CHALIMBANA UNIVERSITY

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

ELE 3100: ENGLISH SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

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Introduction

This is a compulsory course that is offered in third year. It begins with looking at concepts used in Semantics and Pragmatics. Semantic approaches and principles are then discussed. The course encompass figurative language, sense and reference, inference, predicators, thematic roles and sense relations at semantics level to help bring up meaning of other notions. At pragmatics level, the concepts of conversational implicature, politeness, tact, deixis and thematic roles are discussed in order to give students the idea of contextual effect.

Rationale

This course aims will offer students of language informed knowledge on semantic theory and pragmatic principles that will equip the students with skills of semantic representation and pragmatic interpretation. Pragmatics as a programme of study develops out of the desire to properly explain the nature of language and how it works in the context of people and situations.

Aim

The aim of this course is to present students with the essentials of English semantics and complex analysis of issues of communication. It also aims to demonstrate the various ways speakers or communicators mean in different social contexts illustrate how grammatical elements may assume new meanings in some definite situations and how language may be viewed as performing actions.

Course Outcomes

At the end of this course, the students will be expected to:

- trace the development of linguistic semantics
- highlight the scope and concepts of linguistic semantics
- explore the nature and meaning of English semantics
- identify different types of meaning explain the different theories of meaning
- the major thrust in the various approaches to the study of semantics
- discuss the sense relations in the study of words
- demonstrate understanding of the concepts used in Semantics and Pragmatics

- describe the relationship between semantics and pragmatics
- Discuss at least one theory of pragmatics and how it has enabled you to understand better the functions of language in the context of people and situations
- Apply the knowledge gained to communicate effectively in different social contexts, especially applying such concepts as politeness, indirectly speech act or indexical in social communication
- Describe the influence of the context comprising social assumptions, values, conventions or world view on speakers and hearers
- Explain such concepts as speech acts, politeness, conversational principles or implicature.
- show how deixis works in English language
- utilise semantic theories in the study meaning

Summary of module

ELE 3100 – English Semantics and Pragmatics is a compulsory course for students majoring and those taking English language as a minor. The course is divided into two components; Semantics and Pragmatics and first deals with Semantics then Pragmatics. At semantic level, the course deals with the study of meaning of language. The central function of language is communication. Without the sharing of meaning, there is no communication. Since semantics concentrates on the study of meaning, the course is critical to success in English and indeed, any other language. At Pragmatic level, the course deals with the study of language use in interpersonal communication. It is concerned with the choices made by speakers and the options and constraints which apply in social interaction. It examines the effects of language use on participants in acts of communication. Pragmatics is closely related to semantics, the study of meaning, with which it is often associated, hence Semantic and Pragmatics.

Study Skills

As an adult learner your approach to learning will be different to that from your school days: you will choose what you want to study, you will have professional and/or personal motivation for doing so and you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic **responsibilities.**

Essentially you will be taking control of your learning environment. As a consequence, you will need to consider performance issues related to time management, goal setting, stress management, etc. Perhaps you will also need to reacquaint yourself in areas such as essay planning, coping with exams and using the web as a learning resource.

Your most significant considerations will be *time* and *space* i.e. the time you dedicate to your learning and the environment in which you engage in that learning.

We recommend that you take time now - before starting your self-study - to familiarize yourself with these issues. There are a number of excellent resources on the web.

Time frame

This part of the course is to be covered in the period of **3** months. You will be expected to spend at least 18 contact hours with the lecturer and 60 hours of self-study

Course material

The main course materials in this course are:

- Study units
- Text books
- Dictionaries & Charts
- Pre-recorded Radio lessons
- DVDs

Need help (contacts)

If you should need help, you can contact email **jimaimahandili@gmail.com** You may also see us physically at the Chalimbana Literature and Languages department.

Recommended readings

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. London: Oxford University Press

Cook, G. (1989). Discourse (Language Teaching: A scheme for Teacher Education)." Paperback, 1st Edition

Cook, G. (1989). Discourse. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crystal, D. (1989). *The Encyclopaedia of Language*. New York: CUP.

Hurford, J and Heasley. B. (1983). *Semantics: a course book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Leech, G. (1983) *The Principles of Pragmatics*. London: New York

Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Riemer, N. (2010). Introducing Semantics. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Yule, G. (1996). *The Study of Language: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Assessment

Assessment	Percentage
Continuous Assessment	**50%**
One Assignment	25%
One Test	25%
Final exam	**50%**
Final Mark	**100%**

UNIT 1 Definition of Semantics

Introduction

Semantics simply implies the study of how meaning in language is produced or created. Semantics encompasses how words, phrases and sentences come together to make meaning in language. The term semantics simply means the study of meanings. It has been the subject of discourse for many years by philosophers and other scholars but later was introduced formally in literature in the late 1800s. Hence, we have philosophical semantics, linguistic semantics among other varieties of semantics. For the purpose of the present discourse, we shall be focusing on the development and nature of semantics. Hence, we shall be learning the definition and beginnings of linguistic semantics.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, you should be able to;

- define and explain the meaning of semantics
- discuss the beginnings of linguistic semantics.

1.1 The Concept of Semantics

Semantics is an area of linguistics that deals with the meaning of words or indeed the meaning attached to words or symbols. This view of semantics places it at the centre of communication in language. Indeed, there is no communication without the sharing of meaning.

1.2 The Definition of Semantics

Even though the quest for the understanding of meaning has always been of interest to scholars, semantics was not mentioned as a term and did not appear in literature until 1897 when it was first used by Breal. And so, semantics as a term was first formally used by Breal in 1897. Breal is therefore believed to have been the first to bring to the fore in a formally acceptable way, the nature of meaning in language. It is this first attempt to study meanings by philosophers brought about the area of semantics called philosophical semantics, which examines the relationship between linguistic

expressions and the objects they refer to in the external world. Philosophical semantics focuses on examining the conditions under which such linguistic expressions and the objects they refer to are true or false. This can be traced to as far back as Plato and Aristotle's works**.**

The current philosophical semantics, however, can be traced to the works of scholars such as: Rudolf Carnap (1891 - 1970), Alfred Tarski (Born 1902) and Charles Peirce (1839 - 1914). Peirce argues that philosophical semantics developed as Semiotics in America while with the influence of Saussure in France, the term "semiology" was used. However, the idea of truth-based semantics was Tarski's major contribution. Linguistic semantics emphasises the properties of natural languages while pure or logical semantics is the study of the meaning of expressions using logical systems or calculi. Examining semantics in this dimension makes it more mathematically related than linguistic in nature. You ought to note that the discussion of semantics as a branch of linguistics began recently and this shall be our next focus.

1.3 Brief History of Semantics

Alfred Korzybski, who incidentally was a non-linguist, was the first person to attempt studying semantics as a distinct discipline, separate from the discipline of philosophy. He was so passionate about introducing a generally acceptable science of communication. Note that before the works of Korzybski, semantics was being looked at from a non-scientific perspective. The works of Korzybski were the first formal attempt at bringing in a scientific model to the study of semantics.

In his studies, Korzybski started by describing all entities and realities by assigning labels to them. He went further to group the names into three. He had names for common objects such as chair, stone, cow and so on. He also had labels for groups and collections like nations, animals, people and so on. Korzybski's third group of labels is that of highly abstract entities which do not have identifiable referents in the outside world. This group of labels, therefore, does not lend itself to the assignment of concrete reality.

The abstract labels according to Korzybski are only assignable to concrete realities by imagination. Such labels include freedom, love, and democracy and many others.

They feature in aesthetics, philosophy and politics. The case of abstract labels is not the same with common objects since, as can be observed, there seems to be a direct correspondence between items in the outside world and linguistic expressions. There is therefore a challenge in the perception of abstract labels.

The main challenge with abstract labels derives from the fact that meaning does not have an objective reference in reality because different people will react to different words differently. For instance, the word ***"love"*** would be interpreted differently by different people as a result of their circumstance or present reality. One person who probably is in a loving relationship will interpret it positively while another in an unfulfilled relationship will interpret it negatively. Hence, their reactions will be different and will therefore stir up different emotions from them.

Two other scholars, Odgen and Richards came very close to the analysis of meaning by combining philosophical processes and linguistic methodologies. How did they do this? They introduced the concept "referent" to describe the physical object or situation which the word identifies in the real world. They pointed out that the representation or situation should be seen as a referent while the actual pronunciation or orthographic representation will constitute the symbol. For example, the figure or silhouette of an adult female human being will be the referent while the word used to describe the referent will constitute the symbol. The symbol is similar to Korzybski's concept of label.

Since the world is dynamic, the study of semantics has not been left out. One of such areas that have remained dynamic among others is the concept of change in meaning. Semantics has been at the fore in the study of change in meaning. As early as 1933, Bloomfield observed a system of change in the meaning of words. Instances of change in meaning of words overtime:

Meat used to represent all types of food. Bitter derives from the metaphor of biting
The meaning of astound derives from the weakened meaning of thunder The meaning of knight has been an elevation of the concept of boy The word "money" relates to the Latin word *moneo* (warn) or admonish because money was made in Rome at the temple of the goddess, Junto Moneta Tanks in modern warfare derived their names

from the 1914 –1918 war in which the Germans were deceived into believing that the structures being moved around were just water tanks The modern word “car” originated from the word “chariot

Etymology, which focuses on the discovery of the origin and earlier meanings of words, also played an important role in earlier studies in semantics. However, it should be noted that there is a challenge with etymological studies. The major one being that no one can state with certainty the origin of the meaning of any word.

1.4 Conclusion

In this unit, we have tried to explain the concept of semantics as the study of how words, phrases and sentences come together to create meaning in language. We have also tried to examine the history of semantics from its first appearance in literature and the contributions of scholars like Breal, Bloomfield and Korzybski among others.

Reflection

In your opinion, is the definition of semantics adequately provided? Are there other definitions of your own that you can provide? Try to bring out some.

Activity

1. Provide an elaborate definition of Semantics
2. Give a brief history of semantics
3. Is possible to pin down with certainty the origin of word meaning?

UNIT 2 THE SCOPE OF SEMANTICS

2.0 Introduction

It is hoped that you have noted that semantics originates from philosophy and that earlier scholars in philosophical semantics concentrated on pointing out the relationship between linguistic expressions and identified phenomena in the external world. The purpose of this course is to emphasise on linguistic semantics – with interest on the properties of natural languages. So, this unit wishes you to see how linguistic semantics relates to other disciplines. The unit shall also examine the nature of linguistic semantics, the semantic/pragmatic interface and major concerns of semantics.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, you should be able to;

- state the scope of semantics
- describe the nature of semantics
- explain how semantics relates to other discipline
- discuss the main areas of focus in semantics
- discuss the semantics/pragmatic interface
- describe the semantic/pragmatic boundary
- state the main concerns of semantics

2.1 The Nature of Semantics

In semantics, we study the meaning of words and sentences of languages. You must note that linguistic semantics studies meaning in an objective and systematic way. You will also note that a great deal of the idea of meaning still depends on the context and interlocutors in the act of communication because meaning as a concept is not static.

Reality has demonstrated that there is a strong association that exists between meaning and communication. The term communication as used here refers to the exchange or relay of information, message, attitude, feelings or values from one person to another mainly by the use of language. It is often expressed that language is a system, which uses a set of symbols agreed upon by a group. It is hoped that by now

you know that these symbols can be spoken or written, expressed as gestures or drawings.

You must know, as a student of language that to convey meaning, the symbols employed in language cannot just be combined anyhow but must be patterned in a systematic way.

Any natural language is organised at four principal levels – sounds (that is phonetics/phonology), words (that is morphology), sentences (that is syntax) and meaning (that is semantics). Indeed, phonology and syntax are concerned with the expressive power of language while semantics studies the meaning of what has been expressed.

Much as the knowledge of grammar is an aspect of the innate cognitive ability of human beings, the power of interpretation complements that innate ability. Interpretation is an aspect of semantics. Therefore, language acquisition or learning includes not only the knowledge of the organisation of sounds and structures, but also how to associate meaning to the structures. Semantics can, therefore, be characterised as the scientific study of meaning in language.

2.2 Semantics and Pragmatics Interface

Grice suggests that there is an apparent division of labour between semantics and pragmatics in terms of saying and implicating. Semantics and pragmatics are both involving sophisticated methods of studying meaning with different focuses where semantics focuses on the relation between signifiers, such as words, phrases, signs and symbols, and what they stand for, their denotata while pragmatics studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning. The key issue is whether their objects to be analyzed can be separated from each other or if each sub-discipline can give one individual object called ‘meaning’.

Semantics was conventionally responsible for compositionally deduced sentence meaning, in which there is a combination of the meanings of lexical items and the structure involved. Unquestionably, the truth-conditional semantics is the best developed approach to sentence meaning. It appears that such formal methods allow

the translation of vague and ambiguous sentences of natural language into a precise metalanguage of predicate logic with the provision of sense-making logical forms.

Pragmatics was recognized as a study of utterance intended meaning, and so it is the meaning in context, and was hence undertaking with a different aspect of field to be studied. It was also regarded as a separate enterprise with different object of study.

2.2.1 Semantics - Pragmatics Boundary

Rajman (2007) points out that the boundary between semantics and pragmatics is very critical in view of the constraint of linguistic processes. Traditionally, semantics is in charge of conventional or lexical, i.e. unavoidable meanings, as entailment and meaning are supposed to have (for example, Paul killed Peter, therefore, Peter is dead). And, pragmatics has taken charge of meaning in context in relation to conversational implicatures, which is presumably nonconventional.

2.2.2 Communication at the Semantics / Pragmatics Interface

In pragmatics, a speaker can express a thought without really putting it into words. He can say one thing but may mean something else. To communicate something to someone, the speaker has to make clear the utterance even if it does not convey what he intends to express. The hearer has a task of understanding the speaker to the extent that he has to recognize the communicative intention of the speaker in producing the utterance and in particular, to identify the meaning of speaker. The hearer also needs to figure out what has happened in the given situation that the speaker spoke that sentence with that meaning.

In Semantics, a capable hearer grasps the semantic contents of a sentence by understanding that the language acts as a function of its constituents in relation to syntactic structure. Bach (2010) suggests that there should not be any intermediate level of meaning existing between the semantic contents of a sentence and the speaker's communicative intention in uttering it. Rather, the speaker's act of uttering that sentence may invoke additional information to help the hearer understand its contents.

2.2.3 Semantics and other Related Disciplines

Having read unit one, you must recall that philosophy has been linked to the earliest postulation about meaning. This is not the only discipline with which semantics shares relations, but there are still other disciplines that are relevant to semantics. There is a very strong relation for example, between semantics and logic- a branch of philosophy. Logical systems are known to show coherent and consistent models for evaluating thought. Thus, logical postulations are the ideal but may not always reflect the real world in matters of language.

Semantics is also related to sociology and anthropology because of the connection that lies between language and culture. The whole essence of cultural relevance in language substantiates the reliance on context for the meaning of expressions. Of particular interest to semantics is the complex system of kinship terms and colour expressions.

Another discipline that semantics is related to is psychology. This can be explained firstly from the fact that humans are able to tell the distinction between deep and surface meaning of any given structure and secondly from the fact that the human brain has the power of to generate many paraphrases of a single structure. Undeniably, the mentalistic approach to meaning and language use in the tradition of generative grammar is a psychological issue. Furthermore, the approaches adopted by behavioural semantics in the stimulus – response connection in meaning are a purely psychological affair.

A relationship also exists between semantics and communication theory. You should be aware of the fact that information is carried and processed in the communication system passing through the channel and the medium. The minimalisation of noise and the processing of feedback are aspects of the communication system. These are achieved by ensuring logical thinking.

2.3 Major Concerns of Semantics

Semantics is associated with different issues related to meaning including naming, concept, sense and reference. Naming as a semantic process derives from the understanding that words are names or labels for things. The major problem with this naming view of semantics is that, it is only nouns and nominal expressions that can be analysed semantically. In addition, abstract nouns like love, hatred, truth will be difficult to explain since they are not living things.

There is a red bull in the park
This will have meaning, only if there is a red bull in a particular park.
Thus, sentences that are lies may not be interpreted.

