

## Presuppositions of Social Activism in Marcus Rashford's Open Letter

Alya Zasha Khalisa<sup>1</sup>, Widyastuti<sup>2</sup>  
Universitas Negeri Surabaya  
[alya.19045@mhs.unesa.ac.id](mailto:alya.19045@mhs.unesa.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

### Article History:

First Received:  
11/12/2022

Final Revision:  
20/12/2022

Available online:  
31/12/2022

**Abstract.** This study analyzed the presuppositions in Marcus Rashford's open letter to the UK government regarding free school meals for children all over UK during the outbreak of Covid-19. His open letter is an essential part of social activism in a changing society. It was written with enthusiasm, optimism, and positivity for a new future. The study is conducted to fill the gap between the previous studies since no research has analyzed an open letter before. This study used Yule's theory (1996) of presuppositions and Cutting (2002) to analyze the data found in the letter. The results of the study found that the open letter used four kinds of presuppositions, which is existential, factive, lexical, and counterfactual presuppositions. Rashford was able to provide the audience with new data as an addition to the material they already knew by utilizing those presuppositions. Additionally, it refutes a common misconception. In this case, the UK government's stance is successfully influenced.

**Keywords:** *presupposition, open letter, social activism*

<http://jos.unsoed.ac.id/index.php/jes>

### INTRODUCTION

Standing for human rights whenever, wherever, and at whichever level is a powerful form of activism. One of the people who played a big role in it is the great Muhammad Ali. He refused to be drafted into the United States Army in 1966, claiming his Islamic beliefs and how the war's cause did not correspond with them. Due to his remarks, he was arrested, and his boxing license was canceled (DAZN, 2021). Ali's action reflects social activism, which is an individual's decision to participate in society (Brenman and Sanchez, 2014). In this case, it is not social activism if participation is forced or compelled. Confronting existing power, authority, or "the way things are" is a common feature of social activism.

However, social activism is frequently misinterpreted by many (Taib, 2006). To avoid misinterpretation, activists who intend to promote activism need to have the same understanding as the ones they want to engage with. The understanding should be able to be conveyed through communication. Before producing a speech, in a communication, speakers would assume a presupposition as an event (Yule, 1996). One can recognize the statement as information that is understood correctly and will be connected with its knowledge. The presupposition is in the form of a speaker's saying that the speech partner can know the person or object being discussed. The speech partner will understand or recognize something that the speaker communicates.

Presuppositions, according to Griffiths (2006) are the shared underlying assumptions that people take for granted during a communication. These are significant in pragmatics because they are necessary for connecting discourse. Background presuppositions are also an excellent place to start for a reader or listener who wants to know what the message's author thinks is important. People who are well acquainted can form entirely correct ideas of what assumptions they share. It is, however, more challenging to determine which portions of that information the other person is considering at any given time throughout a communicative interaction. A presupposition is sometimes used to refer to a specific type of inference described in this section. In addition, presupposition deals with the truth-value in the utterance. The true value is based on what is happening in the language and the world. Katz in Sopha (2020) said that the truth of a sentence's presupposition must flow from the statement's truth. Still, if the presupposition is false, the statement has no truth value, meaning it is neither true nor false. The presupposition must be true if the sentence is false.

Yule (1996) classified presuppositions into six types, they are existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural, and counterfactual presupposition. The symbol (>>) stands for "presupposes" in presuppositions.

An existential presupposition is a form of presupposition in which the objective is to assume the existence of someone or something. It is identified by using a noun phrase and possessive construction. For example, *Kai has a new shirt* >> The new shirt exists because Kai bought it.

Then, the form of the presupposition that demonstrates a fact is known as a factive presupposition. It can be seen in terms like know, glad, be aware, regret, and realize, which can be viewed as facts. In this case, the speaker persuades the addressee to believe what he or she is saying. For example, *we know that Kubo is a Japanese footballer* >> Kubo is a Japanese footballer. In this example, the speaker strives to inform the reader about Kubo.

