* question is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that the information after the *wh-* form (i.e. 'when' and 'where') is already known to be the case (Yule, 1996).

The common ground of utterance (6) is *There is something that we want*. Something that we (Greta and the listeners) want is climate justice. As emphasized by Thunberg:

"And we, we the people, we want a safe future. We want real climate action, and we want climate justice. Did you hear me? What do we want?"

[Crowd calls back, "Climate justice!"]

When do we want it?

[Crowd calls back, "Now!"]”

Quoting from *Down To Earth Indonesia* page, climate justice itself means that there is a fair solution to climate change that is based on the rights, needs, participation, and agreement of the communities who deal with the biggest impacts of climate change or who will be affected by mitigation efforts.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results of this study reveal that the meaning of presuppositions and common ground in Thunberg's speech are related to the tackling of climate change by world leaders. From 13 utterances, 6 presuppositions types are found. The most dominant presupposition used in Greta Thunberg's Speech on the Youth4Climate conference 2021 is existential presupposition. This is due to the need to find concrete solutions for climate change.

REFERENCES

- Ariyanti, H. (2021, September 29). *Greta Thunberg Kecam Pemimpin Dunia: 30 Tahun Bla Bla Bla*. Retrieved July 10, 2022, from Merdeka.com: <https://www.merdeka.com>
- Bir, B. (2021, September 30). *'Blah, blah, blah' goes viral after Greta Thunberg's speech in Italy*. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from Anadolu Agency: <https://www.aa.com.tr>
- Britton, B. (2019, December 11). *Greta Thunberg labeled a 'brat' by Brazilian President*
- Jair Bolsonaro. Retrieved June 11, 2022, from CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com>
- Down To Earth Indonesia. (n.d.). *Beranda: Keadilan iklim*. Retrieved May 1, 2022, from Down To Earth Indonesia: <https://www.downtoearth-indonesia.org>
- Fourment, T. (n.d.). *What is the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?* Retrieved August 2, 2022, from WMO for YOUTH: <https://youth.wmo.int>
- Lam, S., Harper, S., & Dodd, W. (2021, October 26). *COP26: Bagaimana dunia mengukur kemajuan aksi iklim Perjanjian Paris dan memastikan akuntabilitas setiap negara*. Retrieved May 6, 2022, from The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com>
- Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Nugrahani, F. (2014). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif dalam Penelitian Pendidikan Bahasa*. Surakarta: Cakra Books.
- Siagian, R. O., Pangaribuan, R. E., & Toruan, F. (2015). An Analysis Of Types Of Presupposition In Time Magazine Advertisement. *The Episteme Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 1(3), 230-244.
- Soergel, B., Kriegler, E., Bodirsky, B. L., Bauer, N., Leimbach, M., & Popp, A. (2021). Combining ambitious climate policies with efforts to eradicate poverty. *Nature Communications*, 1-12.
- Uechi, J. (2021, September 28). *Greta Thunberg's speech at Youth4Climate hits hard at 'empty words and promises'*. Retrieved March 25, 2022, from Canada's National Observer: <https://www.nationalobserver.com>

UNFCCC. (n.d.). *Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)*. Retrieved August 2, 2022, from United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Web site: <https://unfccc.int>

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.