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SURVEY INTO THE ANALYSIS OF SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

Dr Florence Etuwe OGHIAFOR

ASURVEY INTO THE ANALYSIS OF SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

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Abstract

This paper has extensively done a semantics-pragmatics analysis. It explained words and meaning through context independent meaning and speaker's intention through context dependent aspect of meaning. These are done by the use of human and sign language. The physical context, deixis, and linguistic context of meaning have been examined. Presupposition has also been considered when a speaker's intention is known. This paper has dealt with speech act semantics and its use in speaker's intention. Yule's direct and indirect speech acts are explained with examples; Austin's illocutionary, locutionary and intentional acts have been critically analyzed. Finally, the notion of order of event; has been discussed.

Keywords: Semantics, Pragmatics; Analysis; Speech act; deixis.

Introduction

There appears to exist two dimensions in which the meaning of language of an utterance is determined: a semantic dimension of meaning which focuses on linguistic structure, and a pragmatic dimension of meaning focusing on the features of the context of use. Semantic has been described as an area of linguistics that studies the meaning of words and sentences. The term semantics became popular in the 20th century. This does not mean that the study of meaning started at that period. From the time of Aristotle and Plato, scholars have been investigating the nature of meaning. Scholars from different areas, such as philosophy, logic, psychology anthropology have tried to study the nature of meaning. As Ndimele (1997) put it, "meaning itself is a chameleon of word that can change the colour of its effect with a change of speaker, hearers, context or setting." According to Levison (1983), "in the semantic theory meanings are studied with respect to the relation of signs to their designate (that is objects of entities to which the signs refer), while in the pragmatic theory, meanings are studied with respect to the relation of sign to their users and interpreters.

According to Akwanya(1996),"Pragmatics as a theory of language use in conversation was originally suggested by Bar-Hillel in the 1950s."Although many semanticians do not recognize that there is a need for a separate discipline to study conversation.Since the late 1970s pragmatics has tried to explain how it is that sentences with definable meanings can be used to convey messages that have no relation whatever,with the linguistic content of the sentence. Pragmatics deals extensively with context dependent aspects of meaning while semantics is concern with meaning completely without context.Pragmatics deals with the description of language from users point of view.This is done through the choice of language user,the

[difficulties encountered in the process of using the language for social interaction and the effects of language use on speaker hearer context

The study of semantics and pragmatics are closely related because they both study meanings. They are concerned with the aspects of meaning in a language. Ndimale (199) emphasizes that we can say anything we like, but in practice, we are constrained by some unwritten rules to be mindful of the social context we find ourselves before we can say anything. "For instance, there are utterances which are norms of formality and politeness that have been learnt by speakers of a language. These norms are applied when there is interaction with a particular set of people

either in rank or sex. The study of a speaker's intention has been proposed as a supplement of semantics, to be concerned only with ordinary language. But Lyons (1977), objected to this by saying that "semantics can and should account for meaning of all kinds conveyed by language"

Methodology

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act theory is the research method for this study. This theory was propounded by J.L. Austin, who was a philosopher. His lectures which he delivered at Harvard in 1955 were collected after his death in 1960 and were published in a book entitled:

How to Do things with Words

In 1962 (Akinwotu, 2020). The book marked the beginning of pragmatics as a discipline. Semantics focuses on conventional meaning, while pragmatics studies language in use (Yule, 1996). Austin stated that language is not just about the meaning of the words, phrases, and sentences we used in expressions. He argued that those words used in expressions usually ordinary, but most often constitute the actual performance (or fulfilment) of an action. For Austin, to speak is to do something. Austin proves that there are many utterances that constitute partly or wholly, the performance of an action (1962). As when X says to Y, I will buy you a car, or I am sorry. They are not just making a statement of meaning, performing the actions; misses and apology respectively.

There are other scholars who also made remarkable contributions to speech Act. Searle (1975) who observed that to speak a language is to perform acts, which include making statements, giving commands, asking questions or making promises. Yule (1996) asserts that speech Act is "action performed by the use of an utterance to communicate".

Mey (2001) in Akinwotu (2020) also explain that speech Acts are verbal actions happening in the world. In uttering a speech, I do something with my words, which is performing an activity that intentionally brings about at best, a change in the existing state of affairs. Mey insists that Speech Act involves doing something with words which in effect may bring about a change in a given state of affairs (Akinwotu, 2020).