Concepts mediate between the mind constructs and objects in the real world. Saussure's sign theory and Ogden and Richards, semantic triangle derives from the conceptual approach to semantics. The approach stresses the ability of the mind to create images and to associate these images to objects and ideas. The approach is highly mentalistic, relying on the ability to associate one thing with another. This ability of association may not yield universal understanding. That explains why language experts develop dictionaries to aggregate meaning on a universal basis. Interestingly, the production of dictionaries relies heavily on denotations and connotations, two major angles to the study of meaning.

Reference relates to things, people and events in the world. It is the object or entity to which a linguistic expression relates or refers to. Thus, the referent of the word ***"student"*** is a human being called student these notions will be discussed in detail. However, there is a limitation to the idea of reference. Take for example if meaning were restricted to reference, many words without obvious referents would be left out. It would be difficult to explain the meaning of prepositions, conjunctions and other grammatical units. Not only that, several linguistic expressions only relate to single referents. To avoid these limitations, semanticists use the words denotation and connotation to distinguish between meaning based on ostensiveness (that is, pointing) or reference and extension.

Another interesting area of concern for semantics is sense. Sense explains the system of linguistic relationships, which a lexical item contracts with others. If that relationship is paradigmatic, we have synonymy, antonymic, and so on. However, if the relationship is syntagmatic, we have collocation. The scope of semantics covers a wide range of issues related to meaning.

2.4 Conclusion

It is hoped that you have learnt that semantics is related to a wide range of disciplines because of the general interest in meaning. Precisely, semantics has been seen to be relevant to naming, reference and sense. It is also concerned with the interpretation of sentences. You have also been exposed the relationship between semantics and pragmatics and how they can be distinguished.

Reflection

Would say there are other fields with which semantics is related apart from those stated in this unit?

Activity

1. Discuss the major concerns of semantics
2. In which way is semantics related to pragmatics and in which way are they different?

UNIT 3 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF SEMANTICS

3.0 Introduction

You have learnt that the study of meaning in language has been of interest to both the linguists and the philosophers. Because meaning occupies a central position in communication, there have been different perspectives to the study of meaning. This simply means that over the years, different approaches to the study of semantics have emerged. This unit focuses on some of the time-tested approaches to the study of semantics. The unit focuses on four major approaches to the study of semantics. They include traditional, behavioural, structural and generative perspectives.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- highlight different approaches to the study of semantics
- point out the merits and demerits of each of the approaches.

3.1 Traditional Semantics

Traditional semantics is associated with the works of such great philosophers as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle as well as many others who came after them. Their focus was on the nature of human language itself. Based on their views of the nature of human language, these early philosophers were into two – the naturalists and the nurturists. Naturalists believed that language was God-given and as such there was hardly anything anybody could do to understand language. Man was not expected to make alterations, but should concern himself with merely observing and describing the rules of language. The Greek language was perceived to be the chosen language upon which all other languages should be based. Later, Latin became the focus of philosophical analysis.

The nurturists on the other hand viewed language as a social property common to a speech community. Language was therefore perceived to be man's creation for the convenience of communication. Thus, in spite of difference in languages, the uniting point is that they are all for communication.

Traditional semantics was also concerned with the relationship between form and meaning. Following Carnap (1927), Firth (1957) and Ayer (1936), the meaning of a word is actually what it refers to. Ogden and Richards (1933) have also shared this view. There have also been later scholars – Grice (1957) and Katz (1972) who believed that the image of a word takes shape in the speaker's or hearer's mind. Another major view of traditional semantics is that the meaning of a word can be decoded from its shape or sound. Words in this category are onomatopoeic. The major ideas in traditional semantics are reference, concepts, truth conditions, and so on.

3.2 Behavioural Semantics

This approach has been influenced by the works of Watson Bloomfield and Skinner. Idealism or mentalism in traditional semantics looks at meaning as something established in the hearer's or speaker's mind. There is usually a non-physical process of thought, concept or feeling generating a mental experience. On the other hand, behaviourism relies on observables and records of utterances. These observables and records are linked to their relationships with the immediate situations that produce them. Behaviourists do not believe in mentalistic constructs such as mind, concept and ideas. As a result, there is no room for introspection as a means of obtaining valid information since thoughts and feelings are usually personal. As a result of the highly psychological dimens of this theory, human and animal behaviour is identical.

Experiences coming through the senses are the major sources of knowledge. There is determinism in the affairs of the world. There are universal laws governing every situation. As a result of this reliance on determinism, there is no predictability in evaluating human behaviour. The external environment is perceived to be the major stimulus to all human utterances. The stimulus-response scenario is synonymous with the cause and effect connection in most natural situations. Those who favour the behavioural approach to semantics have argued that by reducing meaning to observable entities, language, as an aspect of human favour can lend itself to examination. They also argue that meaning is influenced by reinforcement. The theory stresses nurture rather than nature. Thus, the physical environment is perceived to contribute to meaning rather than the internal thought processes. Though behaviourism tends to lend meaning to experimental explanation, it has been criticised for its rejection of introspection, concepts and ideas. It is not everything in language

that can be observed physically. The over-reliance on reinforcement tends to present animal and human behaviour as identical.

3.3 Structural Semantics

The proponent of structuralism is Ferdinand de Saussure. Structuralism as a linguistic theory considers the structures and systems in language. Structuralism stresses the process of segmenting and classifying the features of utterances. Under this theory, emphasis is on the analysis of sense relations that connect words and meaning. Sense is an expression of the system of semantic relationships which a given word keeps with other expressions in a given language. This relationship is normally paradigmatic in terms of similarity and dissimilarity. The relationship of similarity occurs as synonymy, while the relationship of dissimilarity is referred to as antonymy. Structural processes are useful in lexical relations in the study of words.

3.4 Generative Semantics

Noam Chomsky is the father of generative grammar. According to the theory of transformational generative grammar, knowledge of language is generated in the mind. A language user has a finite set of rules from which he can generate an infinite number of sentences. This power of generations is facilitated by the power of transformational rules, which convert deep structure sentence types into other various forms via transformations. At the beginning of Chomsky's generative grammar, there was the assertion that syntax was autonomous and independent of semantics. It was only later in *Aspects of the theory of Syntax* (1965) that Chomsky pointed out that the semantic component specifies the rules necessary for the interpretation of deep structures. This observation enhanced the semantic representation of sentences. Deep structures specify the original meaning of sentences before the application of transformations. There was the immediate problem of explaining the meaning of multiple paraphrases from a single deep structure. Thus, generative semantics would be concerned with sentence meaning and interpretation. This will require the interpretation of functional roles in sentences. This interpretation has been explained by the Case theory as propounded by Charles Fillmore, and further elaborated in Chomsky's case theory and thematic theory. The semantic component has been presented as being partially dependent on syntax and at the same time distinct. This

produces a composite relationship between grammar and meaning. The deep structure is deemed to determine how sentence parts combine to make meaning for the whole. The syntactic component is the generative source of grammar. Thus, the output of syntax forms the input to the semantic component. The semantic component is perceived to operate on the structural description of sentences to provide a representation of the meaning of sentences. Grammar as used here is the totality of the mechanism and rules of language organisation including meaning. As a result of the complexity of this theory, we shall have a more elaborate discussion of its implication in another unit. Perhaps the philosophical postulations of Aristotle provided impetus to critical thinking in semantics. Based on the major areas of concern, there have been traditional semantics, behavioural semantics, structural semantics and generative semantics.

3.5 Conclusion

We have observed the progression in the development of semantic thought. We have noted the positive relationship between semantics and other components of the language system. We can safely conclude that while syntax, for instance provides the basis for the structure of the sentence, it is semantics that holds the key to meaning. This means that semantics is critical to communication.

3.6 Summary

In this unit, you have learnt the approaches of the traditionalists, the behaviourists, the structuralists and the generativists to the study of semantics. You learnt that the traditionalists were related to the early philosophers, while the behaviourists were more concerned with psychology, with the object of study being what is observed. Structrualists emphasised the sense relations between words while the generativists depended on the deep structures of sentences for meaning. It would be possible to identify the essential ingredients of these approaches to the study of semantics.

Reflection

Do you think the theories of meaning are sufficient in how they bring about meaning?

Activity

1. Discuss in detail any of the approaches to the study of meaning
2. Can you say the approaches to the study of meaning covered here are fulfilling? Discuss.

UNIT 4 THE STUDY OF MEANING (THE NATURE AND THEORIES OF MEANING)

4.0 Introduction

We hope you are still following the fact that semantics is the linguistic study of meaning and you have not also forgotten that meaning is central to the process of communication. Interestingly, there is usually the controversy about the nature of meaning. Meaning is at the centre of the study of semantics – for both the philosopher and the linguist. However, there are differences in opinion based on approaches and methods. We shall explore meaning from the perspectives of the different schools of thought.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, you should be able to;

- explain different schools of thought in the study of meaning.
- describe the different types of meaning.

4.1 The Nature of Meaning

4.1.1 Schools of Thought in Meaning

Both linguists and philosophers agree that meaning is central to semantics. However, there is considerable disparity among different scholars on the exact conception of meaning. Based on their understanding of the meaning of meaning and procedures, there are different schools of thought in relation to meaning. These are the naturalists, the conventionalists and the contextualists. According to the naturalists with Plato as the chief proponent, the meaning of a word is the entity or thing it represents. There is an intrinsic relationship between sound and meaning. The major criticism of this view is that there exist very many words in natural languages without physical entities.

To the conventionalists, words and their meaning do not necessarily have any direct link. Whatever connection existing between a word and meaning is through a concept formed in the minds of the users of the language. Conventionalism derived from the works of Aristotle. According to J. Firth and other contextualists, the meaning of a word derives from its usage. Each of these approaches has had a profound impact on

the practice of linguistics. Their contributions shall become apparent as the text progresses. Apart from focusing on the three principal approaches to the study of meaning, there are thematic, conceptual and associative types of meaning.

4.1.2 Types of Meaning: Thematic and Conceptual

There are three basic types of meaning; these are thematic, conceptual and associative. Associative meaning can further be divided into connotative, collocative, affective, reflected and stylistic meanings. We shall for this section concentrate on thematic and conceptual meaning.

4.1.2.1 Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning derives from the organisation of the message presented in a language. It is the arrangement of the components of communication that determine the point of emphasis. This arrangement may take the form of passivisation, topicalisation or focus. In the sentences that follow, different items have been made more prominent by merely re-ordering them.

Jane bought the house – normal SVO order
It was Jane that bought the house – topicalised
The house was bought by Jane – passivised.
The house, Jane painted – focused

In sentence (1), the sentence is in the normal subject verb object order without any special meaning. Sentences (2) and (4) tend to lay emphasis on Jane, the doer of the action being referred to. In sentence (3), emphasis is on the house, which was bought. Indeed, focused and topicalised elements in a structure are given prominence within an information structure. A component of the bit of information can also be made more prominent by stressing it. Consider the following:

She **BOUGHT** my suit (She did not STEAL it)
She bought my **HUNGRY LION** (not my sweets)
SHE bought my newspaper (not any other person)

4.1.2.2 Conceptual Meaning

Conceptual meaning is synonymous with primary, central, logical, cognitive or denotative meaning of a word. It is the first ordinary meaning listed in dictionaries, which is not affected by the context, or emotional overtones associated with the act of communication. There is an assumed shared conceptual meaning of every word of a language. There is a universal implication of the conceptual meaning. It is possible to express the conceptual meaning of a word using contrastive semantic features. Such features indicate the attributes present and those that are absent. If a feature is present, it is specified as (+); if absent, it is (-). These contrastive features specifying the attributes of the words provide the necessary criteria for the correct use of words. The feature specifications for the words man and woman are as follows.

Man	**Woman**
+ HUMAN	+ HUMAN
+ MALE	- MALE
+ ADULT	+ ADULT

The conceptual meaning of a word constitutes a major part of the shared system of a language for all speakers. It is a criteria element of human communication since it is a major factor in language. The use of this process has been described as componential analysis. It is a major process in structural semantics.

4.1.3 Associative Meaning

The meaning of a word is affected by the context, background, time and the cultural realities of the users of language. This type of meaning is not static. It is variable and open ended. Certain words, structures and styles are usually employed to arouse some emotional reactions in the hearer. Certain attitudes and forms of behaviour are elicited by the associative meaning of the words used in communication. These different reactions are derived from the associations which the words cerate in the minds of language users. As a result of the great variation in associative meaning, it is not always easy to express that form of meaning in terms of contrastive semantic features.

Indeed, associative meaning reflects individual differences. There are individualised intentions and interpretations. There is therefore, the need for all participants in communication to share common reference points, symbols and background for there to be any meaningful interaction. Most of the problems of communication arise when associative meaning is assumed to be shared by all concerned. There must be a way of ensuring actual sharing of background. For second language learners, this problem is profound. This explains the enormous difficulty second language learners' encounter with decoding the meaning of idioms and figurative expressions. They also find it difficult to apply appropriate idioms to diverse situations. Associative meaning can be any of the following.

Connotative Meaning
Collocative Meaning
Reflected Meaning
Stylistic or Social Meaning

4.1.3.1 Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning contains elements of the conceptual meaning of a word and the individual's personal interpretation of what is communicated. That interpretation is based on the personal experience of the hearer. This means that connotative meaning varies with the experience of people in communication. It may also vary from society to society. There are additional semantic features that are associated with connotative meaning. Thus, a great deal of the meaning of idioms and figurative expressions derive from connotation. There are symbols in literature, which have different connotations in different cultures. For instance, among the Hausa in Nigeria, the cricket is associated with the tricks, whereas among the Igbo and the Yoruba, it is the tortoise that has that attribute. In the Western world, it is the fox is considered very cunning.

4.1.3.2 Collocative Meaning

Collocation is the natural association and sequence of words in longer structures. Collocative meaning is therefore the meaning of a lexical item deriving from other lexical items with which it is associated in a longer structure. The collocative meaning of lexical items in a language is based on related semantic fields. For instance, job,

employment, engagement, and work are all related. There are also associations that are perceived to be more natural. Consider the following examples:

August visitor
Auspicious occasion
Sympathise with
Nutritious food

Some of the structures are restricted to certain circumstances as in

Stroll vs wander
For people
Tremble for animals
Quiver

4.1.3.3 Affective Meaning

Affective meaning is related to the feelings and attitudes of the speaker towards the subject or the audience. This meaning is realised by the choice of words. Note that certain words suggest positive feelings – *love, attraction, happiness, exciting* etc. Some others stir up negative reactions – *disgusting, nauseating, disappointing*, etc. Interjections like:
ah!, oh!, uh!, mmn!, often suggest the emotional state of the mind. Other words like darling, daddy, mummy, and so on, give an impression of endearment.

4.1.3.4 Reflected Meaning

Reflected meaning relates to expressions that have multiple meanings. Words with several meanings (polysemous words), have reflected meaning although there is a dominant meaning among these several meanings. Note that when a particular sense of a word begins to assume prominence, all other senses (meanings) begin to be de-emphasised and with time, these de-emphasised senses disappear. Meat, for example, used to refer to all forms of food and flesh for nourishment. The later meaning seems to have caught on.

4.1.3.5 Stylistic (or Social) Meaning

Stylistic meaning is the kind of meaning achieved when a particular pattern of speech, language variety or speech form is associated with a specific social context. You must

note that a speaker's choice of words and structures reveals his or her social, regional, geographical or even economic background. Word choice can also reveal the level of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer. Emphasis is usually on the different stylistic variations open to language users. Based on the level of familiarity, users have the following possibilities in making requests.

(1) I wonder if I could see you later today (indirect question) used for extreme politeness
(2) May I see you later today (very formal)
(3) Can I see you later today (causal and less formal)

Conclusion

Meaning has been presented to be at the centre of semantics. Meaning can be thematic, conceptual, associative, connotative, collocative, affective, reflected or stylistic.

Reflection

In your opinion, which kind of meaning do you think is the best?

Activity

1. Describe the different kinds of meaning discussed in this unit
2. Do you think meaning would be arrived at without these kinds?

4.2 Summary

In this unit, we have studied the different schools of thought in the study of meaning. The different types of meaning discussed are thematic, conceptual, and associative.

UNIT 5 BASIC NOTIONS IN SEMANTICS

5.0 Introduction

This unit introduces you to the basic notions in semantics. It is important that you master these notions from the outset since they are at the core of semantics.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, you should be able to;

- distinguish the three basic notions in this unit; sentences, utterances and propositions.
- make differences between sentences and utterances.
- distinguish between reference and sense.