In contrast with factive presupposition, the non-factive presupposition is associated with some verbs that assume not to be true. Such verbs are: imagine, pretend, and dream. Those are used to presuppose that something is not valid. For example, *Erika pretends to be angry* >> Erika is not angry. This example shows that the speaker is not angry.

Next, there is lexical presupposition. In other words, the usage of one form with its declared meaning is typically read with the assumption that additional meanings are possible. For example, *Reno stopped loving Risa* >> Reno used to love Risa. This example shows that 'Reno' was doing something, but 'Reno' stopped doing it now.

Another one is structural presupposition. A structural presupposition is a type of presupposition that is linked to the use of the WH question, which is information obtained after the WH question has already been determined to be true. For example, *where did Nana buy the bracelet?* >> Nana bought a bracelet.

The last one is counterfactual presupposition that gives rise to meaning that is the polar opposite of the facts. When information is not valid at the time of utterance, this kind can be demonstrated using if-clause. For example, *if Joey came here, this would not happen* >> Joey did not come here.

There are several studies done on presuppositions. The first study is conducted by Bahar and Ariyanti (2020) about the types of presupposition and the function used by the previous mayor of Surabaya, Tri Rismaharini, on a television program named *Satu Indonesia*. This study was based on the theory of Yule (1996). It used a descriptive qualitative method and a presupposition pragmatic. This research found that there are four types of presuppositions in the interview which are existential, non-factive, lexical, and counterfactual presuppositions. Furthermore, those presuppositions have three pragmatic functions: emphasis, persuasive, and euphemism.

The next study was conducted by Devi (2020) concerning pragmatic presuppositions in Youtube advertisement. For the method, it employs mostly a qualitative design with some descriptive quantification. This study adopts the presupposition triggers' classification by Khaleel (2010) with some adjustments. From the investigation, it is found that there are seven types of triggers in the advertisements analyzed; they are existential (definite description), lexical (conventional items and iterative), and structural (questions, adverbial clauses, comparative constructions, and non-restrictive clauses). Existential presuppositions were the most frequent ones, which can be used to notify viewers that their product exists and drive their curiosity in purchasing the advertised products.

Auliawanti and Parmawati (2020) also examined presupposition in President Erdogan's message in the form of a speech. The qualitative descriptive method was used as the research methodology in this study. In this case, the theory of Yule (1996) was used to analyze the group of presuppositions. This study showed that there are 30 utterances with three sorts of presuppositions: existential, lexical, and functional, with existential presupposition dominating.

Another study was conducted by Khalili (2017) which investigated *Heart of Darkness*, a short novel. In collecting the data, it employed non-participant observation as a method of data collection. This study also used Yule's theory (1996). It provides insight to the readers on presupposition as a pragmatic study. Moreover, the result found that existential presuppositions were most used in this study.

Lastly, the use of presuppositions was also studied in the communication between a student and a lecturer through WhatsApp by Ariyanti, Damanhuri, Wedawati, and Khoiri (2020). As a means of explanation, the qualitative method was used and the theory of Yule (1996) was used. The result showed that the presuppositions used by the lecturers are 39 presuppositions (12 existential, three factive, 16 lexical, six structurals, and two non-factive).

This current study deals with Marcus Rashford's open letter. Marcus Rashford is a professional footballer who plays as a forward for the national team of England and Manchester United Football Club (Manchester United FC Ltd, n.d.). Just like Muhammad Ali who took a part in social activism by refusing to be drafted into the US Army, Rashford's open letter is an essential part of social activism in a changing society. His letter was issued with anticipation, jubilation, and fresh hope for a future. Rashford's statements are highly anticipated and crucial for the public, the black community, and all those who support him to make a change for society. Thus, Rashford's open letter is one-of-a-kind in a variety of ways. His acts and inactions as a black English footballer draw the attention of a wide range of individuals. Rashford was regarded as a hero who represented the 'people' (Whittingham, 2020). Every word that Rashford delivered in his open letter holds important messages about social activism to combat the UK's child hunger. Hence, Rashford's open letter became the object of this study, focusing on examining the social activism through pragmatic presuppositions.