The major thrust of speech act theory is that utterances do not only express just only a state of being, but also perform an action. This means that when we speak, we do not merely say

something with word, but we do something with the words. Furthermore, it is important to note that there is the functional or performative aspect of speech acts, as meaning and usage of speech are interrelated. This implies that attitude may be expressed in the performance of a speech act (Akinotu, 2020). For instance, words such as 'please' and 'kindly', are often used to express attitude most especially in performing an act (of request)

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Semantics-Pragmatics Analysis

It has been mentioned earlier that semantics is concerned with the description of word and sentence meaning and pragmatics studies the intentions of the speaker, and take into account of the effects of the utterance on his listener, the implication of expression. Let us consider these illustrations.

- a) Those two cars came here yesterday morning.
- b) Car DT 1252AGB and Car DT 1102AGB came to Ebu Street, Agbor, at 10.00 am on 10th May, 2024.

When these sentences are compared, they appear to be utterly different. The meaning of sentence (a) seems to be only generally suggested. It has to do with two cars that came to a particular day, but the identity of the cars, the place and the day they came were not stated.

In sentence (b) it appears that a state of affairs is completely described, and the only meaning question is whether the sentence is true or false. The pragmatic explanation of the fact that even sentence (a) can be used to describe a specific state of affairs is that the indexical in sentence;

(a) 'those; here; and yesterday' are designed to interact with the context of utterance. A speaker of (a) does not rely on the linguistic structure of the sentence exclusively. He draws no features of the context in which he utters the sentence. For example, the fact that the two cars came within view and that he and the hearer are at Ebu.

Pragmatics finds a study of language use motivated primarily in those cases where the complete meaning detected in actual use in some way overrides the meaning motivated by traditional semantics techniques. It is where the use of language clearly exposes the untenability of semantic oversimplification that pragmatics finds its subject-matter (Segardahl, 1996). When one is driving a car on an express way and sees this sign;

"Ferma

Direct

Labour".

The driver will probably know he is asked to slow down because, the company Ferma's

working on the road. Also, when one is trying to park his car along the road and sees this sign "Bank, no Parking". The driver will not interpret it as bank has no parking, but the interpretation is that this is a bank and no parking is allowed". The meaning of these signs are derived in the context of the words and what the writers of the signs intended their message to convey.

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A pragmaic description of his event emplorying he nun of udifcatom midt ie me

ЦfoolHooJmpJ

Byou codifies the address
ii come! here codify a movement towards the speaker resputivdt

iii.now codifies the time of uturence.

The speaker is using the person,the plaoe and the time codes codly,This is uase he watts the action to be camied out in immediate connection vith ihe time of usance

As a competent language user,the scretary tacitly knos the ordes and has e tty o the values that the context provides,which the sentenee vish its wanmascalineh intormadscn only abstractly describcs,The pragmatics represents the sntnoe,you,ume heae,non "a piece of linguistic structure that codifies the ueneral descrtigton of doing,a syeticntion cf te genral directions"(Segredah 1),He further states that the content devendent mearing belcmgs to pragmatics,while the study of context independent meaning belongs to semanics,which studies mcaning in abstraction from the contert of use,A deitic sentence such as,I am sick would be characterined by having a content dependent meaning in the vnse than the setenee

varies systematically with the context of use and requires the knowledge of the context. Also, in a non-deictic sentence like, oil floats in water, would be characterized by having a context independent in the sense that the meaning conveyed by using the sentence does not vary with the context of use, which does not require knowledge of the context.

In addition, some words in the English language cannot be interpreted at all, unless the physical context, especially the physical context of the speaker is known. Examples of those words are here, there, thus, that, now, then, yesterday, and pronouns such as I, you, him, her and them. These words are called deictic expressions (or deixis), which are means of pointing with language.

ror Yule(1996),a sentence like they ll have to do that tomorrow,because they arentt here now.is extremely vague.This is so because it contains a large number ofdeitic expressions

they.that.here.tomorrow and now.These deixis depend on their interpretation on the immediate physical context in which they were uttered.There are many of those expressions which can only be understood in terms of a speaker's intended meaning.If someone says I hate

working here';the person mean in this office'or in this building,or in this part of the town'or in this country'.The word 'here'is a deitic expression which can only be interpreted in terms of the location that the spaker intends to indicate.

The meaning of a speaker or writer's intention is also understood through the influence of the linguistic context.Semantically,the linguistic context of a word is the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence.Linguistic context has a strong effect of what we think a word

means.For example,the word bank'is a homonym.a form with more than one meaning.How does one usually know which meaning is intended in a particular sentence when the word bank is used?This is done on the basis of the linguistic context.Look at these sentences below;

1.The bank is overgrown.

2.I have to go to the bank to cash a cheque.

From the foregoing sentences,we know from the linguistic context that number(1)has to do with river while sentence (2)is concern with financial institution.

On the other hand,if one sees the word bank'written on the wall of a building in a town or city. the physical location will influence ones interpretation that it is a financial institution. Therefore,this is the physical context of interpreting the meaning of the work bank.