5.1 Sentences versus Utterances

A sentence is a string of words put together by grammatical rules of a language expressing a complete thought. It is neither a physical event nor physical object and is conceived abstractly. For example, ***I am a student***. A sentence can be thought of as the ideal string of words behind various realizations in utterances and inscriptions. Note the following:

> The traditional definition of 'sentence' as provided is unfortunately vague, but it is hard to arrive at a better one for our purposes. It is intended to exclude any string of words that does not have a verb in it, as well as other strings. The idea is best shown by subsequent examples.
>
> (i) ***I would like a cup of coffee*** is a sentence.
> (ii) ***Coffee, please*** is not a sentence.
> (iii)***In the kitchen*** is not a sentence.
> (iv)***Please put it in the kitchen*** is a sentence.

An utterance on the other hand is any stretch of talk, by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person. It is the use by a particular speaker, on a particular occasion a piece of language, such as a sequence of sentences, or a single phrase, or even a single word. We can simply say an utterance is any sound of talk that humans produce. It is spoken; it is a physical event and may be grammatical

or ungrammatical. It is also done by a specific person in a particular accent, at a specific time or occasion.

From the definition of pragmatics by Leech, you will notice that one of the principles of pragmatics is the emphasis on "utterance" meaning as opposed to word or sentence meaning, and how such utterances relate to the context in which they are used. The difference between an utterance and a sentence is the fact that an utterance does not necessarily need to be syntactically perfect in the same way we expect a sentence to be. A sentence must satisfy some basic grammatical rules (e.g. subject/verb/complement structural pattern.) An utterance on the other hand does not even have to be a sentence. It may be a word like "settle," a phrase like "area boy," a contracted form like "what's up?" or an exclamation like ***hei*** or ***Ooh***! The "meaning" we associate with these utterances is defined in terms of their functions or the intention of the speaker in uttering them. While sentence meaning is a function of the words in the sentence together with the overall sense of the sentence, utterance meaning relies much more on the intention of the utterance in relation to the context.

5.1.2 Proposition

This is that part of the meaning of the utterance of a declarative sentence which describes some state of affairs. The state of affairs typically involves persons or things referred to by expressions in the sentence and the situation or action they are involved in. Besides the declarative sentence, a proposition also involves the meaning of interrogatives and imperative sentences. For example, in the subsequent sentences the speaker asserts a proposition.

(a) "Get out of here this minute!"
(b) "I am afraid that I will have to ask you to leave."

The notion of truth can be used to decide whether two sentences are express different propositions. Thus if there is any conceivable set of circumstances in which one sentence is true, while the other is false, we can be sure that they express different propositions. Note that you can entertain a proposition in your mind regardless of whether they are true or false, by thinking them or believing them. However, only true proposition can be known. Practice the follow:

(a) If John wonders whether Alice is deceiving him, would it seem reasonable to say that he has the proposition that Alice is deceiving him in his mind, and is not sure whether it is a true or a false proposition?

(b) If I say to you, 'If Mary came to the party, Phyllis must have been upset', do I thereby put in your mind the proposition that Mary came to the party, without necessarily indicating whether it is true or not?

Fill in the chart below with '+'or '-' as appropriate. Thus, for example, if it makes sense to think of a proposition being in a particular regional accent, put a '+' in the appropriate box; if not, put a '-'.

	Utterances	Sentences	Propositions
Can be loud or quiet			
Can be grammatical or not			
Can be true or false			
In a particular regional accent			
In a particular language			

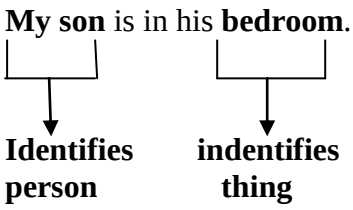
A single proposition could be expressed by using several different sentences (***say, Prince William will inherit the throne, or The throne will be inherited by Prince William***) and each of these sentences could be uttered an infinite number of times.

A proposition is an abstraction that can be grasped by the mind of an individual person. In this sense, a proposition is an object of thought. Do not equate propositions with thoughts, because thoughts are usually held to be private, personal, mental processes, whereas propositions are public in the sense that the same proposition is accessible to different persons: different individuals can grasp the same proposition. Furthermore, a proposition is not a process, whereas a thought can be seen as a process going on in an individual's mind. Unfortunately, of course, the word thought may sometimes be used loosely in a way which includes the notion of a proposition. For instance, one may say, 'The same thought came into both our heads at the same time.' In this case, the word thought is being used in a sense quite like that of the word proposition.

The relationship between mental processes (e.g. thoughts), abstract semantic entities (e.g. propositions), linguistic entities (e.g. sentences), and actions (e.g. utterances) is problematic and complicated, and we will not go into the deference further here.

5.2 Reference and Sense

In this section of the unit, you are introduced to two quite distinct ways of talking about the meaning of words and other expressions. These are reference and sense. And so, by **reference** of a word, the speaker indicates which things in the world (including persons) are being talked about. Reference of word in other words is the relation between the linguistic expression (the word) and the entity in the world to which the word refers. For example:



And in talking about **sense**, we deal with deal with relationships inside language. It is the relations to other expression in the language system. In other words, the SENSE of an expression is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language. There are words, of course, that might have sense, but no referents in the real world. Other words may differ in sense, but not necessarily in reference, and vice versa. Note that the class of entities to which an expression can be applied is usually called its ***extension***. Consequently, the referent of a word is always a member of the class of the entities that constitute its extension. The word's ***intension***, on the other hand, is defined as the set of semantic properties which define it.

5.3 Referring Expression

A REFERRING EXPRESSION is any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone (or a clearly delimited collection of things or people), i.e. used with a particular referent in mind. For example, the name Fred in an utterance such as '***Fred hit me'***, where the speaker has a particular person in mind when he says 'Fred', is a referring expression. Fred in 'There's no Fred at this address' is not a referring

expression, because in this case, a speaker would not have a particular person in mind in uttering the word.

5.4 Predicator

The PREDICATOR of a simple declarative sentence is the word (sometimes a (partial) group of words) which does not belong to any of the referring expressions and which, of the remainder, makes the most specific contribution to the meaning of the sentence. Intuitively speaking, the predicator describes the state or process in which the referring expressions are involved.

For example,

> ***asleep*** is the predicator in ***'Mummy is asleep'*** and describes the state Mummy is in.
>
> ***love*** is the predicator in ***The white man loved the Indian maiden*** and describes the process in which the two referring expressions the white man and the Indian maiden are involved.
>
> ***wait for*** is the predicator in ***Jimmy was waiting for the downtown bus*** and describes the process involving Jimmy and the downtown bus.

The predicators in sentences can be of various parts of speech: adjectives (*red, asleep, hungry, whimsical*), verbs (*write, stink, place*), prepositions (*in, between, behind*), and nouns (*crook, genius*). Despite the obvious syntactic differences between these different types of words, semantically they all share the property of being able to function as the predicators of sentences. Words of other parts of speech, such as conjunctions (and, but, or) and articles (*the, a*), cannot serve as predicators in sentences.

Note that the semantic analysis of a sentence into predicator and argument(s) does not correspond in most cases to the traditional grammatical analysis of a sentence into subject and predicate, although there is some overlap between the semantic and the grammatical analyses, as can be seen from the examples above. We shall be concerned almost exclusively in this book with the semantic analysis of sentences, and so will not make use of the notion 'grammatical predicate (phrase)'. But we will

use the term ‘predicate’ in a semantic sense, as defined in the subsequent section, developed within Logic.

A PREDICATE on the other hand is any word (or sequence of words) which (in a given single sense) can function as the predicator of a sentence.
For example, *hungry, in, crook, asleep, hit, show, bottle,* are all predicates; *and, or, but, not,* are not predicates.

5.5 Denotation and Connotation

The term denotation (that is also frequently used in the sense of an extensional reference) refers to the constant, abstract and basic meaning of a linguistic expression. Secondary meanings or associations the expression evokes are called connotations.

Conclusion

It is hoped that you have enjoyed running through the contents of the unit and you have understood. You have dealt with the basic notions in semantics. Always keep in mind the main ideas raised here. Understand the terms and concepts as: sentence, utterance, proposition and declarative, interrogative sentence and imperatives. Remember also aspects of sense and reference, referring expression, predicator.

Reflection

Comment on proposition and sentence. Is possible to distinguish them? How would explain the concepts of referring expression and predicator and predicate.

Activity

With tangible examples, discuss the notions discussed in this unit.

UNIT 6 THEORIES OF MEANING

A THEORY is a precisely specified, coherent, and economical frame-work of interdependent statements and definitions, constructed so that as large a number as possible of particular basic facts can either be seen to follow from it or be describable in terms of it.

We have by now established the fact that semantics deals meaning in language. It is fundamental at this point to state that Semantics, just like other disciplines also has theories that are applied to explain in detail the nature of meaning in a principled way. These theories among other things basically explain the nature of word and sentence meaning. We in other words are saying, these theories try to explain the nature of meaning by making use of a finite set of rules. Any semantic theory provides statements that explain meaning relationship – such as relates to ambiguity, synonymy, tautology, entailment, hyponymy, contradiction and so on. To be considered viable, a theory must also relate meaning to the situations and contexts in which words and sentences have been used for appropriate interpretation.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you are expected to;

- identify specific theories in Semantics.
- state the functions of Semantic theories.
- explain sense/lexical relations.
- discuss key concepts in sense/lexical relations.
- apply sense relations in explaining the meaning of English words.

6.1 Ideational Theory of Meaning

The Ideational theory of meaning was development by the British philosopher by the name of John Locke. According this theory, meaning attached to words can be separated from the words themselves. By so saying, Locke suggests that meaning originates in the mind in form of ideas. His argument is that words are simply sensible signs for the convenience of communication. And language is therefore a means for expressing thoughts. The Ideational theory is mentalistic and as such, the meaning of a word is the mental image or idea of the word or the expression generated in the

mind of the speaker or hearer. In this theory, no attempts are made to define words and any expressions using physical associations. Because of its dependence on mental images, the Ideational theory is said to be abstract.

6.2 The Referential Theory of Meaning

The referential theory was propounded by Odgen Richards. In this theory, the meaning of a word is the object it refers to in the external world. The object to which the word refers is called a referent while the words or expressions are simply symbols. The connection between the referent and the symbols is realized through the thought process. The challenge to this theory is that there are some words that do not have referents or indeed concrete objects to which they refer.

6.3 The Usage Theory of Meaning

This theory was postulated by a German scholar, Wittgenstein (1953) and was further developed in detail by J. Firth and M. A. Haliday. The usage theory is also referred to as the contextual or operational theory of meaning. The major motivation to the generation of this theory was fear that the meaning of certain classes of words could be lost if meaning were treated as just entities. According to the theory, the meaning of a word or an expression is determined by the context of its use. It is the effect created by a linguistic unit within a given context that expresses its full meaning.

6.4 Semantics and the Study of the Word: Sense Relations

It is hoped that you took note of the important aspects during the study of theories of semantics. What you must have noticed is the ability of the theories of meaning to explain the nature of the meaning of words and that of sentences. One truth is that the meaning of a word may not necessarily, often be understood from its referential or denotational characteristics. Truthfully, there are many words whose basic characteristics may not be easily analysed. The best way to study the meanings of such words would be by focusing on the kind of relationship they create with other words. These relationships are based on the sense or meaning of the words. Therefore, we study words from their sense relations or lexical relations. This unit therefore introduces you to the study of sense relations along the following lines: synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy and homonymy.

6.4.1 Synonymy

Synonymy refers to the semantic qualities or sense relations that exist between words or lexemes with closely related meanings. In other words, when reference is made to lexical relation or close relatedness in the meaning of words, we deal with synonymy. Synonymy in a strict sense is the relationship between two predicates that have the same sense. Sometimes synonymy is defined as similarity of meaning. (A predicate is any word (or sequence of words) which (in a given single sense) can function as the predicator of a sentence). The term predicator identifies the semantic role played by a particular word (or group of words) in a particular sentence. A synonym is therefore a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another lexeme (word or phrase) in the same language. Words that are synonyms are said to be synonymous, and the state of being a synonym is called synonymy. We can therefore, describe pairs of words that have very close similarities in meaning as synonyms. For example, we can have the following pairs of words as synonyms.

Friend / ally;
Begin / start / commence / initiate
Boss / master;
Amiable / friendly

It should be noted that the idea of sameness is not necessarily 'total sameness.' There are many instances or occasions when one would be appropriate in a sentence, but its synonym would be odd. For example, whereas the word ***answer*** fits this sentence: ***Misebo had only one answer correct in the test***, its near synonym, ***reply***, would sound odd. This observation means that we may have absolute, complete and total synonyms when there are exact substitutes as in:

Everybody / Everyone
Bandit / Brigand

There are also broad or near synonyms as in:

rich / sumptuous
mature / ripe

We may conclude on synonyms by saying that synonyms are defined with respect to certain words: ***pupil*** as the aperture in the ***iris*** of the eye is not synonymous with student. Such like, ***he expired*** means the same as he ***died***, yet *my passport has expired* cannot be replaced by *my passport has died*.

6.4.2 Antonymy

Antonymy refers to the relationship of oppositeness or the oppositeness of meaning between a word and another or among words in the same part of speech, such as ***good / bad*** (adjective-adjective) and ***fast / slowly*** (adverb-adverb). However, this view is not adequate because words may be opposite in meaning in different ways. Lyons (1977) argues that antonymy covers the relation between lexical items whose meanings stand in opposition to each other and it is often thought of as the opposite of synonymy. It must be noted, however that there are different types of antonymy or incompatibility. For example, ***Hot*** is not the opposite of ***cold*** in the same way as ***borrow*** is the opposite of ***lend. Thick*** is not the opposite of ***thin*** in the same way as ***dead*** is the opposite ***alive.*** Antonymy occurs in two forms – gradable and non-gradable antonyms. The non gradable antonyms are further subcategorized into complementary and relational antonymy.

Gradable Antonymy

Gradable antonymy occurs when two antonyms are at opposite ends of the continuous scale of values, (a scale which varies according to the context of use) which may be given such names as warm, cool or tepid. In other words, they occur as comparative constructions. For example:

Wet – dry
Young – old
Easy – difficult
Big – small
Hot and ***cold*** are also gradable antonyms.

You will realise that between hot and cold is a continuous scale of values, which may be given such names as warm, cool or tepid. What is called hot in one context could well be classified as cold in another context.

Note that for adjectives and adverbs, gradable antonyms show degrees and can be compared with suffixes – **er**, and – **est** as well as with the words, more and most – as in:

- *tall* *taller* *tallest*

- intelligent	*more intelligent*	*most intelligent*
- dangerously	*more dangerously*	*most dangerously*

You must have noticed that gradable antonyms have some characteristics. From the above examples you are able to see that members of a pair of gradable antonyms differ in terms of degree.

Non-gradable Antonymy

Note that non-gradable antonyms are sub-categorised into two; complementary and relational antonyms. Non-gradable antonyms do not occur in comparative constructions.

Complementary Antonymy

In this category of antonymy, you will discover that words are expressed as complementary pairs such that their exact opposites are the only options. This suggests that there is only one possibility of meaning which is fixed; there is no intermediate ground between the two of them. There is no word, for example that exists between two pairs, ***dead*** and ***alive***. The word ***half dead*** is not possible to be put to state ***one neither dead nor alive***. Complementary antonymy in other words proposes that if something is ***A***, then it is not ***B***. If something is ***X***, then it is not ***Y***. If something is ***ON*** it is not ***OFF***. You can acquaint yourself with some subsequent examples.

Alive – Dead
Yes – No
Input – Output
Male – Female
Father –Mother
Open – Close

Relational Antonymy

In this category of antonymy, the pairs of words are reversal of a relationship of words. The relational opposites convey the meaning of reciprocal, bilateral or social relationships. These meanings are interdependent such that membership of one of the pairs suggests the other.