Unlike previous research, this study examined the presuppositions on Marcus Rashford's open letter. According to BBC Online (2015), an open letter is addressed to the general public or a specific person, such as a politician, but published in a public forum such as a major newspaper or a social media. It is also letter which is intended to be read by many people, not only the person to whom it is addressed (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Furthermore, an open letter itself is one of the letter types, which is also under the branch of non-fiction texts, texts based on facts (BBC Online, 2017).

This study will help to reveal the types of presuppositions used by Marcus Rashford in his open letter. Moreover, it will also be able to reveal the underlying meanings of the presuppositions used by Marcus Rashford in his open letter. The study is conducted to fill the gap between the previous studies, since no research has analyzed an open letter before. Furthermore, it is also due to presuppositions being inferences about what is assumed in an utterance rather than directly asserted. It can be drawn even when there is little or no surrounding context.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research focused on forming descriptive information in the shape of a person's written sentences, which was analyzed and it is known as qualitative method. This research used qualitative methods, which illustrate a distinctive method to scholarly analysis than quantitative research methods (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). It builds on the data of texts and images, has different data analysis steps, and draws on various designs.

The source of the data is from a Rashford's open letter that was taken from a Twitter post which was posted on Rashford's official Twitter account, @MarcusRashford, back on June 15, 2020 (Twitter, 2020). This research data are the written sentences obtained from Marcus Rashford's open letter to the UK government.

The data are collected in a document analysis technique wherein social activism is analyzed in this research. The study's document is an open letter with written sentences as its content. As for the research instrument, it is the observation

checklist consists of sentences that contain presupposition triggers in Marcus Rashford's open letter.

The presupposition data analysis was classified in accordance with Yule's (1996) theory, according to which presuppositions were chosen by triggers. A presupposition that is triggered by a word or sentence structure is meant to be background knowledge that is believed to be understood by the addressee (Griffiths, 2006). By highlighting the presuppositional utterance triggers, the data were classified into presuppositions. Every utterance contains a presupposition that is dependent on the triggers.

The data obtained are then classified according to the types of presuppositions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The presuppositions used in Marcus Rashford's open letter are discussed below. The analysis draws on associative endophora by Cutting (2002) and the theory of cohesion by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), which depends in part on background knowledge of the cultural or interpersonal context inside the presuppositional pool as well as knowledge of what came before or later in the same text.

For this study, the concept of social activism is adopted from Brenman and Sanchez (2014), which describes social activism as getting engaged with others in working together to make a difference in society. The term "social" refers to both "society" and the notion that activism encourages participation. It demonstrates an individual decision to participate in society. People often decide to participate in social activism because of morals. Social responsibility thoughts are frequently shared between them. Some activists put their actions on their personal relationship, while others think they were born with a psychological tendency for social justice activism. As for Rashford, in the open letter he wrote, he refers to his activism actions to two themes, they are: a) Rashford's childhood; and b) fresh hope for the future of the UK children.

### a) Rashford's Childhood

Inside the letter, Rashford describes his personal experience of having to struggle with life and his relation with free school meals as a child, emphasizing how much they supported his family using presuppositions triggers.

- 1) "*My story* to get here is all-too-familiar for families in England: my mum worked full-time, earning minimum wage to make sure we always had a good evening meal on the table."
- 2) "*The system* was not built for families like mine to succeed, regardless of how hard my mum worked."

Data 1 and 2 displayed the use of existential presuppositions with *my story* and *the system* as the triggers to show the existence of them. In datum 1, Rashford clarified that he also had a story similar to families in England. His statement suggested that the families who struggle in England are just like his family back in the days, where the parents would work hard while only receiving the minimum pay to ensure that their children had a satisfying supper. Rashford, in datum 2, also used the presupposition to tell the addressees that there was a system in the UK that did not

help many families to succeed, including his own family. He implied from the familiarity of his story to the present day, that the issue has been there for a long time and it has not changed. The two presuppositions indicated Rashford is having his personal relationship from his childhood absorbed to his action of issuing an open letter for the UK government, which portrayed social activism.

