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Speakers' Communicative Intention in a Piece of Writing

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to highlight the distinction between what is said and what is meant, in a word the textual meaning and the contextual meaning. Hence, the author of this study tries to put a line of demarcation between semantics and pragmatics, taking into consideration the speaker's background and intention as well as the hearer's understanding of the same speech act produced. It also shows the difficulty of interpreting utterances in a real speech situation as well as in speeches in writing. A good example from Jane Eyre is given to illustrate the hypocritical religious man who allows for his own children what should definitely be forbidden for the orphans. Consequently, his speech act is expressed by a flagrant contradiction. Then a brief literature review explores Lehrer's scaling method about the similarities and the differences in meaning of language in context. Finally, this humble study argues that what is usually presented in literary texts is not always understood through its semantic meaning because it is never explicitly explained. Therefore, the reader should be aware of all factors even the interlocutors' degree of familiarity.*
Keywords: *Context, meaning, pragmatics, semantics, speaker, utterance.*
Résumé : *L'objectif de cet article est de mettre en évidence la distinction entre ce qui est dit et ce qui est signifié, en un mot le sens textuel et le sens contextuel. Par conséquent, l'auteur de cette étude tente de mettre une ligne de démarcation entre la sémantique et la pragmatique, en tenant compte de l'arrière-plan et de l'intention du locuteur ainsi que de la compréhension de l'auditeur du même acte de parole produit. Elle montre aussi la difficulté d'interpréter les énoncés en situation de parole réelle ainsi que dans les discours écrits. Un bon exemple de Jane Eyre est donné pour illustrer l'homme religieux hypocrite qui permet à ses propres enfants ce qui devrait définitivement être interdit aux orphelins. Par conséquent, son acte de parole s'exprime par une contradiction flagrante. Ensuite, une brève revue de la littérature explore la méthode de mise à l'échelle de Lehrer sur les similitudes et les différences de sens du langage dans le contexte. Enfin, cette humble étude soutient que ce qui est habituellement présenté dans les textes littéraires n'est pas toujours compris à travers son sens sémantique car il n'est jamais explicitement expliqué. Par conséquent, le lecteur doit être conscient de tous les facteurs, même du degré de familiarité des interlocuteurs.*
Mots clés : *Contexte, sens, pragmatique, sémantique, locuteur, énoncé.*

1. Introduction

Both semantics and pragmatics are concerned with meaning, but semantics studies it as a property of language, wheras pragmatics considers it in terms of language use. The former is rule – governed, and is conceived of as a theory that deals with the meaning aspect of language as a system.

It characterizes and explains the systematic relations between words and between sentences and is thus able to predict. Pragmatics, on the other hand, treats meaning not at an abstract level of the system but at the concrete level of use. It deals

with meaning in terms of speaker's intention, hearer's interpretation, context and performance or 'action'. (Leech,1983:310 quoted in www.uk.Cambridge 2005).

Therefore, we should distinguish what is said, which is a purely semantic notion, from what an utterance means which is determined pragmatically depending, in part, on the speaker's communicative intention and broad features of context. What is said and what is conveyed are two totally different matters. So, one may claim that the meaning of an object changes as it enters into new situations: new contexts, intentions and conventions. As a result, all the characters in Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre are using different languages when addressing different people and each character has to adapt his speech to the different listeners according to the different situations and settings; all these choices are but the invention of the writers.

The term 'pragmatics' is taken in its current sense by Bar- Hillel (1968:271). Thus, pragmatics concerns itself not only with the interpretation of indexical expressions but with 'the essential dependence of communication in natural languages' on speaker and hearer, on linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts. It also deals with the availability of background knowledge, on readiness to obtain this background knowledge and on the good will of the participants in a communication act.

For example, the use of English by Emily Brontë in her novel always varies according to a number of factors, and has to be appropriate to the occasion, the audience and the topic.

As stated by Denis Freeborn (1993 quoted in www.uk.Cambridge 2005) in speaking or writing English we have to make choices from our vocabulary, or store of words, sometimes called lexis, so that we are said to make lexical choices and also from grammar and pronunciation in speech; by grammar is meant the form that words take i.e., word – structure or morphology, and how words are ordered into sentences, sometimes called syntax, so that they make meaning.

2. Semantics / Pragmatics

Linguists have come to the general conclusion that the physical environment, or contex, is perhaps more easily recognised as having a powerful impact on how referring expressions are to be interpreted. The physical context of a speech community, perhaps even the conventions of those who live in the same house, may be crucial to the interpretation of speech. I may consider for instance some characters living in the same house, Thrushcross Grange or Wuthering Heights for Wuthering Heights and the private boarding – school or the Manor for Jane Eyre.

As Chomsky (1965:103) points out, part of the difficulty with the theory of meaning is that 'meaning tends to be used as a catch-all term to include every aspect of language that we know very little about."

And Lehrer (1974 :33) stressed this fact when he devised certain tests which were meant essentially to measure semantic similarity and others to determine the degree of semantic difference. The tests made use of native speakers' intention, and the results showed that judgements were not stable for meanings which were very

different or very similar, i.e., for words with meanings occupying both ends of a continuum on sense relations. The unclear cases fall in-between these extremes.

Lehrer (1974 :36) used the scaling method to determine which meanings are more similar and thus, conversely, less different, and vice versa, but this method is far from being decisive. The reason is that there is variability not only for different speakers, but for the same speaker at different times. This implies an element of arbitrariness will be present when deciding on the distance between two or more meanings.