Teacher – student
Parent – child
Brother – sister
Buy – sell
Servant – master
Wife – husband
Employer – employee
Give – Receive
Teacher – Pupil
Borrow - lend

6.4.3 Hyponymy

This is a sense relation between lexemes such that the meaning of one lexeme is included in the meaning of another. So when the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another, we have hyponymy. For instance, included in ***animals*** are ***dogs, elephants, goat***, and so on. ***Plant***, also, ***includes flowers, trees, and weeds***. In the meaning of ***flower***, included are; ***rose, daffodils*** and ***carnation***. We can also relate hyponymy to professions to include law, medicine, teaching, banking, and so on. The term that includes other terms is called the super ordinate and the included terms is the hyponym. There is always a hierarchical relationship drawing from the general to samples. Watch some hyponyms of some terms:

Pig*-sow/piglet/boar*
Tree*-beech/oak/sycamore/fir/etc*
Virtue*-honesty/patience/wisdom/prudence/generosity/etc*
Emotion*-fear/love/anger/sadness*
Strike *(transitive)-kick/hit/butt/thump*
Pleasant*-tasty/pretty/soothing/etc*

6.4.4 Homonymy

Homonymy explains a situation of identical spelling or pronunciation but with different unrelated meanings. Such words usually create problems of ambiguity. Consider the following examples.

Bank *(of a river)*
Bank *(financial institution)*
Fly *(an insect)*

Fly *(to move in the air)*
Lead *(verb to guide)*
Lead *(an element used in making pencil)*

When homonymy is partial, we have heteronymy. It is possible to have a situation of homonymy at one medium of language – such as in writing – but pronounced differently as in:

Lead *- /li:d/ and*
Lead *- /led/.*

This situation is referred to as homography. With this distinction, it has become more common to reserve the term "homophony" – when reference is made to identical pronunciation as in:

Key and quay /ki:/
Been and bean /bi:n/
Court and caught /kɔ:t/

6.4.5 Polysemy

A case of polysemy is one where a word has several very close related senses. For example: Mouth (of the river vs. of an animal) is a case of polysemy. The two senses are clearly related by concepts of an opening from the interior of some solid mass to the outside, and of a place of issue at the end of some long narrow channel.

A situation of polysemy arises when one form of a word has multiple meanings, which are related by extension. Words that are polysemous have single entries in the dictionary. However, there are numbers that suggest the list of possible meanings – as shown below.

Foot *1 - of a person*
2 – of a bed
3 – of a mountain

It should be noted that homonyms are listed as different lexical items in the dictionary.

Reflection

In your opinion, are these theories of meaning sufficient in bring about the meaning of meaning?

Activity

1. Distinguish between gradable and non gradable antonym
2. Describe and exemplify hyponymy

You have had an experience on how sometimes meaning is arrived at. This experience must now give you the platform upon which you get to the next unit.

UNIT 7 ASPECTS OF SENTENTIAL MEANING

7.0 Introduction

When we refer to lexical relations, we are simply talking about meaning of individual words. On semantic theories, however, you must have noticed that the role of semantic theories is not only explaining the meaning of individual words, but also meticulously explain the meaning of sentences. You may want to ask why it is so important to systematically examine sentential meaning. One reason is that many of the communication problems emanate from a lack of clarity at sentential level. This unit therefore, brings to your attention some aspects of meaning at the level of sentences. Note that language awareness and the art of communication depend on man's ability to systematically combine words since we do not communicate with individual words in isolation. It is out of the combination of these words that sentential meaning is achieved.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify different issues related to the meaning of the sentence
- explain major concepts in the meaning of English sentences
- demonstrate the ability to apply these concepts in real language situation.

7.1 Paraphrase

A paraphrase is a restatement of the meaning of a text or passage using other words. A paraphrase explains a situation in which two or more sentences have one meaning. The term itself is derived via paraphrasis from Greek, meaning "***additional manner of expression***." The act of paraphrasing is also called paraphrasis. Paraphrasing occurs at two levels; lexical and structural.

Examples:

Original sentence

Her life spanned years of incredible change for women.

Paraphrased sentence

Mary lived through an era of liberating reform for women.

Original sentence

Giraffes like Acacia leaves and hay, and they can consume 75 pounds of food a day.

Paraphrased sentence

A giraffe can eat up to 75 pounds of Acacia leaves and hay every day

You will notice that in lexical paraphrases, there are two or more sentences giving the same interpretation as a result of the replacement of one word or phrase by another. This would be realized as exemplified in the subsequent examples.

(i) The Vice Chancellor invited ***a spinster*** to motivate female students.

(ii) The Vice Chancellor invited ***an unmarried woman*** to motivate female students.

In the foregoing sentences (i) and (ii), the change in their form or indeed their structure is realized through the substitution of ***spinster*** for ***an unmarried woman***. So, we can safely say both ***a spinster*** and ***unmarried woman*** are phrases. You can examine the next set of sentences as see how the paraphrase is realised or achieved.

(iii) The crying baby was ***agitated***.

(iv) The crying was ***anxious***.

Note that in sentences (iii) and (iv), the paraphrase has been realized through substitution of the lexical ***agitated*** for ***anxious***.

As for structural paraphrase, you will notice that it is a little more complex than the lexical one. Lexical paraphrase is realised through the change in the arrangement of sentences through transformations. Observe what happens in the following sentences and how the paraphrase is achieved.

(i) They built a new house (***Basic –subject + Verb+ object***)

(ii) It was a new house that they built (***Cleft***)

(iii) What they built was a new house (***Pseudo cleft***)

(iv) A new house was what they built (***topicalised***)

7.2 Ambiguity

When an expression can be given more than one interpretation ambiguity arises. Therefore, why polysemy relates to words, ambiguity is concerned with sentences. We have two types of ambiguity – lexical and structural. Lexical ambiguity occurs when the presence of just a specific word leads to multiple interpretations. Consider the following examples.

(i) The team has many *goals*
(ii) She prepared *tables*

It should be noted that "goals" and "tables" can be interpreted in different easy based on the contexts. Structural ambiguity is achieved by the organisation of the elements of the sentence. It is possible to interpret these elements in different ways. Consider these examples.

(i) They promoted all English teachers
(ii) Boiling water can be dangerous

The ambiguity in the second sentence drives from the possibility of reading the sentence as:

(i) Water that is boiling (i.e. hot) can be dangerous
(ii) The act of boiling water can be dangerous

The first interpretation makes *boiling water* as the subject noun phrase whereas in the second interpretations, *boiling water* is the complement.

7.3 Vagueness

A sentence is vague when it has no definite meaning. This lack of meaning may derive from the incompatibility of the semantic properties of some of the words. Sometimes, a vague expression may be grammatically well formed, yet its meaning may be farfetched. Consider the following classical example taken from Chomsky (1965).

(i) *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously together*

It should be noted that many of what we describe as literary language would have been vague except that we understand the background as literary. Consider further the following example.

(ii) The stones consoled her

This expression is clearly a personification since *stones* which are inanimate have been endued with the characteristics of *consoling.*

7.4 Tautology

A situation of tautology arises when we have unnecessary repetition of elements in communication. There is undue emphasis without necessarily making meaning any clearer. Tautology is closely associated with redundancy, which is the introduction of linguistic units, which do not affect the status, or meaning of the larger construction.

The following are examples of tautology.

(i) This bachelor has not been married

(ii) The congregation are members of a church

Other instances of tautology are:

circumnavigate *around*

unlawful theft

can be able

7.5 Presupposition

In presupposition, there is usually a piece of information, which the speaker assumes the hearer already knows. This assumption is based on some shared background knowledge between the speaker and the hearers. An outsider in the circle of communication may be at a loss. Let us illustrate this situation with the following sentences.

(i) John: Are you able to bring Harry along?

(ii) Peter: That will be splendid. On our way, we shall pick up the drinks.

The presupposition in this conversation is that both John and Peter know who Harry is. They both have an idea of the drinks, and the source from where to bring them.

7.6 Entailment

In entailment, there is usually a pair of sentences and the truth of one derives from the truth of other. Consider the following sentences.

(i) Tracy is a spinster
(ii) Tracy is a female

Sentence (i) derives from the meaning of sentence (ii). This means that if sentence (i) entails sentence (ii) then, sentence (ii) is necessarily the implication of sentence (i).

7.7 Anomaly

Anomaly results from the combination of two semantic features that are not compatible in describing a phenomenon. Words attract specific selectional restrictions. For instance, trees are vertical while rulers, ropes and snakes are horizontal. For vertical items, we describe them in terms of tall, while for the horizontal ones we talk of long. Thus, we can have tall trees, tall buildings, tall people, but long ropes, long snakes, long rulers, and so on. It will therefore be anomalous to have:

a long man
a tall snake

7.8 Contradiction

Contradictory expressions present two opposing proposition at the same time. Thus, a person cannot be dead and alive at the same time. Other examples of anomaly are:

(i) That circular house is rectangular
(ii) The drains are flooded because there are no rains

7.9 Analyticity

We talk about analyticity when we have sentences in the grammatical forms and lexical meanings of their proposition, which make them necessarily true. Consider the following examples.

(i) Churches are usually attended by Christians

(ii) Unmarried ladies are spinsters

Activity

1. Identify different issues related to the meaning of the sentence
2. Explain major concepts in the meaning of English sentences
3. Demonstrate the ability to apply these concepts in real language situation.

Summary

This unit has exposed you to the meaning of sentences. You must have discovered why it is so important to systematically examine sentential meaning. You should have discovered in this unit that many of the communication problems emanate from a lack of clarity at sentential level.

UNIT 8 PRAGMATICS: MEANING AND SCOPE

8.0 Introduction

Pragmatics has been defined as the study of speaker/context meaning showing how language users manipulate language forms, distort or reorganise sentences in order to express their intentions. And at other times they say one thing but mean another or use questions to express requests/demands. Thus pragmatics demonstrates the relationships between what speakers say and what they actually mean and the kind of effect they expect on the minds of the hearers. The study of pragmatics therefore aims at enlarging the scope of enquiring into the true nature of social meaning and their effects in various situations.

The general aim of this course is to demonstrate how language as a social phenomenon functions in practical social situations contrary to the view that it is a mere cognitive skill that should be studied from a formal structuralist point of view. It therefore attempts to show how speakers and writers make language choices to achieve their intentions. And this they do effectively because the context guides them to encode and interpret meanings beyond words or grammatical structures. The overall aim of this course therefore is to expose you the crucial notion of speaker/writer's (contextual) intended meaning-making process and not just to give you head knowledge but also to impact practically on your language performances at the end of this course.

Aim

This part of the course aims to introduce you to the fundamental definitions and theories of pragmatics as a sub-field of socio-linguistics. Not only that but to also demonstrate the various ways speakers or communicators mean in different social contexts and illustrate how grammatical elements may assume new meanings in some definite situations and how language may be viewed as performing actions. Finally, explain the relationship between pragmatics and other disciplines.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this Unit you should be able to;

- explain the meaning of pragmatics as a sociolinguistic study and the difference between pragmatics and semantics.
- describe the influence of the context comprising social assumptions, values, conventions or world view on speakers and hearers
- explain such concepts as speech acts, politeness, conversational principles or implicature.
- discuss at least one theory of pragmatics and how it has enabled you to understand better the functions of language in the context of people and situations.
- apply the knowledge gained to communicate effectively in different social contexts, especially applying such concepts as politeness, indirectly speech act or indexical in social communication

8.1 Defining Pragmatics

Pragmatics has been defined differently by a number of language scholars. The definitions so given will be of interest to you since they provide some light on the nature, principles and scope of pragmatics. In this module, we have looked at a few of these definitions.

8.1.1 Some Definitions of Pragmatics

- Leech & Short (1981:290) - Pragmatics is "the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered." Notice the word "utterances" not necessarily sentences.
- Leech (1983:6) - Pragmatics is "the study of meaning in relation to speech situations". The speech situation enables the speaker use language to achieve a particular effect on the mind of the hearer." Thus the speech is goal-oriented (i.e. the meaning which the speaker or writer intends to communicate).
- Levinson (1983:9) – Pragmatics is "the study of those aspects of the relationship between language and context that are relevant to the writing of grammars." Notice in this definition that interest is mainly in the inter-relation of language and principles of language use that are context dependent.
- Yule (1996:127) – Pragmatics is "the study of intended speaker meaning." It is "in many ways … the study of invisible meaning or how we recognise what is meant even when it isn't actually said (or written).

8.1.2 The Scope of Pragmatics

By scope, we mean the levels to which the study of pragmatics has been extended. For the purpose of our present study, we must mention that linguistic pragmatics as it is used today is a lot more restricted than when the term "pragmatics" was first used by Charles Morris (1938). Morris was interested in Semiotics – the general study of signs and symbols. Pragmatics was defined as the "relation of signs to the interpreters." Today, linguistic pragmatics mostly dwells on those factors of language use that govern the choices individuals make in social interaction and the effects of those choices on others (Crystal, 1987). We wish not to go into so much unnecessary detail. You may have to read much on your own on this.

8.2 Pragmatics and its Interfaces

In this part of the unit, you are introduced to the interface of pragmatics and other linguistic disciplines. In other words you will interact with how grammar, lexicon, sound/tone of voice interact with Pragmatics. Furthermore, this section will look at Pragmatics and Core linguistics, Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis.

8.2.1Pragmatics and Grammar

Scholars of pragmatics believe that every grammatical truth-condition construction in any natural language has a non-truth condition equivalent to that which has pragmatic values. This implies that some grammatical constructions which we take for granted as truth-condition statements have some definable pragmatic equivalents. The subsequent examples have been used to explain the Pragmatic-Grammar interface.

(i) The student was knocked down by a car
(ii) 50 opposition cadres were shot
(iii) Some expired malarial drug had been sold before it was known that it had expired

The constructions (i) and (ii) are both passive in nature. You obviously would wonder why sometimes speakers and writers sometimes and indeed deliberately choose to passive constructions over active ones. When you look at sentence (i), the truth condition of the sentence is simply that the student was knocked down by a car. But the speaker's intention (non-truth condition value) may be to highlight the seriousness

of knocking down a student; hence "the student" is made prominent as the topic of the sentence (topicalised) thus, receiving sentence stress. Of course, this may simply be to defer information about the agent (the car) till the end of the sentence. It is also possible that the writer deliberately chooses to be silent about the agent as in sentence (ii). If sentence (ii) were to appear as a newspaper headline, one may conclude that the newspaper is protecting the interest of the police who are likely shooters of opposition cadres.

Note that using passive constructions permits the expression of the agent to be entirely suppressed, allowing a speaker to accommodate the fact that it is unknown (as in (ii)) or irrelevant (as in (iii)) or simply avoiding saying who the agent is even though the speaker knows.

Additionally, the use of passive also means that the occurrence being described had some effect on some individual within a particular context. Often the individual is the agent as in: ***The sick old woman was made to stand for five hours in a queue***. We are not told who made her stand for those long hours but we are made to ***feel*** for her. The intention of the speaker might simply be to appeal to our emotions. The point here being made is that certain conditions expressed in grammar point to beliefs and attitudes of the speaker which amount to presuppositions, and they are so strongly linked to syntactic constructions. So we cannot just hold on to grammatical constructions alone without reference to those beliefs and attitudes that underlie the constructions.

8.2.2 Pragmatics and the Lexicon

Earlier in this module when a distinction was made between pragmatics and semantics, you noted that semantics dwells on the linguistic aspects of representing the formal meaning of words and sentences, while pragmatics is concerned with the context/ speaker's meaning. Thus in examining the pragmatics of the lexicon, we are simply considering the tendency of words or lexical units having pragmatic meanings. Some scholars of semantics even agree that a full account of lexical meaning has to include more information than that which allows one to discriminate the meanings of different words (Blutner, 2006). Watch the following examples taken from Blutner 2006:489:

(a) Should we take the lion back to the zoo?

(b) Should we take the bus back to the zoo?

When you try to distinguish the 'take back' in (a) and the one in (b), you surely will notice that the lion is the object being taken to the zoo, while the bus is the instrument that takes back the lion to the zoo. One other thing you will notice is that the zoo in a is surely different from what is mean in b in relation to the two items – the lion and the car. The pragmatic components of utterances is usually embedded on the different conceptual setting or context especially with words that do not discriminate two occurrences like 'take back' in the above sentences. In the Zambian context, several English words have come to be used in a number of contexts that results in semantic extensions or pragmatic usages. Look at the different use of the word see in the following examples:

(c) I can ***see*** the plane from afar
(d) I would like to ***see*** the Vice Chancellor
(e) I ***see*** what you mean
(f) To get the contract, you may have to ***see*** the personal manager

The meaning of see in (c) is obvious from a semantic point of view but certainly not in (d) - (f). Cognizant of the fact that meaning is arbitrarily assigned to words in English as in any other language, it is still evident that our knowledge of the environment, the world/culture is highly related to the meanings we assign to lexical items.