- 3) "It's only now that I really *understand* the enormous sacrifice my mum made in sending me away to live in digs aged 11, a decision no mother would ever make lightly."

Datum 3 showed the use of factive presupposition with *understand* as the trigger to refer to a fact. Rashford presupposed that by sending him to live away from home at the age of 11, his mother had made a huge sacrifice. The present day's issue made him realize that. Furthermore, he emphasized again that the problem had always existed, but that the pandemic had made it worse. How Rashford deals with his childhood experience here, and how that helped him realize about an issue of child hunger in the UK, is one aspect about social activism.

- 4) "We *relied* on breakfast clubs, free school meals, and the kind actions of neighbours and coaches."

In datum 4, *relied* is categorized as lexical presupposition since this expression was used to presuppose unstated concept. The concept is that when Rashford was a child, his family *used to rely* on breakfast clubs, free school meals, and the kindness of his neighbors and coaches to live. Without the help from those people, he would not be able to survive as the UK government did not do enough to help him and many other children. This, once again, shows how Rashford's childhood experience in the past urged him to take social action.

#### **b) Fresh Hope for the Future of the UK Children**

Rashford used his open letter to the UK government to request that it reconsider its decision to end free school food vouchers. He used presuppositions to illustrate the causes and realities of the poor society.

- 5) "As many of you know, as lockdown hit and schools were temporarily closed, I partnered with food distribution charity *FareShare* to help cover some of the free school meal deficit."
- 6) "This is about *humanity*."
- 7) *Food poverty* in England is a pandemic that could span generations if we don't course correct now.

In data 5, 6, and 7, the use of existential presuppositions can be seen with the use of triggers such as *FareShare*, *humanity*, *food poverty*. Rashford indicated in data 6 and 7 that there is an issue existing which is about humanity, specifically about food poverty in England. He wanted to highlight how important the issue is. Rashford then clarified, it can be seen in datum 5, that there is a food distribution charity named *FareShare* that partnered with him. Together, they covered up a part of the

deficit in the providing of free school meals. Without his partnership with FareShare, there would not be any help for the free school meal deficit. The main point from those three data is, here, he implicitly urged the government to take on this matter quickly. Because if they do not fix it now, it will only get worse. In this case, by using the existential triggers above to urge the government so that they take an action belongs to social activism as Rashford hoped for a new future.

- 8) “Whilst the campaign is currently distributing 3 million meals a week to those most vulnerable across the UK, I *recognize* it’s just not enough.”
- 9) “I also *know* from talking to people that there is a 2-child-per-family limit, meaning someone like my mum would only have been able to cover the cost of 2 of her 5 children.”
- 10) “I’m *asking* you today to extend that same thinking to protecting all vulnerable children across England.”

In here, *recognize*, *know*, and *asking* are categorized as factive presuppositions as they showed facts. Rashford implied that the UK government did not try enough to protect their people. The campaign he did while partnering with FareShare of providing 3 million meals a week to the most vulnerable people in the UK is not enough. By saying not enough, in datum 8, he suggested that the government needs to do something too. They need to help significantly. Furthermore, in datum 9, Rashford suggested that the policy, Universal Credit scheme, is insufficient for a big family because it has a 2-child-per-family limit. He presupposed that this policy would be unfair for families with more than 2 children. Rashford then used presupposition in datum 10 to imply that the UK government did not protect the vulnerable children. He was asking the UK government to protect all the vulnerable children across England, like how they took extra care of the other things, as they have not done so. Again, the facts Rashford showed by using the triggers were that he demanded the UK government to make a change, which was an act of social activism.

- 11) “I would be doing myself, my family and my community an injustice *if* I didn’t stand here today with my voice and my platform and ask you for help.”