Moreover,the linguistic meanings of expressions are explicit.This is because the meanings of the expressions are clearly.stated.While pragmatic meaning is implicit,that is the.meaning is not clearly stated in words but can be understood.The meaning can be understood as a result of some characteristics.These are:

1.situation in which the utterance is produced,

2.the linguistic context,and

3.the cultural background between the speaker and the hearer.

In the case of the situation in which an utterance is produced,the speaker and the hearer are physically present.Therefore,the speaker finds it unnecessary to bother himself in providing every detail.Consequently,in the cultural background,certain aspects of meaning are taken for granted.This is because,both the speaker and the hearer share identical background knowledge

of the topic in discourse. Also in the linguistic context, the hearer understood the speaker due to the linguistic environment in which the expression is rendered. There are other several ways of interpreting a speaker's intended meaning. For instance, when someone tells you that 'your elder sister is waiting for you at the gate'. There is a presupposition that you have an elder sister. Similarly, if someone asks, why did you come late today? There is a presupposition that you did come late today. If the following question is asked, "when did John stop drinking alcohol?" there

is an obvious presupposition that John used to drink alcohol and John no longer does so. This type of question with built-in presuppositions is a very useful device for interrogations or for formal lawyers

Yule (1996), re-emphasized that one of the tests used to check for the presupposition underlying a sentence involves negating a sentence with a particular presupposition and considering whether the presupposition remains true and he used this sentence as an illustration, "my car is a wreck. The negative version is "my car is not a wreck." He further states that ... "although these two sentences have opposite meanings, the underlying presupposition, "I have a car remains true in both." Furthermore, pragmatics uses speech act semantics to interpret the intention of the speaker. Yule (1996) says this is done through direct and indirect speech acts. When a speaker does not know something and asks the hearer to inform him, he uses a direct speech act in the question. For example, "can you drive a car? Or "did she come? But in an utterance like, "can you serve the food?" is an indirect speech act; though it is asked in the form of a question, but it is a request. The hearer will not treat it as a question at all, and the action requested will be performed. Indirect speech acts also come in the form of an utterance associated with a statement for instance, if this is said to a visitor "you left the gate open." And the visitor met the gate open when she came, the speaker has not made a statement, but request. The speaker is requesting indirectly that the visitor should close the gate.

According to Yule, it is possible to have humorous effects as a person fails to recognize another person's indirect speech. For example, a visitor to Agbor town has been given the name of "Pace Hotel", where he can lodge when he gets to Agbor. Here is a dialogue between the visitor and a passer-by, visitor-Excuse me, do you know where Pace Hotel is?

Passer-by "Oh yes, I know where it is. (He walks away)

In the sentences above, the visitor uses a form that is associated with a question to make a request and the passer-by answers the question literally, instead of responding to the request. The passer-by treated an indirect speech act as direct. Also indirect command or request is considered more polite than direct command.

Akwanya (1996), states that Austin speech-act semantics presupposes that there is a difference between the sentence with which an action is performed and others that relate pieces of knowledge. But in the theory of pragmatics, the two can co-exist, and can also be analyzed when the same set of rules are used. According to Jurgen Habermas (1972) in Akwanya (1996), the major difference is between the communicative action and discourse. Action means the interpersonal uses of language in our everyday context and involves the exchange of

information that has been acquired through sensory experience Discourse is language use at a more abstract and philosophical level.

The notion of communicative action is connected to Austin's speech act theory; which deals with locutionary and illocutionary acts, that correspond to the meaning and force of the

utterance. And the other type is what he calls the intentional act", Meaning describes fact which form part of the speech situation and the link to the object and force is the interpersonal aspect of the dialogue.

According to Austin, "if an utterance simply says something, and has a locutionary force." ■

for example in this sentence;

"I should like to see Dorta's new car". Apart from indicating intention, there is a meaning in the act of uttering the sentence-which is a locution. Also "if an utterance does something in being uttered, then it is an act performed in saying something, it has illocutionary force." Let us consider these examples,

- i Tell me, has Bobby gone home now?
- ii. I declare that Bobby must be sent home at once.

In the example (i) the act performed is the asking of a question. This means that the utterance has the force of a question. But sentence (ii) is a declaration.

Locutionary act has a meaning therefore, it is subject to verification procedure of propositional semantics. The force of an illocutionary act depends on whether or not it conforms with certain conventions. For instance, "if the force of an utterance is that of a warning. Such a warning can only come off if the conventions for giving a warning are conformed to, especially, if the hearer would rather not encounter the state of affairs projected, that is to his benefit to be informed and that the 'evil' can be avoided". (Akwanya 1996) conditions of this type are associated with performative utterance.