8.2.3 Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics cuts across many levels of linguistics and due to the many areas of common interests that the two disciplines share, it has been very difficult to draw a clear boundary between them. Some scholars believe that pragmatics is in fact a sub-field of sociolinguistics. You will notice that in studying language in its social context, two important functions of language come to the fore: (i) language or speech is used as a means of communication (ii) it is used as a means of identifying social groups. These two functions are performed on definite social contexts, beliefs, cultures and world views. These variables in turn influence linguistic choices and what pragmatic implications these choices may have. Studies in pragmatics over the years have revealed interesting insights in the interfaces of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, showing how speech acts are performed in conversations and how

speakers in socio-cultural contexts adopt pragmatic principles to encode meaning to achieve certain results on the mind of their hearers.

8.2.4 Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis

When you look at Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis, you wonder where one ends and where the other begins from. You also find it difficult to explicitly state where one excludes the other. Drawing from the definition of discourse analysis as given by Brown and Yule (1983) i.e. … "***the analysis of language in use***" which is not to be restricted to the description of language forms independent of the purpose or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs. What concerns discourse analysis is not divorced from the concerns of pragmatics. Theories of pragmatics attempt to explain how people create meaning and make sense of what is said in specific situations. Speakers are guided by their knowledge of the language system alongside their knowledge of the socio-cultural system, beliefs and traditions and the fact that meaning is not constructed from the formal language of the message alone. You will note that both discourse analysis and pragmatics link form to function.

8.3 The Origin of Pragmatics

The origin of modern pragmatics is attributed to a philosopher by the name of Charles Morris who studied the science of signs or semiotics. Morris argues that Semiotics constitutes three broad branches namely:

(a) Syntax being the formal relation of signs to one another
(b) Semantics being the formal relations of signs to objects to which they refer
(c) Pragmatics being the formal relations of signs to interpreter (the language user)

Within each of these branches (e.g. syntax) Morris also distinguished between "pure studies" and "descriptive studies." Pure studies concerned with the explanation/elaboration of sign system/symbols used to describe language called metalanguage. While descriptive studies are the application of the metalanguage to a particular language, i.e. descriptions of signs (or words) and their usages. Morris attempted to include some aspects psychology, biology and sociology which occur in the functioning of signs known as the "biotic aspect of semiosis" in pragmatics. But we know that this scope is much wider than what goes on today in linguistic pragmatics.

Interestingly, Morris' broad use of pragmatics has been retained in some quarters and this explains the use of the term in disciplines such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, communication etc. Pragmatics is also used within analytical philosophy.

Carnap retained Morris' idea of pragmatics as an investigation in which explicit reference is made to the speaker or the user of the language and equated pragmatics with descriptive semiotics (formal study of meaning). Like Morris, he made a distinction between pure and descriptive studies, equating pragmatics with the latter. He also added a pure pragmatics to include concepts like belief, utterance and intention and how they relate to each other. This latter idea (i.e. pure pragmatics) has since been dropped. In the 1960s, Carnap's definition of pragmatics as requiring reference to the user was adopted within Linguistics, especially within a movement called "Generative Semantics."

Semantics simply concerns the conventional meaning of words, phrases and sentences rather than what a speaker or writer might want the words to mean in a particular context/situation.

Some scholars however have argued that pragmatics is no different from semantics because according to them semantics adequately covers all aspects of pragmatics. The contextual theory of meaning (which is a semantic theory) for example, explains the relationship between language and the context. On the other hand, scholars, defending pragmatics, argue that pragmatics covers those areas that semantics has hitherto overlooked, especially the concept of speech acts. It throws more light to what speakers/writers actually do with language and what effects they expect from their hearers/reader.

In semantics you ask, "what does X mean? But in pragmatics the question is "what do you mean by X?" So the focus of pragmatics is the user rather than the linguistic code.

Reflection

In which way do concerns of discourse closely related to pragmatic concerns and when are they divorced?

Activity

What is the difference between the meaning of settle in (a) and the settle in (b)?

(a) You need to settle at the age of 35.
(b) You can't leave before you settle your bill.
(c) What do you think constitute the relationship between Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics?
(d) In which way do you think discourse analysis is linked to pragmatics?

Conclusion

In this unit, you have looked at pragmatics, its scope and its interface with other fields. You have also looked at its origin. We hope you have grasped the ideas carefully. Yes, some of the concepts have not been dealt with in detail, research more on them.

Summary

Pragmatics has been found to demonstrate the relationship between what the speakers say and what they actually mean and the kind of effect they expect on the minds of hearers. It has also been established that there is an intricate relationship between pragmatics and semantics.

UNIT 9 CONTEXT IN LANGUAGE USE

9.0 Introduction

In this unit and module, the expression language 'use' will mean the use of linguistic units (words) in the social life context. This is so because pragmatics is the study of language use by individuals in specific social contexts and all actions are determined by these contexts. The study of language in its social context can be traced back in the 1970s when scholars developed interest in sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, pragmatics and ethnography of speaking. For the scholars, it was no enough to just study language alone but to also focus on the language and society interface and how language use is influenced by the social context.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define context.
- describe the features of a context.
- differentiate between the different types of contexts.
- discuss the components of discourse context proposed by M.A.K. Halliday.
- explain why context is an important concept in pragmatics.

9.1 Meaning and Features of Context

Context refers to the situation within which language is used. This situation may be physical, social context or institutional situation that might include events, time culture or social conventions that can influence language use. Note that the first use of the term "context or situation" is traced back to Bronislaw Malinoski, a social anthropologist, who in his study of language behaviours among some native Indians concluded that language is a "mode of action" and as a social behavior is closely tied to the relevant social situation in which it is used (Malinowski).

Note also that the meaning of words was not to be restricted to sounds of utterances or their grammatical structure but must include the "pragmatic context" in which they are uttered. Context, as argued by Firth is the bedrock of any linguistic enterprise. This is so because normal linguistic behavior as a whole is meaning effort, directed towards the maintenance of appropriate patterns of life. One important thing you

ought to understand is that; since every utterance occurs within a culturally determined context, its meaning is tied to that context about the speaker and the ways he perceives himself, his roles in the society and his relationship with other members of the society. It will be impossible to discuss pragmatics without making reference to context where utterances are made because pragmatics investigates context-based meaning.

9.2 Linguistic Context

Linguistic context refers to the set of words in the same sentence or utterance. And so, the set of words in the sentence or utterance forms the linguistic environment that determines the sense (meaning) of the words in the context. For example, if the word *offence* appears with other words like *police*, *traffic*, *contravene*, *speed limit* etc, you would immediately understand what is meant by the word *offence*. The linguistic context (co-text) strongly affects what we think a particular or words mean. One thing you ought to note is that words occur together and are frequently used with specific words with which they collocate.

9.3 Physical or Environmental Context

You must by now know that the meaning of words is realized on the basis of physical or environmental context. Our understanding of words is much more tied to the physical context especially with regard to time and place referred to by the expression. We surely are influenced by the physical context in the way we interpret a particular word.

9.4 Interpersonal Context

The interpersonal context focuses on psychological considerations that influence speech or talk. There is no doubt that the state of the mind of the speaker or writer places some constraints on the quality or amount of interactions s/he engages in. His inputs and reactions are predictable if he is sad, happy, excited or bored. Critics of pragmatics emphasis on such criteria as intention, belief or rationality, argue that the understanding of text and talk is not dependent on elements rooted in psychology rather, on social factors such as “power” and “status” and how they are distributed and maintained linguistically in the society (Lavandera, 1988).

9.5 Situational/Socio-cultural Context

Unlike the other contexts discussed above, the situational context concerns mainly with socio-cultural considerations. The context of culture includes beliefs, value system, religion, conventions that control individuals' behaviour and their relationship with others. These sociocultural rules of behaviour often guide them in order to communicate effectively with one another. Some beliefs or conventions may be considered as universal, while some are culture-specific, especially those that guide utterances, non-verbal communication and other forms of social behaviour that may be interpreted meaningfully.

Knowledge of socio-cultural rules of behaviours brings up the idea of "communicative competence" which according to Dell Hymes (1972) is the ability of the speaker to know when to speak, when not and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner. This competence is integral with attitudes, values and motivations concerning language, its features and uses in the most suitable and appropriate contexts. A little child: (scribbles unintelligibly on the surface of a white paper and presents it to his father, smiling) Daddy, see…!

Father: (hugs the child) ah…beautiful, this is the most brilliant writing I've ever seen.

9.6 Institutional Context

Much of what you will see here as "institutional context" may have actually been covered as part of the social/cultural context, but you will discover that it is imperative to establish some elements of the context in some specific kind of settings like educational institutions, which enforce or practice some constraints in language use. Take a Convent or a purely Seventh day Adventist institution for example: there are certain conventions there that govern people's mode of communication and behaviour which is not just "social" or "cultural." We consider this as institutional and much of this institutional standards or "common sense assumptions" (Fairclough, 1989), determine social behaviour and individuals simply take them in as natural and unchanging. For example, there are certain ways people must greet one another in some of these places. Expressions such as "***bless you***" or "***it is well***" in some Christian mission universities have become almost institutionalised that people are made to believe that unless they greet each other that way they may never be enjoy certain

privileges. Note that in some cases these rather peculiar manner of expressions help to identify the individuals and the institutions they are associated with.

9.7 Components of Discourse Context

M.A.K. Halliday (1976) identifies three components of the context which we shall discuss in this sub-section. According to Halliday, situation types can be represented as a complex of three dimensions, namely:

(i) The ongoing activity
(ii) The role relationships
(iii) The symbolic channel (i.e. the medium, either written or spoken)

The ongoing activity is referred to as the Field which is the total event in which the text (or utterance) is functioning. It is the primary aim of the discourse and what subject matter the interlocutors must explore. According to Hudson (1980), the field of discourse is the "what about", "the why" of discourse: it may be political, religious, academic, health, marriage etc. You must have realised by now that an individual's choice of words in a conversation is generally determined (influenced) by the field of discourse.

The role relationships are referred to as the tenor. This has to with the "***with whom***" of discourse. The tenor indicates or displays the kind of social relationships that exists among interlocutors; type of role interaction (how they take turns and what influences it) and how temporal or permanent such relationships are. It also reflects the identities of the people involved. Note that some important social variables such as age, status, education and many others influence how individuals assign roles to one another in conversations.

The mode of discourse is the function of the text in the event, including the medium of expression. This is the third component of the dimensions of the context. Hudson calls it "***the how***" of discourse. Again the subject matter of a discourse and the relationship between the interlocutors many times determine the best mode of expressing the text, either in writing or verbally. You are aware that Legal documents for example require writing, while interpersonal communication is usually done orally. The choice of words is also influenced by the formality or informality of the

relationship that exists among speakers or writers. Look at this example: two people address the same person (Lungowe Jimaima) in the following terms:

A: You're welcome, Miss Jimaima (formal)

B: Hi Lulu! (Informal)

9.8 Text and Context

As we noted in Unit 1, rather than emphasize the sentence, utterance, text or talk is emphasized in pragmatics. A text is a unit of language in use (Halliday & Hasan 1976). It is any utterance or passage spoken or written of any length that forms a unified whole. It is not a grammatical unit like a clause or sentence, but could be a sentence, paragraph, or a whole passage. It is not limited by size and therefore does not consist of sentences, but rather realized by sentences (Halliday & Hasan 1976). A text is therefore considered as a meaningful unit rather than a grammatical unit. This means that it may not be grammatically correct but meaningful and analyzable as a discourse unit. The meaning associated with a text is realised in a context. As we have already discussed, the meaning of any text or utterance largely depends on any of the various types of context identified above.

Reflection

In your opinion, would meaning be achieved with contexctualising human utterances? Give reasons for your answer.

Activity

1. Discuss the importance of context in the study of pragmatics, give examples
2. Describe any four (4) types of contexts and explain how they affect intended meaning of a speaker or writer.

9.9 Conclusion

From your reading of this unit, you surely must have realized that context is an indispensable concept in pragmatics. Undoubtedly, pragmatics has been defined by many scholars as the study of context based meaning. In other words, the study of pragmatics is the study of how language use is influenced by the context.

Summary

It has been learnt that context is the central determiner of meaning especially considering how people interact with one another in different situations. You notice that even from your own experience, you will agree that in all the times you were able to communicate effectively with people because you recognised the kind of social attitudes and conventions that guided your interactions and you responded exactly the way you were expected to respond. Obviously you are and were able to apply your knowledge of the society and its cultures in your interactions and you talked when you should and kept silent at other times. In other words, context guided the way you interacted with others.

UNIT 10 CONCEPTS IN PRAGMATICS

10.0 Introduction

This unit introduces you to some concepts in pragmatics and how they are to be understood. You are invited to pay particular attention and follow closely because the concepts here are very important. Run through and critically analyze them.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain what tact is
- describe the relationship between tact and politeness
- explain why tact is very essential in communication
- apply what you have learnt in practical communication
- explain the meaning of person deixis, place deixis and time deixis
- differentiate between semantic reference and pragmatic reference
- distinguish between reference and inference
- explain the importance of intention to the communication of meaning.
- explain the various conversational maxims
- explain the terms "entailment" and "implicature"
- explain the importance of entailment and implicature in encoding meaning.
- discuss the roles of politeness phenomena in communication
- apply politeness in your everyday communication
- explain how interlocutors do things with words

10.1 TACT: Tact as a Pragmatic Concept; Face-Saving Tact

According to Adegbite (2000) tact or "tactics" is a means of interpreting the discourse value of information encoded in a word and its relationship with other linguistic items which precede or follow the items as well as some other non-linguistic factors of communication based on the communicative context of an utterance. "Discourse value" is the meaning which the speaker or writer expects his hearer/reader to decode or interpret. A question for example may not be intended to elicit any answer at all, but may aim at eliciting another kind of response from the participant.

Rhetorical questions for example do not generally demand any verbal answers. Tact therefore is that alternative discourse options which are available to you, that will

enable you communicate more comprehensively, appropriately and most friendly. If I asked you, "don't you think your shirt needs washing?" You are not likely to respond, "Yes, I think it does." You will know I am tactically suggesting that you wash your shirt. On the other hand, you're likely to feel embarrassed if I told you: "your shirt is dirty; go and wash it." Let us take it for granted a news item appears on the cover page of Newswatch magazine for over five weeks in the Zambian context. It says "***Who killed Kabokisi***?" It is indeed a question, but is it really a question? What kind of answer does it demand? The caption is not really a question but simply a tactical way of appealing to the minds of the Zambian people against Police brutality. So, rather than accuse the police directly, the headline keeps asking "***Who killed Kabokisi***" even when it was almost obvious that everyone knew killers.

10.1.2 Tact as Politeness

Interlocutors choose to apply tact in speech or writing in order to present some serious subject that may ordinarily appear offensive in a more polite and receptive manner. Note that one of the principal aims of tact is to achieve politeness. In pragmatics, we often pay attention to the force of the utterances we make. You should be aware of the fact that when people speak, their words generally have some illocution (force) on the hearer, which may be positive or negative. And so, to increase the level of politeness, it is advisable to use more indirect kind of illocution.

Leech (1983) proposes that the indirect illocutions tend to be more polite because they increase the degree of options that people have and then the more indirect an illocution is the more diminished its force tends to be. Sometimes, some indirect illocutions functions as commands, while some don't. An offer such as "***won't you come in***?" implies that coming in is in the interest of the person being addressed although it doesn't sound too polite. On the hand, "***will you return my book***?" sounds rather harsh and authoritative. "***Would you mind returning my book***?" is indirect and polite.

Leech (1983) argues that the tact maxim essentially has two sides to it, i.e. a negative side, meaning "***minimize the cost to Y***" and positive side "***maximize the benefit to Y***." This means that in proposing an action to Y, Z should direct his illocution towards a

positive outcome by restricting Y's option of saying "No." Thus an imperative like "relax" or "help yourself" which does not allow Y to say No, is actually a positive polite way of making an offer. A positive force might even be added to it by a persuasive emphasis of "have a drink" or "you must have a drink."