In datum 11 above, the *if*-clause used was the trigger for counterfactual presupposition which leads in meaning that is opposite with the facts. Rashford urged the UK government to protect all the vulnerable children across England. He presupposed that without doing all of this, he will disrespect all of the people who had helped him back in the days when he was just a poor kid. The presupposition used there showed that Rashford’s decision is his individual decision to get involved in society and change it for the better.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Marcus Rashford’s open letter presupposes his miserable childhood and his hope for a new future for the UK children. The theme of Rashford’s childhood consist of three presuppositions, they are existential, factive, and lexical. As for the theme of fresh hope for the future of the UK children, it consists

of three presuppositions also, which consist of existential, factive, and counterfactual presuppositions. The use of all the presuppositions in his open letter, which he used to critique the UK's child hunger were connected to his personal interactions and life experiences. Importantly, it influenced the stance of the addressee, which is in this case, the stance of the UK government.

## REFERENCES

- Ariyanti, L., Damanhuri, A., Wedawati, M. T., & Khoiri, M. (2020). Presupposition Used by the Student and the Lecturer. *Proceedings of the International Joint Conference on Arts and Humanities*, 491(IJCAH), 903–906. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201201.151>
- Auliawanti, R. N., & Parmawati, A. (2020). Presupposition of President Erdogan's Message in Human Rights Day on December 10, 2018. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 3(5), 607. <https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v3i5.p607-613>
- Bahar, R. F., & Ariyanti, L. (2020). Presuppositions in Satu Indonesia Television Program Interview. *LITERA KULTURA*, 8(1), 1–7.
- BBC Online. (2015). Letter - Non-fiction Text Types. Retrieved June 2, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z2t3rdm/revision/4>
- BBC Online. (2017). Non-fiction Texts. Retrieved June 2, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zqtwbnk/revision/1>
- Brennan, M., & Sanchez, T. W. (2014). Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-being Research. In *Connecting the Quality of Life Theory to Health, Well-being and Education: The Selected Works of Alex C. Michalos* (pp. 335–346). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51161-0\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51161-0_16)
- Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). Open Letter. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from Cambridge Dictionary website: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/open-letter>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Fifth Edit). California: SAGE Publications.
- Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and Discourse - A Resource Book for Students*. New York: Routledge.
- DAZN. (2021). "Be Like Ali": Muhammad Ali's life of activism and his continuing impact. Retrieved June 2, 2022, from <https://www.dazn.com/en-US/news/boxing/be-like-ali-muhammad-alis-life-of-activism-and-his-continuing-impact/vg6wtp4qmhgm1cohda5xfw8z7>
- Devi, A. P. (2020). Depicting Pragmatic Presuppositions in Youtube Advertisements. *Journal of English Pedagogy, Linguistics, Literature, and Teaching*, 8(02), 2338–3739. Retrieved from <https://jurnal.unsur.ac.id/jeopallt>
- Griffiths, P. (2006). An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics. In *Edinburgh University Press Ltd*.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Third Edit; Hodder Education Publishers, Ed.).
- Khaleel, L. M. (2010). An Analysis of Presupposition Triggers in English Journalistic Texts. *Journal Of College Of Education For Women*, 21(2), 523–551.
- Khalili, E. (2017). An analysis of Presupposition Used in Heart of Darkness. *Scinzer Journal of Humanities*, 3(2), 83–87.

- Manchester United FC Ltd. (n.d.). Marcus Rashford. Retrieved May 21, 2021, from Official Manchester United Website website: <https://www.manutd.com/en/players-and-staff/detail/marcus-rashford>
- Sopha, D. (2020). Presupposition and Its Truth Relations. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 5(1), 29–33. <https://doi.org/10.32696/jp2bs.v5i1.403>
- Taib, M. I. M. (2006). (de)Meaning of Social Activism. *Karyawan Magazine*, 7(1), 1–6.
- Twitter. (2020). Marcus Rashford on Twitter. Retrieved December 10, 2022, from <https://twitter.com/MarcusRashford/status/1272302819819823105?s=20&t=AKZ6G7whKW6LresYGOBqHA>
- Whittingham, S. (2020). Marcus Rashford: Man Utd star a “hero” in Wythenshawe. Retrieved December 10, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-53065947>
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.