Moreover, the non-linguistic context can be taken to refer to the more immediate context of situation as well as the broader context of culture. The expression 'context of sit' is always associated with the name of J.R Firth who regarded meaning as an essentially social phenomenon and, thus, as something that cannot be dissociated from the social context in which the utterance is embedded.

Yet, communication as defined by James Carrey (quoted in:

Murray,2002:4) is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced maintained, repaired and transformed ... reality is brought into existence, is produced, by communication – by in short, the construction, apprehension and utilization of symbolic forms. Reality, while not a mere function of symbolic forms, is produced by terminological systems - or by humans who produce such systems - that focus its existence in specific terms.

This definition implies that communication is a process of 'making' reality where significant symbols are formed and understood. Indeed, one may claim that the meaning of an object changes as it enters into new situations: new contexts, intentions and also conventions.

To understand in Gadamer 's sense (quoted in: Dostal, 2002:41), is to articulate (a meaning, a thing, an event) into words, words that are always mine, but at the same time those of what I strive to understand. The application that is at the core of every understanding process thus grounds in language. It has been called by Dostal (2002: 42) 'implicit understanding', which conceals the view of the other in our form of life and culture.

It is an interesting feature of language that the meaning of a word depends on more than what it refers to. Words carry associations which often come from our sense of what they mean in the contexts in which they are habitually used (Labov, 1970: 283). Phrases can recall particular registers, e.g., 'supply and demand'; it may also be the case that certain words can be defined as belonging only to a context of poetry.

Hence, 'logopoeia 'as defined by Ezra Pound (quoted in Leech, 1969:34) is 'the dance of the intellect among words', that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its own acceptances, and ironical play. 'It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation, and cannot possibly be contained in plastic or music'. Such a notion of poetical language in words and phrases in the poem and prose version of the same locutions exist.

For David Crystal semantics is the study of linguistic meaning. He discusses under the heading of 'reference' the fact that we think of words as relating 'things' in the world. However, semanticists do not agree with this. They use the term 'sense' rather than 'reference. On this concern David Crystal explains that 'the focus of the modern subject (of semantics) is on the way people relate words to each other within the framework of their language.'

The term 'word 'is used for any inflected variant, for instance 'open ''opens ', 'opened ', 'opening 'are different forms of the same lexeme. One of the sense relations among lexemes is the syntagmatic / paradigmatic relations. Syntagmatic is the way lexemes are related in a horizontal line whereas paradigmatic is the way words can substitute for each other in the same sentence context.

According to the philosopher J. L. Austin (quoted in www.uk.Cambridge 2005) pragmatics is the study of 'how to do things with words 'or of the meaning of language in context; undoubtedly, context does contribute to make sense.

A statement must be valid in a context in which speech acts are uttered .This means that the sentence must be not only correctly performed but also 'felicitous' ;one of the types David Crystal mentions is concerned with preparatory conditions, perhaps the best example in Jane Eyre is that of Mr Brocklehurst ; this character, a caricature of hypocrisy, maintains he abhors pride and vanity, yet when we see him for the second time at Lowood, he is accompanied by his family whose dress and demeanour is anything but humble:' they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk and furs.' Anne Holker (1986: 84 quoted in Brontë,2003:1) is not the only critic who states that: his hypocrisy is so monstrous that it blinds him to the terrible destruction that bad diet and comfortless accommodation are to wreak the Lowood girls. Many of the typhus victims would have survived had it not been for Brocklehurst pasimony. His 'Christianity 'is of the most dangerous kind.

In fact, when Mrs Reed asked him about the educational institution Jane was going to, he answered:

> [...] Humility is a christian grace, and one peculiarly appropriate to the pupils of Lowood; ....and only the other day, I had a pleasing proof of my success. My second daughter Augusta, went with her mama to visit the school, and on her return, she exclaimed: "Oh, dear papa, how quiet and plain all the girls at Lowood look! with their hair combed behind their ears, and their long pinafores, and those little holland pockets outside their frocks - they are almost like poor people 's children!" and said she, "they looked at my dress and mama's, as if they had never seen a silk gown before.

Once more following the famous linguist David Crystal one has to wonder: has the person performing the speech act the authority to do so? Are the participants in the correct state to have that act performed on them? In this case the speech act is expressed by a contradiction between how the other girls should be and how his own daughters are.

Literature and life go together hand in hand. In fact, literary texts directly reflect experience of what happens in the world. Sometimes, they are reflecting the world we are living in and our experience of it. At other times this is done indirectly; it is probably the case that the less the literature is directly relevant to the reader, the more he or she has to find ways of linking the two, that is, of building bridges between his own experiences and the experiences described in the work of literature. One may perhaps wonder about the fancy situations encountered in for instance Kafka's The Metamorphosis published in 1914.

The situation is depicted in a novella by the writer Franz Kafka: a man wakes up one morning to find he has turned into a beetle. His family is not surprised by this and continues to treat him in the way they have always treated him. On one level, the situation is impossible; on another level, Kafka could be saying that the family had always treated him as if he were an insect. Kafka is not depicting the situation directly or realistically. But indirectly he could be said to be representing the truth of the situation.

The reality which is depicted is not one of those we see everyday. Perhaps we see it only in dreams, or nightmares. So, it is not easy at all to explain or interpret what is being represented in some literary texts that are too far from experiences we can identify with. All this is done with the help of that complex means of communication between human beings which is language.

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