10.1.3 Forms of Illocutionary Function

Illocutionary functions are said to be those functions that correspond to what the speaker or writer intends to achieve on the mind of the hearer or reader. These functions or goals as we have observed earlier may be positive or negative. Leech (1983) has identified four (4) types of illocutionary functions that are possible in different types of context especially in relation to achieving social goals of maintaining friendship. They are as follows:

(i) **Competitive**; this illocutionary goals competes with social goal e.g. ordering, asking, demanding, begging
(ii) **Convivial**; this illocutionary goal coincides with social goal e.g. inviting, greeting, thanking, congratulating
(iii) **Collaborative**; this illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social goal; asserting, reporting, announcing, instructing
(iv) **Conflictive**; this illocutionary goal conflicts with social goal e.g. threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding

Note that only two out of the four involve politeness. However, where the illocution is competitive, it only tends to reduce discord in case of competition between Y and Z.

10.1.4 Face-Saving Tact

What has been discussed so far about tact and how it relates to politeness is to show the various ways individuals use language to achieve the desired aims and sustain social relationships. When a speaker tries not to cause offence, he is said to be protecting the hearer's face. So face saving tact is a strategy in communication aimed at lessening someone's feeling of threat or fear. It might be in form of polite request or a statement that is actually a question, in order to reduce someone's possibility to feel threatened, embarrassed or insulted. "*Could you possibly turn on the light please*" is a more face-saving tact than an imperative "*turn on the light*!"

10.2 Deixis

To fully understand the speaker/writer's intended meaning, his identity, situation, time and environment should be known to the reader/hearer. If you get a short note that says: "meet us there this evening" it is assumed you understand 'us', 'there' or 'this evening' since meaning depends on the knowledge of who is speaking, about whom, where and when the expressions are made.

Lyons (1977:637) has defined deixis as follows:
By deixis, is meant the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatio-temporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee. Lyons (1977:636) has used the term deixis to cover the function of personal and demonstrative pronouns, of tense and of variety of other grammatical and lexical features which relate utterances to the spatio temporal co-ordinates of the act of utterance.

For Yule (1996: 9), deixis is a technical term (from Greek) for one of the most basic ones that means pointing' via language.

Attempting to grammaticalise the aspects of deictic use in language, Levinson (1983:54), however, prefers to define deixis as follows:
Deixis concerns the ways in which languages encode or grammaticalize features of the context of utterance or speech event, and thus also concerns ways in which the interpretation of utterances depends on the analysis of that context of utterance."

Deixis, in a broad sense, is potentially context-dependent linguistic expression and typically anchoring in the perspective of the speaker. In this regard, the view that deixis is, in fact, a part of pragmatics is highly advocated, as its interpretation depends directly and primarily on features of the context involved, i.e., context-dependent, such as the speaker and addressee, their location in space and time, etc.

10.2.1 Deictic Reference

Words such as us, I, we, him, then, now, there, here etc. usually identify referents so that the addressee may be able to quickly pick out a person, place or time relevant to the understanding of the intended meaning. These words are called 'indexical' and their functions, i.e. being able to encode the context are called 'deictic' borrowing from the Greek word meaning 'pointing' or 'to point out.' The above deictic references are therefore used as pointers to persons, place or time the speaker has in mind. It is important to note that it is the context of utterance that again gives meaning to indexical like you, here, now, or there. If you hear your lecturers say:

(1) You, you and you, see me in my office
(2) You don't come here often, do you?
(3) When you pick up the book, you don't know whether to read the entire text or a few chapters
(4) Now is the right place to meet there

In (1) you will expect that your lecturer practically points specifically to certain persons using gestures or eye contact apart from just speaking. And you will also notice that each of the '***you***' will refer to a different person whose identity will be known only by those present when the lecturer makes the statement. In (2) '***you***' refers to a particular person at a particular time and place and 'here' will be meaningful if both the speaker and the hearer are at the same place. The lecturer's '***here***' in (2) and '***now***' and '***there***' in (4) may not be your '***here***' or '***now***' if both you and your lecturer are at different places and at different times. But notice the '***you'*** in (3). The 'you' does not refer to any particular referent, so that being present when it is used does not help you to identify the referent. This generalized use of 'you' is said to be non-deictic.

Deictic expressions used to point to persons are called person deixis, e.g. I, him, we, you etc. Place deixis is used to point to locations e.g. here, there, beside, etc, while time or temporal deixis is used to point to time, e.g. now, then, this evening, tomorrow etc.

10.2.2 Person Deixis

Among the indexical that refer to persons in English, only the word YOU appears to be the only deictic, i.e. the context is required to determine the referent. Other third person pronouns he, she, it or they do not function as deictic rather refer anaphorically to persons or objects already mentioned in the text. Unlike other languages like French or German, 'you' has both the polite and familiar forms (vous/tu in French) 'you' in English is used to refer to an individual or a group. Sometimes a speaker may add 'you-all' when s/he wishes to make a distinction but has only one form available to him/her.

10.2.3 Place Deixis

Place deixis or spatial deixis as sometimes referred to concerns itself with the spatial locations relevant to the utterance. As in person deixis, the locations may be either those of the speaker and the addressee or those of persons or objects being referred to. The most important English examples are the adverbs ***here*** and ***there*** and the demonstratives ***this*** and ***that*** – although these are far from being the only deictic words. Study the subsequent examples:

I enjoy living in ***this*** city.
Here is where we will place the statue.
She was sitting over ***there***.

Note that unless otherwise considered, place deictic terms are generally understood to be relative to the location of the speaker, as in:

The shop is ***across the street.***

Where ***across the street*** is understood to mean "across the street from where I am standing now as the speaker". Even if the expressions ***here*** and ***there*** are often used to refer to locations near to and far from the speaker, respectively, ***there*** can also refer to the location of the addressee, if they are not in the same location as the speaker. Look at the example:

Here is a good spot; it is sunny over ***there***.

Consider also the following examples:

(i) The lecturer's office is along the corridor on your right

(ii) The lecturer's office is along the corridor on your left

Assume that the descriptions above are given to two different students who are going to the same place. You will conclude that the place each student is standing when the description is being made determines the location of the lecturer's office, i.e. the context indicates whether the office is 'on your right' or 'on your left.' If you and I stand facing each other, your right will be my left, while your left will be my right. So it is always important to know where the speaker is at the time he is speaking to be able to interpret correctly what s/he means by ***right, left, here, there, above, go or come.***

Consider another example:

(i) I am going to Lusaka

(ii) I am coming to Lusaka

Note that here again the difference between the two expressions depends on the location of the speaker and what he or she considers as either moving toward or moving away from. Proximity to Lusaka from where the speaker is, again may be a determining factor. Languages usually show at least a two-way referential distinction in their system: ***proximal***, that is near or closer to the speaker; and ***distal***, that is far from the speaker and or closer to the addressee. In English, demonstratives such as this/these and here are often used to indicate proximity, while that/those and there refer to distance. In all the examples, you can see clearly how deictic expressions depend on the context to determine the reference of the items they point to.

Deictic Projection

You will note that in some contexts, spatial deixis is used metaphorically rather than physically, that is, the speaker is not speaking as the deictic centre. For example:

I am ***coming*** home now.

The preceding utterance in the example would generally be considered as the speaker's expression of his or her going home, yet it appears to be perfectly normal for one to project his physical presence to his home rather than away from home.

10.2.4 Temporal (Time)Deixis

Time or temporal deixis refers to deictic references that point to the time at which an utterance is made as well as the time the speaker intends to communicate to the hearer. For example, the reference of the following deictic items can only be determined by the time the utterance is made: now, then, soon, before, later, ago; yesterday, today, tomorrow; next, last; Monday, week, month, year etc.
If read today a letter your Dad wrote you last year, and it says:

(i) Try to stay at school more often *this year*.

You are not likely to be mistaken about 'this year' since the above expression was not made at the time you pick up the letter. Therefore the instruction to stay back at school may not apply to you at the time you are reading the letter probably the second or the third time. Again if your Dad wrote you this year (the year you're reading this lecture) and said:

(ii) I hope you perform well *this year*

You will understand that '*this year'* points to the current school year and not necessarily the calendar year. But if the expression was part of a card he gave you on the 1st of January, of course you will know he meant the new year (the calendar year). But if you read that on your birth day, then 'this year' will refer to the period up to your next birth day. We also see this kind of variety of references with deictic items like today, now, tomorrow or Wednesday. Consider these other examples:

(iii) *Today* is my birthday
(iv) *Today* women are strong political office holders

If I said (ii) on a Monday, then Monday is my birthday. But if I said (iii) on a Monday, the referent merely includes Monday plus all other times the speaker

considers as ‘today.’ In other words, ‘today’ in (iii) refers to the present time (not old time).

(v) Let’s do the work ***now***

(vi) I don’t really know what to do ***now***

Again ***now*** in (v) refers to the present time, either at 8 am or 12 noon. While ‘***now***’ in (vi) refers to an unspecified moment and remains unexpired.

(vii) I’ll see you tomorrow

‘***Tomorrow***’ in (vii) refers to the day after today if the speaker and hearer are within the same time frame. Otherwise the hearer’s ‘tomorrow’ may not be the speaker’s ‘*tomorrow*.’ You will probably begin to see why Linguists recommend that when reporting a speech or utterance, attention should be paid to expressions that indicate time for proper interpretation of meaning. If someone says:

(vii) I’ll be traveling to Lusaka tomorrow

A good report of that expression will be *he or she* said *he or she* would be traveling to Lusaka the *next day*.’ This is because ‘the next’ is more general to capture the intended meaning irrespective of the speaker/hearer’s time. If the reporter reports ‘tomorrow’ he will definitely miss out the time the speaker had in mind, because the speaker’s ‘tomorrow’ may not be the hearer’s ‘tomorrow’ especially in relation to the time the report is being read.

10.2.5 The Deictic and Meaning

In attempting to distinguish between the meaning of deictic like ***here*** or ***now*** from its variable reference, Hanks (1992:52) proposes that ‘***here***’ is the “the region immediate to you” while ‘***now***’ is ‘the time immediate to this utterance.’ Whenever a deictic occurs, what changes are not these propositional meanings, rather the place and time that the speaker refers to since the context shifts. Let’s look at this example taken from Grundy (2000:33). It is an advert on a Mazda showroom. It says:

(i) The car you saw today and intend to buy tomorrow, somebody saw yesterday and intends to buy today

Of course what the person that saw the car yesterday and intends to buy today referred to as 'today' was 'tomorrow' to him. So you can see that knowing what day is picked out by deictics such as today, tomorrow or yesterday depends on knowing the time of the utterance. So that if you look at the canteen notice that says:

(ii) No credit today, come tomorrow

You are not likely to pin down when ***tomorrow*** really is, thus the adage ***tomorrow never comes.***

The idea that mere uttering a deictic immediately affects a reference, i.e. index-referent identity hypothesis - the referent of an indexical is the very thing picked out by their linguistic meaning has been argued against in recent times. For instance, Nunberg (1993) proposes a theory of 'deferred reference' which distinguishes between the index (what is indicated e.g. today, tomorrow, here, now etc) and the interpretation (what is referred to). If I pick up a pair of jeans and tell you:

(i) These are the latest in town now.

Nunberg points out that by picking out a single pair of jeans and referring to a plural form '***these***' shows clearly that the reference is not the pair of jeans I picked out, rather other biros of the same kind that are the latest in town. The interpretation you reach depends on how you are able to link the index with the right reference, which is not evident in the immediate context. This is what is meant by deferred reference and Nunberg believes that all deictic reference works in this way. First identify the index, and then the index is instantiated into an interpretation.

10.2.6 Discourse Deixis

Discourse deixis is sometimes referred to as text deixis. It refers to the use of expressions within an utterance to refer to parts of the discourse that contains the utterance – including the utterance itself. Study the examples that follow; in

This is a great story.

"***this***" refers to an upcoming portion of the discourse, and in

That was an amazing account.

"***that***" refers to a prior portion of the discourse.

Distinction must be made between discourse deixis and anaphora, which is when an expression makes reference to the same referent as a prior term, as in:

Tasila is an incredible poet; ***she*** won the poetry competition last year.

The word ***she*** refers back to Tasila; thus anaphoric reference.

Of course, as argued by Lyons, it is possible for an expression to be both deictic and anaphoric at the same time. In Lyons example:

I was born in London and I have lived ***here/there*** all my life.

"***here***" or "***there***" function anaphorically in there reference to London, and deictically in that the choice between ***here*** and ***there*** indicates whether the speaker is or is not currently in London. The rule of thumb to distinguish the two phenomena is as follows: when an expression refers to another linguistic expression or piece of discourse, it is discourse deictic. When that expression refers to the same item as a prior linguistic expression, it is anaphoric.

10.2.7 Deictic Center

Again let's assume you are going to my office, and someone tells you:

(ii) The lecturer's office is on the left

In this case we have to decide whether 'the left' is the speaker's or the hearer's. It is generally assumed that the 'left' meant is the speaker's. The speaker's location at the time of the utterance is the deictic centre, which in this case determines 'the left' being referred to. Deictic center, in short is a set of theoretical points that a deictic expression is anchored to, such that the evaluation of the meaning of the expression leads one to the relevant point. Deictic centers have a tendency of being egocentric, that is, the center often consists of the speaker at the time and place of the utterance, and additionally, the place in the discourse and relevant social factors. The deictic centre however can be shifted. In other words, the deictic center can be transferred to

other participants in the exchange, or to persons, places and so on, who are being described in a narrative.

(iii) The lecturer's office is along the corridor on your left

The right interpretation of the deictic reference here relied on the context – in this case, the direction you were facing. The introduction of a cotext (your) in example (v) advises the addressee that the deictic centre has shifted from the unmarked location of the speaker to the marked location of the addressee. Speakers often do this to save their hearer the trouble of asking 'do you mean your left or my left?' Sometimes a shifted deictic centre can be effected without a co-text. If I'm looking for my child and a Good Samaritan tells me:

(iv) ***Behind*** the car

I will assume that my child is behind the car in relation to me rather than the Good Samaritan. Speakers have their ways of updating deictic centres using expressions like 'when you get to…' or 'before the Anglican church' etc. We also do the same thing with reference to time when we tell our listeners 'after that, or tomorrow the 15th of March, 2008 etc. In this case we give them enough clues to what deictic reference is meant. However, there are times when it is difficult to identify a deictic centre or when there are 'competing deictic centers.' You visit a friend and on his door, he leaves a notice that says:

(v) Will be back in 15 minutes

And you wonder whether the deictic centre is your friend's '15 minutes' or yours. Or you are reading a newspaper and there is a group photograph on which you are told:

(vi) On the right is the Minister of Higher Education.

If you are not told that '*the right'* is yours, you surely will be confused. Some speakers or writers are not always mindful of the problems they create for their hearers or readers when they use indexicals that make context identification difficult. But good listeners or readers always have their way of identifying the deictic centre or avoid it altogether.

10.2.8 Deixis and You

In discussing 'deixis and you,' we shall be looking at more examples of deixis in real life situations and how to interpret them. Of course it is clear that individual uses of deictic references differ with the encoding of relationship between persons, time and place. As a student if you use '***we***', '***us***' or '***our***' to refer to your membership of Chalimbana University, e.g. if you tell a friend, 'we lost the match' or 'they didn't invite us' where ***we*** and ***us*** stand for the university, you are simply encoding your membership/affiliation of the university. We do this all the time without even realizing that these are examples of deixis. Look at the following example;

The other day Mr. Zulu told me:

(vii) If ***we*** get a bigger fridge from the dean for the department, ***we*** will buy cases of water and in the ***next six months we*** won't be talking about water.

Notice the first '***we***' referring to me and him; the second 'we' obviously referring to him because he does most of the buying and the third '***we***' referring to the entire department that would not need water in six months. The person deixis has enabled Mr. Zulu to encode much of the meaning he intended, while my knowledge of deictic reference enabled me to interpret correctly what the indexical represents without him explaining to me what the various 'we' referred to. More importantly look at the use of 'the ***next six months***.' You may ask: Does he mean the next six months from the time the statement was made or from the time the fridge is brought or next six months from now? Remember that the fridge had not even been brought at the time the statement was made. With your knowledge of deixis and deictic reference, you will realize that 'the ***next six months'*** would be from the time the fridge was brought.