Philosophers of the study of meaning, which is propositional semantics requires that language should correspond to the external facts described. This is called the correspondence theory; but Austin (1962), is not in support of this theory. He argues that language is not used for describing phenomena alone, but also for doing many other things. For example in these sentences;

- 1. Mary will reject the gift.
- 2. I bet you that Mary will reject the gift.

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3.I tell you that Mary will reject John the gift.

In the three sentences above,sentence(1)describe what will happen,and whether it is a true or a false description will be seen when Mary is actually presented with the gift.Austin calls description of this kind constatives.But sentences(2)and(3)do not describe anything but perform the actions of betting and telling respectively.Such utterances which perform an action being uttered are what Austin calls performatives.He continues that constative utterances can either be true or false while performative utterances are happy or unhappy since they either come off or fail.

According to Akwanya(1996)"there are performative utterances,that are not in the first person as in;"Beware of dogs" In traditional grammar,sentences such as "Beware of dogs"are considered as elliptical,and as implying a second person subject.However,the sentence could be rendered in a form that will bring out the first person component essential in a performative. as in:

Dr.Florence wamed you,beware of dogs!

It then means that performative is a class of utterances in the indicative,which are subject to other laws than indicated in those prepositional semantics.

In a notion of order of events,Segerdahl (1996)explains that Grice's sub-maxim of manner,be orderly.states that participants of a conversation should recount events in the order in whichl they happened.For example,we should say,John opened his eyes and saw a cat;not John saw a cat and opened his eyes.The fact that'and'is often used in a way that clearly deviated from thel conjunction of prepositional logic is explained by adding the pragmatic maxim as a kind of supplement to the semantic rules of sentence meaning.Also,does this statement;"A girl went to Delta line and bought a ticket",describes two events?Did the girl perform two actions when she went to Delta Line Park to buy a ticket?It is true that the action of going to the park in general is not the same action as the action of buying a ticket?But it is also true that someone who goes to the park and buys a ticket,does not first go to the park as someone who is not going to buy a ticket,and then buys a ticket as someone who has not gone to the park to buy a ticket.

Pragmatists find the sub-maxim be orderly motivated by the fact that it allows semantics to treat and'formally as a conjunction even in the above sentence.The possibility of applying the notion of order on a sentence like "Jane went to the market and bought some fish"presupposes an external and sequential order of separate events.

Let us look at this presupposition.If a Madam orders her housemaid to "wash the dishes and then sweep the house;She can easily disobey this command by sweeping the rooms first.The order of execution has been reversed and counts as a specific violation of the command.What then is the reverse order of execution with this command "Go to Delta Line and buy a ticket?To buy a ticket from a friend and then go to Delta line?But that is not the reverse order of execution,because she was not commanded to go to Delta Line First and then by the ticket in any way it pleases her,for instance from a friend.She was commanded to buy the ticket at Delta Line.Therefore,the case where sub-maxim be orderly can be applied has no sequential order of separate events.The action that is described as to go to Delta line to buy a ticket does not consist of two externally related actions.We can come to the conclusion that the meaning of a sentence such as 'A girl went to Delta Line to buy a ticket is not a function of its composition. The application of the sentence is not determined by the meaning of its constituents.

Recommendations

The study of language in Nigeria at the lower levels in schools have been solely on grammar. Meaning and speaker's intention have not been paid attention to. It is very essential that some aspects of the study of what a word or sentence means should be put into consideration. Similarly, the study of the speaker's intention is necessary in our schools. These studies of meaning and intended meaning of a speaker are semantics and pragmatics; and will favourably help in the study of other subjects in the school curriculum.

Conclusion

Language is dynamic in nature and it is said to be best used in conversation, and interpersonal relations. Semantics and pragmatics study the use of language both in human and sign form. Semantics studies meaning within language, it examines the relationship between words and how meanings are drawn from these words, and looks at the literary meaning of words and their connotative meanings. Pragmatics looks beyond the literary meaning of words but pays attention at the context of meaning. Pragmatics examines the difference between the literal meaning of words and their intended meaning within social contexts. There are sentences which have informational value that are beyond the propositional content and are difficult for semantics to analyze. Therefore, pragmatics does the work as can be seen in Austin locutionary and illocutionary act which is used in language to perform actions. This type of language is usually used in conversation. Finally, if semantics studies the meaning of words and sentences in a language, and pragmatics deals with the intended meaning of speaker, and speaker has spoken a word or a sentence, why is it that semantics could not interpret intended meaning of these words or sentences? Why should there be another area of study of language that is to interpret the speaker's intention, and take into account of the effects of utterance of the speaker on his listener, and also the implication of expression? These questions are really answered when one goes into the study of language deeply.

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