Another example is from a media interview involving a policeman and a robbery suspect.

(viii) Policeman: Did you say you often met at X?
Suspect: We kept our weapons there?

Who do you think the policeman's 'you' refers to? The suspect quickly understood the 'you' that was meant and responded appropriately. How do we know? In her answer she said 'we' referring to all members of the robbery gang. Again 'there' is taken for granted as referring to 'X,' an already mentioned location.

You must remember example (ii) earlier given that speakers/writers even make fun with the use of indexical; we may say 'fun' but such funs do indeed have their significant intended meanings. The notice that says: '***no credit today, come tomorrow'*** shows that tomorrow is endless but in terms of meaning, you will agree with me that it is another way of saying 'we don't sell on credit.' Think of other examples of deixis especially the ones you have actually noticed either as notices, adverts, new headlines, interviews etc.

10.2.9 Usage of Deixis

Note that it is important that you distinguish the two uses of deixis, gestural and symbolic, as well as non-deictic usages of frequently deictic words. Gestural deixis refers, broadly, to deictic expressions whose understanding requires some sort of audio-visual information. A simple example is when an object is pointed at and referred to as "***this***" or "***tha***t". However, the category can include other types of information than pointing, such as direction of gaze, tone of voice, and so on. Symbolic usage, by contrast, requires generally only basic spatio-temporal knowledge of the utterance. So, for example:

I broke ***this*** finger.

requires being able to see which finger is being held up, whereas

I love ***this*** city.

requires only knowledge of the current location. In the same vein,

I went to ***this*** city one time…

is a non-deictic usage of "this", which does not identify anywhere specifically. Rather it used as an indefinite article, much the way "***a***" could be used in its place.

10.3 Conclusion

This sub-section of our study has demonstrated how deictic references function in various social contexts. We have also seen that deixis is a very important feature of language in use across societies and cultures. In one society however, indexical such as ‘there’ may be used in a sense that may represent ‘here’ in another. All the time speakers/writers apply the various deictic references in ways that identify their hearers/readers, their locations and the time frame within which communication takes place.

10.4 Summary

You have established from your reading, in this part of the unit that the meaning of deictic references depends mainly on the context. Even though this is the case, whenever a deictic occurs, the propositional meaning does not change but the place and time that the speaker refers to as the context shifts. The speaker’s location at the time of the utterance which establishes the context is known as the deictic centre. The deictic centre can shift from the unmarked location of the speaker to the marked location of the addressee. Speakers, through the use of co-texts often do this in order to give their hearers enough clues to locate the deictic centre easily.

Activity

1. Discuss the types of deixis discussed in this part of the unit.
2. Demonstrate the concept of deictic centre.

10.5 Reference and Inference

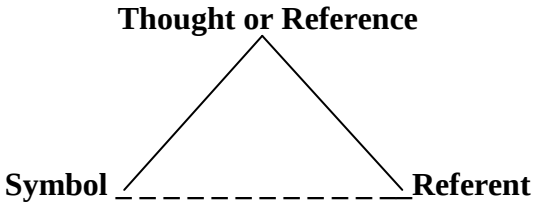
You must have that sometimes speakers or writers use one thing to refer to another and expect the listener or reader would make the connection between the two things. Often time, things are used to refer to people and truly personal names like Misebo, Kambeu or Mbao can refer to things based on some associations. Once or several times we hear students tell their course mates: “I have lost my “Peter Roach” and the classmates immediately understand that “Peter Roach” is a Phonetics and Phonology textbook. And so, we see here that the names of the authors can and are used time and again to refer to their work in a University context. Similarly, speaker and or hearers do make some inferences or assumptions which generally enable them to interpret meaning correctly. This part of the unit therefore, looks at how reference and

inference help speakers and writers communicate their intentions to their hearers and readers.

10.5.1 Semantic Reference

One fundamental characteristics of human language is the phenomenon of being able to talk about things not present in our immediate environment as well as things that are displaced in time and space (Carlson, 2006). This is true of the fact that the significance of human language is found in the way utterances correspond to things or facts around us. Much as is this true, it is still difficult to generalize this correspondence to "facts" or "truths" because not every linguistic sign (word) has a corresponding object in the physical world. Verbs or prepositions for instance, that indicate actions and relationships do not have direct physical references in the real world. The types of words or phrases that formally display references are demonstratives and indexical words as you must have seen earlier in the preceding units.

So, when we talk about Semantic reference, we are referring to is a type of verbal or written "***pointing to***" or ***identifying*** (picking out) of certain objects or individuals that a speaker wishes to talk about. Earlier studies in semantics argue that the meaning of a word or sentence is intimately connected to the truth value of the sentence; hence reference is what relates words to the world of objects on whose condition truths relies on (See McGin, 1981). Ferdinand de Saussure in his sign theory of meaning argues that the linguistic sign is made up of a signifier (the word) and the signified (the object) and both are linked by a psychological associative bond (Palmer, 1996). Ogden & Richard (1923) conceives this relationship as a triangle, thus:



Note that the symbol is the word or sentence while the referent is the object (in the external world). Thought or reference is the concept. You must note also that there is

no direct link between the symbol and referent. The link is only established through the thought or reference (i.e. the concepts of our minds). Reference is therefore the object that the mind conceives about the entity which the word expresses or refers. Thus the referent of the word chair is an object with four legs for sitting. This forms the basis of the proposition by philosophers like Russell and Frege that reference contributes to the truth and falsity of a statement. But we know that not all words have obvious referents in the physical world, (e.g. Christmas, liberty, love etc) and again several expressions may even refer to one referent but to avoid this limitation, semanticists use the terms denotation and connotation to differentiate between direct reference and extension.

10.5.2 Pragmatic Reference

Apart from determining truth, there is another kind of meaning which results from producing and understanding the actual utterance and intention of the speaker, in which case we cannot talk about direct reference of some particular words in the sentence. What we may even refer to as truth or falsity of the words or expressions turns out to be pragmatic rather than semantic. If we say that reference of a word or phrase is what contributes to the truth or falsity of a sentence, we notice that there are other words and expressions in the same sentence that do not have direct references but play a role in determining the truth or falsity of the sentence, so we talk of functions rather than reference. Strawson argues that truth or falsity is a property of use of a sentence via an utterance in a particular context. He further points that a verb such as 'refer' or 'mention' is a verb of doing because if you say X refers to Y, rather than the general reference, there may be specific reference which the speaker has in mind in which case the truth depends on the speaker and the context of the utterance (Carlson, 2006). In fact instances, when some references do not even refer to anything at all even though they have meaning from a semantic point of view. If you say "the skinny woman" you may be referring to a particular woman on one occasion and another in another occasion, but semantically there is no particular individual because there are many skinny women in the world. Take your mind back to our discussion on deictic references.

10.5.3 Inference

Inference is the process of working out meaning or the intention of the speaker from the text or utterance available to you. This deductive process is usually based on some background knowledge of the context or shared understanding of values, social conventions or beliefs between the speaker and the hearer. Hearers or readers are always faced with the task of working something out, and making explicit what is meant from what is not said or written. If someone, for example tells you: ***once again, I've lost my phone,*** you are likely to infer that: the person had been lost a phone before or that he is not likely to buy another phone anymore.

Your inference however doesn't have to be correct all the time, but it is normal attempting to make additional interpretation of an utterance. Even in the reading of literary texts, we make a great deal of inferences in terms of facts we take for granted and aspects of culture/social knowledge without which a text becomes difficult to appreciate. We can infer the illocutionary force of an utterance that seems indirect and also infer that a conversational principle has been violated. According to Horn (2006), speakers implicate while hearer infer.

10.6 Presupposition

Stalnaker (1974) suggests that pragmatic presupposition is what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in a conversation. This definition would reasonably account for the lack of truth value of sentences with false "presupposition". That is, to utter a sentence whose presupposition is, and is known to be, untrue would be simply to produce an infelicitous utterance, rather than, as semanticists would have it, a truth-valueless sentence.

Put in another way, speakers or writers usually design their message on the assumption that the hearer or reader already has a degree of the knowledge of what is being communicated. What the writer assumes the reader already knows about the subject and the context of the information is known as presupposition.

In this part of the unit, you are looking more at how presupposition is based on shared assumption between speaker and hearer and how some clauses (especially introduced

by when) give rise to presupposition. You will also look at how to distinguish between semantic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition.

10.6.1 Pragmatic Presupposition

Note that when we speak with people, we generally make valid assumptions about the background of what we say, which we presume to be mutually known. If someone tells you:

(i) Registration for the workshop ends tomorrow.

For anyone to appropriately respond to this utterance, it is assumed that he or she knows something about "the workshop" in question. If one does not know, we can conclude that the speaker made a wrong assumption about the person's knowledge of the workshop. Lack of knowledge; therefore, on the part of the hearer results in the failure of a presupposition in which case the hearer would be prompted ask in order to know what the speaker is talking about. There would not be any point in saying: registration for the workshop ends tomorrow unless the speaker knew that the hearer is properly informed about the upcoming workshop and the process of registration.

Note that the speaker must meet this condition must be met before he or she makes the utterance. He must presuppose that the hearer is familiar with the workshop and certainly eager to be registered. So, we can call this background knowledge as Pragmatic Presupposition because they are not linguistic in nature, they are felicity condition which ought to be met for the utterance to be appropriate otherwise, the speaker will have to go all the way to explain the upcoming workshop, the expected registration, the date etc.

10.6.2 Presupposition in the Real World

To communicate effectively with people in your daily interactions, you surely depend on a number of presuppositions. Daily interactions may even include specialized places such as courts, between lawyers and their clients, the hospital between doctors and their patients, police stations between police officers and crime suspects. In many cases during interviews, questionings or cross-examinations, people are not very conscious of the responses they give and often before they realise it, they will have implicated themselves. For example:

Police officer: *Did you say you saw Davy near Chalimbana University*?

Suspect: *He actually lives in Chalimbana University compound.*

In the example above, the police's question presupposes that the suspect had actually told him that Davy lives near Chalimbana University.

Even if you may not realise it, presupposition is a feature of a normal everyday conversation. When people communicate, their knowledge of the language system enables them to make valid assumptions and conclusions in order to interpret utterances correctly. In fact, in most instances, it is not all that is in the mind that is expressed in words. You definitely must have noticed that much of the meaning conveyed in what is said, is rooted in the contexts interlocutors find themselves. In other words, people deliberately allow themselves to mean more than they actually express in words. We expect and take it for granted therefore, that with background knowledge and information, the hearer can make the right interpretation of what they hear us say.

One can safely say; Presupposition is the assumption that the hearer already knows about the subject and the context of the information. The context includes shared knowledge of the environment, culture, belief or world view. This enables the hearer to make the right assumption or inference as he interprets a piece of information. Pragmatic presupposition depends more on the context for its interpretation and meaning while Semantic presupposition takes place when there is a definite reference which marches a description like a proper name or a title of a text book.

10.7 Politeness Principle

Politeness is not just about showing some compliments, it is rather the exercise of language choice to create a context intended to match addressee's notion of how he or she should be addressed. Among the aspects of context that are particularly determined by language choice in the domain of politeness are the power-distance relationship of the interlocutors and the extent to which a speaker imposes on or requires something of their addressee. Therefore, to be "polite" is simply a way a speaker implicates a context that matches the one assumed by the hearer (Grundy, 2000:144-5). This we do by applying some great deal of linguistic politeness as a rule

for ensuring the appropriate etiquette or social behaviour. Look at the following example showing expressions of politeness phenomena:

(i) Could you possibly open that window for me please

(ii) Open that window for me

Polite utterances often encode the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. As we can be seen in the above examples, politeness principle does not always encourage economy of words, rather the speaker of (i) adopts politeness strategy as long as it satisfies his intention and needs. That is not to say, however, that there are no situations where (ii) will be the most appropriate.

According to Grundy (2000), if we do not see the relationship between us and the persons who address us as they do, we may be upset by the strategies they use, since these strategies imply the kind of relationship we have with them, thus linguistic politeness is "the function of language to imply the most appropriate speaker-addressee relationship" (2000:147).

Politeness Principle: Table

Maxim	Where Found	Description
The tact Maxim	In impositives and commissives	The speaker minimizes the cost (and correspondingly maximizes the benefit) to the listener.
The generosity Maxim	In impositives and commissives.	The speaker minimizes the benefit (and correspondingly maximizes the cost) to herself.
The approbation Maxim	In expressive and assertives.	The speaker minimizes dispraise (and correspondingly maximizes praise) of the listener.
The modesty Maxim	In expressives and assertives.	The speaker minimizes praise (and accordingly maximizes dispraise) of herself.
The agreement Maxim	In assertives	The speaker minimizes disagreement (and accordingly maximizes agreement) between herself and the listener.
The sympathy	In assertives	The speaker minimizes antipathy (and accordingly maximizes sympathy) between herself and the listener.

10.7.1 Politeness as Face-Saving

Perhaps it is important to state what the concept of ***face*** is in pragmatics. In pragmatics, the concept of ***face*** is someone's self image. One of the reasons for the pragmatic adoption of politeness is to safeguard the other person's face. The other

person usually has a need to be respected, and face here refers to his ability to be present in a social environment without any feelings of embarrassment or being out of place. One's face therefore, is one's emotional and social sense of self worth that one would want another person to recognize (Yule, 1996). And so, if someone says something to you, for example that constitutes a threat to your image, that is called face-threatening act. If someone tells you:

(iii) Leave the road! And another tells you:

(iv) Could you please, move a little bit to your right.

The speaker in (iii) speaks as if he has authority or social power over you. If he does not have that power, then he is indeed threatening your face. The speaker in (iv) on the other hand who has adopted an indirect speech act (in form of a question) removes the face threatening act, hence making his request less threatening. So, the speaker in (iv) who has removed your tendency to feel threatened has performed ***a face-saving act***. You can actually see that this face-saving technique constitutes politeness.

Note that, as an individual, you have both the negative face and positive face. Your negative face is your need to be independent and free of any form of imposition, while your positive face is your need to be well treated, to belong, to be a member of the group (Yule, 1996). A face-saving act that recognises another person's negative face will be concerned about his need not to be imposed, harassed or insulted. Thus the need to use such expressions as "I'm sorry to bother you…" "I just couldn't help asking if…" "I know you're busy but…" etc. A face-saving act that emphasises a person's positive face will show solidarity and be mindful of a common goal, tendency or a common weakness.

10.8 Conclusion

This unit has dealt with deixis, presupposition, inference, pragmatic inference and politeness. It is hoped that you have conceptualized these aspects very well. If not, then go back to the unit and remind yourself.

Activity

1. Discuss politeness as a face-saving act.
2. Show the relationship between politeness and choice of words.

UNIT 11 SOME THEORIES OF PRAGMATICS

11.0 Introduction

This unit introduces you to some theories in pragmatics. Note that not all of them are discussed here and only the surface of those discussed has been covered. On your own, research on other theories of pragmatics and get to the depth of those covered here.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- describe the speech act theory
- describe the locutionary act, Illocutionary act and perlocutionary act
- distinguish between a direct speech act and indirect speech act
- discuss Grice's theory of implicature
- state what is meant by felicity conditions
- discuss thematic roles

11.1 Speech Act Theory

Speech acts show the force that utterances have for counting as actions rather than mere giving of information. In this unit we shall examine in fair details how words or utterances perform actions such as promising, commanding, warning.

11.1.2 Doing things with words

Language, as recognized by both John Austin 1962 and Searle 1969) is a tool for performing actions. Because of this, we can safely say that the ***meaning*** we associate with an utterance is the intention of the user, and not the meaning of words in the utterance. If we study a user's intention, we are studying what the user does with words, either in speech or writing. Austin assumes that when an individual makes an utterance, he or she performs some "speech acts" such as requesting, questioning, pronouncing, informing etc. This, by implicature is that instead of talking of linguistic forms of the utterance, we are talking of the ***functions*** of these forms. Take the subsequent examples, for example:

(i)	May I use your pen for a moment?	Interrogative	Request
(ii)	Did you buy the salt?	Interrogative	Question
(iii)	Leave the room!	Imperative	Command

(iv) I couldn't go to Church yesterday Declarative Information

Note that such forms as "*Did you buy the salt*?" "*Are you coming for/attemding the meeting*?" used as questions are described as *direct speech acts*.

We indeed do things with words when we talk. We usually would say:

(v) "I am here now" to *comfort* someone or *reassure* them

(vi) "Don't forget me" to *remind* someone that he hasn't done your job

(vii) "You met me well" to *invite someone to eat* with you.

All the foregoing example show that there is a difference between the literal meaning of what is said and what ***acts*** the utterances actually performed.

11.1.3 Indirect Speech Act

An indirect speech act is when a statement is used to perform an action such as a request, permission or apology other than its direct implication. So, a question like "do you have some money there?" from a friend alighting from a bus certainly means a request for some money. "You parked the car on the road" could imply "go and remove the car" "the door is open" may be a request (indirectly) asking someone to shut the door.

11.2 Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Acts

11.2.1 Locutionary Act

According to Austine (1962) in his Speech Act Theory, there are three actions related to speech acts. The first act is the locutionary act which is the basic production of meaningful utterance. This act is much related to the hearer. Note that if the hearer fails to understand what the speaker is saying then the speaker has failed to do a locutionary act. For example, when a person from Southern Province of Zambia (he is in the states for instance) talks to an American in Tonga '***mwabuka buti***?' in English this will not produce what is called as meaningful linguistic expression. On the contrary when the speaker says '***how are you, sir***?' then the American would understand and it is a form of locutionary act.

11.2.2 Illocutionary Act

The illocutionary act is considered the core of the theory of speech acts. It is closely related to the speaker's intentions, of e.g. promise, offer, give a command etc. You should know by now that each time one utters a sentence or word, one must have a certain intention. Most of the time people produce well-formed utterances for a purpose. For instance, the need to communicate something to someone or to provide facts. This second dimention is called ***Illocutionary Act***. An illocutionary act is achieved via an utterance with a communicative intention. A speaker as earlier stated may perform an illocutionary act to make a promise, offer, give a command and so on, which is as proposed by Austine as ***illocutionary force***. In order to correctly decode the illocutionary act performed by the speaker, it is necessary for the hearer to be acquainted with the context the speech occurs in. It follows that the illocutionary speech act is communicatively successful if the speaker's illocutionary intention is recognized by the hearer. The speaker's intentions are communicative because the fulfillment of illocutionary intentions consist in the hearer's understanding. In indicating illocutionary act, Searle develops a device called Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (**IFID**). It is an expression to show what the illocutionary force of an utterance is. For example, in the utterance:

(i) '***I promise you this'***

The word '***promise***' in (i) is identified as performative verb which is one of the devices to identify illocutionary force. It is obviously indicated that the illocutionary force of the speaker is to promise something to the hearer as the speaker describes it explicitly.

It should be clear to you that the issue of illocutionary acts is sometimes quite complicated because one and the same utterance can have more illocutionary forces (meanings) depending on the IFIDs, the context, the conventions and other factors. Look at the example that follows:

(ii) ***The door is there***.

The simple declarative sentence in (ii) in form of a statement can be interpreted in at least two ways. It can be either understood literally as a response to the question "Where is the way out?" or "Where is the door?" or it can be taken as an indirect request to ask somebody to leave. The sentence thus has two illocutionary forces which, even if they are different, have a common proposition (content). If understood (taken) as a response to the question "Where is the door, or where is the way out?" then the case would be called a direct speech act. But if it is taken as an indirect request to ask somebody to leave, it is an indirect speech act.

Note that it is also possible for one illocutionary act to have more utterance acts (or locutionary acts according to Austin) as in:

(iii) *Can you make me a cup of tea?*
(iv) *Will you make me a cup of te ?*
(v) *Could you make me a cup of tea?*
(vi) *Would you make me a cup of tea?*
(vii) *Can't you make me a cup of tea?*
(viii) *Won't you make me a cup of tea?*

All the utterances in (iii) to (viii) are indirect requests and have a common illocutionary force, which is requesting. You must note that there are thousands of illocutionary acts and that is why, for understanding and orientation, some linguists proposed their classification. The most cited classification is that of Searle, who divides the illocutionary acts into five major categories, but in this module, to define them, Levinson's explanation has been used. Here we only give you classification by Searle; you can read on your own the classification by Austin. The subsequent section looks at Searle's classification of illocutionary acts as explained by Levinson.

11.2.3 Searle's Classification of Illocutionary Acts:

Representatives: These are such utterances which commit the hearer to the truth of the expressed proposition (e.g. asserting, concluding)

The name of the Registrar is Mr. Chibesakunda.

Directives: These are attempts by the speaker to get the address to do something (e.g. ordering, requesting)

Would you make me a cup of tea?

Commissives: These commit the speaker to some future course of action (e.g. promising, offering)

I promise to come at twelve and cook a delicious meal for you.

Expressives: These express a psychological state (e.g. thanking, congratulating)

Congratulations on your graduation.

Declaratives: The effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (e.g. christening, declaring war)

I bequeath all my property to my beloved fiancée.

11.2.4 Perlocutionary Act

While the locutionary act is the action of making a meaningful utterance and illocutionary act is performing an intentional utterance, a Perlocutionary act talks about producing the effect of the meaningful, intentional utterance. The illocutionary act is the last of the three of Austin's three-fold speech acts. If making an utterance that intend to make someone to drink coffee is successfully performed, the effect that someone actually drank the coffee is known as Perlocutionary effect. Look at the next example. If Joseph says to Sarah "***You are beautiful***", if Sarah is attracted to Joseph, usually she will blush and feel happy; but on the contrary, if Sarah is not attracted to the speaker (Joseph), then usually she will only say "Thank you" and not feel as happy as in the first case.

In conclusion, it is hoped that you have understood even this part of the module. To remind you further, a locutionary act is the production of meaningful utterances and expressions (go away, come here, who are you? etc) which leads to illocutionary act, the intention of producing meaningful expression (promise, offering, giving a command, etc) which causes the performance of Perlocutionary act, which is the

effect of the locutionary and illocutionary act (behaviour, feeling, belief, etc). We can summarise the speech acts as follows:

Locutionary act:	Performing an act of saying something
Illocutionary act:	Performing an act in saying something
Perlocutionary act:	Performing an act by saying something

Reflect

Do you think there could be a relationship among the three speech acts? If so, demonstrate this relationship with tangible examples.

Activity

Demonstrate how true to reality the speech acts are. In your explanation, provide tangible examples.

11.3 Felicity Conditions

A felicity condition is referred to as a state when the utterance made has met the appropriate conditions such as, appropriate context, conventional existence, authority and the speaker's intentions. Austin (1962) argues that in using speech acts one has to fulfill certain conditions regarding the act that is being uttered. In other words, the expression felicity conditions refer to the conditions that must be in place and the criteria that must be satisfied for a speech act to achieve its purpose. In other words, a sentence must not only be grammatical to be correctly performed, it must also be delicious or well suited for the purpose.

11.3.1 Types of Felicity Conditions

There are several types of felicitous conditions. The following are some of them.

Propositional content: This condition requires that the participants understand language, not to act like actors.

Preparatory: A felicitous condition where the authority of the speaker and circumstances of the speech act are appropriate to its being performed successfully.

Sincerity: A condition where the speech act is being performed seriously and sincerely.

Essential: A condition where the speaker intends that an utterance be acted upon by the addressee.

11.3.2 Further thought on Felicity Conditions

Note that Performatives are utterances in which saying is doing, and they are only successful is certain felicity conditions are fulfilled argues (Cook, 1989).

1. The sender believes that the action should be done.
2. The receiver has the ability to do the action.
3. The receiver has obligation to do the action.
4. The sender has the right to tell the receiver to do ht action.

The point is that if any one of the 4 foretasted conditions is not fulfilled, the utterances are not felicitous. The reason is that felicity conditions are conventions that speakers and addressees use as a code to produce and recognize actions. In other words, for felicity conditions to exist, the speaker must utter words that are heard by the receiver. The receiver should take some kind of action based on those words. If the speaker is unintelligible, lacks the authority or status to speak those words, or is insincere, then her utterances are infelicitous. If the listener doesn't act on those words, then the speech is infelicitous. Only if all these conditions are met are utterances from the speaker considered felicitous.

11.4 Grice's Theory of Implicature

Implicature is a technical term in the pragmatics subfield of linguistics, coined by Herbert Paul Grice. Implicature refers to what is *suggested* in an utterance, even though neither expressed nor *strictly implied* (that is, entailed) by the utterance. According to Grice, two very different elements combine to make up the total signification of an utterance. As is well-known, his fundamental divide came between what is said and what is implicated. 'What is said (by a sentence)' is a technical term for Grice and is usually held to be determined by the syntactic constituents of that sentence together with the processes of disambiguation and reference determination for context-sensitive expressions. Although Grice steered clear of the terminology of semantics and pragmatics, it is common to see this notion of what is said by a

sentence as lining up with literal, semantic content for sentences, while what is implicated by an utterance is taken to line up with pragmatic meaning.

For example, the sentence "*Mary had a baby and got married*" strongly suggests that Mary had the baby before the wedding, but the sentence would still be *strictly true* if Mary had her baby after she got married. Further, if we add the qualification "*— not necessarily in that order*" to the original sentence, then the implicature is *cancelled* even though the meaning of the original sentence is not changed.

Grice (1975) 's work consists in an attempt to clarify the intuitive difference between what is expressed literally in a sentence and what is merely suggested or hinted at by an utterance of the same string of words. To distinguish the latter from the former, Grice uses the neologisms *implicate* and *implicature*, while he refers to the linguistically coded part of utterance content as ***what is said***. The sum of what is said in a sentence and what is implicated in an utterance of the same sentence is called the ***total signification of an utterance*** (Grice 1978, 1989). Implicature itself is meant to cover a number of ways in which literally unsaid information can be conveyed.

11.4.1 Types of implicature

Grice identifies two types of implicatures. These being: (i) generalized conversational implicature, which occurs irrespective of the context and (ii) particularized conversational implicature, which is based on the context of speakers and situations.

11.4.2 The Gricean Theory

In addition to identifying and classifying the phenomenon of implicature, Grice developed a theory designed to explain and predict conversational implicatures. He also sought to describe how such implicatures are understood. Grice's theory is basically about how people use language. He therefore suggests a set of assumptions that guide the conduct of conversation for the efficient and effective use of language.

Grice (1975) postulated a general ***Cooperative Principle*** and what he calls four conversational ***maxims*** specifying how to be cooperative. It is common knowledge, he argued, that people generally follow these rules for efficient communication. Grice observed that when people talk they try to be "cooperative" and attempt to obey some

cooperative principle which demands that they make their conversational contributions such as is required, at the stage where it occurred, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk in which they are engaged. The conversational principle operates with some "maxims" in the assumption that the speaker does not say what is false, or irrelevant, or too much or too little. The four maxims are as follows:

11.5 Conversational Maxims

Instances of conversation are based on either adherence to or flouting of certain principles or maxims. Thus Grice observed that when people talk they try to be "cooperative" and attempt to obey some "cooperative principle" which demands that they make their conversational contributions such as is required, at the stage where it occurred, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk in which they are engaged. The conversational principle operates with some "maxims" in the assumption that the speaker does not say what is false, or irrelevant, or too much or too little. The maxims are:

11.5.1 The Maxim of Quantity

This maxim states that the participants to a piece of conversation should offer as much information as is necessary: neither too little nor too much. This implies that the contribution you make should be as informative as required not more informative than is required.

11.5.2 The Maxim of Quality

This maxim states that the participants to a piece of conversation should be sincere and honest in whatever they have to say. They should not make statements for which they have little or no evidence.

11.5.3 The Maxim of Relevance/Relation

This maxim states that the participants to a piece of conversation should present information that has direct relevance to the topic of conversation at hand.

11.5.4 The Maxim of Brevity/Manner

This maxim states that the participants to a piece of conversation should ensure brevity and orderliness and clarity in order to avoid obscurity and ambiguity in their presentations.

Any or all of these maxims can be flouted or broken for a specific communicative purpose. The flouting would not in any way imply lack of competence on the part of any of the participants.

11.6 Semantics: Thematic Roles

This is not meant to be so detailed, it only addresses the relationship between a verb and its NP arguments, including those found as object of an obligatory prepositional phrase. The explanations of the examples apply to Standard English.

11.6.1 Intuition

Note that as human beings we possess an innate ability to determine whether or not a sentence or phrase is grammatical. These judgments are not based on prescribed grammatical rules such as 'do not use double negatives' but rather on **intuitions**. For example, if asked to judge whether or not the sentence 'Batman fell' was grammatical, you would not hesitate to respond 'yes'. The same judgment would apply to the sentence 'Batman waxed the bat mobile'. You would also deem 'Batman bought a towel' as grammatical, but not 'Batman bought' or 'Batman slept the floor'. These intuitions are largely based on the syntactic and semantic properties of a verb required by a language's specific rules or *constraints*. And you know what yours are without too much reflection.

11.6.2 Centrality of the Verb

Verbs are the central component of any utterance. Thus your intuitions in the sentences above were based on whether or not all the 'parts' of the verb phrase were included (or not). For instance 'sleep' cannot be followed by a direct object, and 'bought' must be. These syntactic requirements are referred to as sub-categorization frames. Sub-categorization frames provide information about what types of phrases a verb requires. Here are some examples.

11.6.3 Syntactic Properties

In order for the verbs ‘love’ and ‘sleep’ to be used grammatically, they must be followed by an NP. (This is true at the surface structure level for ‘sleep’.) The verb ‘give’ requires an NP and a PP, whereas verbs such as ‘want’ require an NP and/or a sentential complement (CP or S).

11.6.4 Semantic Properties

As is seen below, the grammatical syntactic structure alone cannot guarantee grammaticality.

You can say

A The child hit the ball.

A We are hoping for rain this weekend.

You can’t say

B *The ball hit the child.

B *We are hoping about rain this weekend.

11.6.5 Semantic Selection

So you can see that verbs impose both structural and semantic restrictions, which are expressed as semantic roles, or thematic roles (***theta roles***). The verb ‘hit’ requires an animate subject that intentionally carries out the ‘hitting’ on an object that is ‘hittable’. This accounts for the fact that **A** is grammatical and **B** is not, even though the sub-categorization frame is syntactically sound. This is also true for the second row. The verb ‘hope’ requires a prepositional phrase as its complement, however there are semantic restrictions on which preposition can be used.

11.6.6 Theta Theory

Theta theory addresses the specific semantic relationships between a verb and its arguments. Verbs assign *thematic roles (theta roles)* to each NP that is obligatory (**must** be included in the verb phrase). Theta theory requires that **theta criterion** to be fulfilled in order for a verb to be used grammatically.

11.6.7 Theta Criterion

Each argument may receive one and only one theta role, and each theta role may be assigned to one and only one argument.

THUS, there is a one-to-one relationship between arguments of a verb and theta roles.

11.6.8 Theta Grid

The theta roles of each NP are stated in a verb's theta grid. This is where we see all obligatory arguments and how they are semantically related to the verb. The format for this grid is as follows:

11.6.9 Thematic Roles

The arguments which a verb assigns are referred to as Thematic or Theta Roles. Major theta roles include the following in **bold.**

- **Agent** – The entity that intentionally carries out the action of the verb.

  ***Mary** slapped her boyfriend.*

- **Experiencer** – The entity that undergoes an emotion, a state of being, or a perception expressed by the verb.

  ***James** is sad*

- **Theme** – The entity that directly receives the action of the verb.

  *John beat **Mary.***

- **Instrument** – The entity by which the action of the verb is carried out.

  *She killed her husband with a **knife**.*

- **Goal** – The direction towards which the action of the verb moves.

  *My father went to **the farm**.*

- **Source** – The direction from which the action originates.

  *They got Semantics books lessons from the **library.***

- **Location** – The location where the action of the verb takes place.

  *They took Semantics lessons in the **school hall***

- **Benefactive** – The entity that receives a concrete or abstract element as a result of the action of the verb

  *Kambeu bought his **wife** a car**.***

Conclusion

You have looked at some theories and felicity conditions in this unit. It is hoped that you took time to grasp what these theories are all about.

Activity

1. Discuss how the theories you have read in this unit are related
2. What are felicity conditions, and how important are they in conversation

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