



# **ENG 304**

## **English Semantics**

Course Manual

**Akin Odebunmi**

**COURSE MANUAL**

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# English Semantics

ENG304



University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre  
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development  
Version 1.0 ev1

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## Vice-Chancellor's Message

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka

Vice-Chancellor

## **Foreword**

As part of its vision of providing education for “Liberty and Development” for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

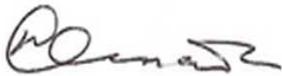
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre’s provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bayo Okunade', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Bayo Okunade

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## About this course manual

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English SemanticsENG304 has been produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. All course manuals produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre are structured in the same way, as outlined below.

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### How this course manual is structured

#### The course overview

The course overview gives you a general introduction to the course. Information contained in the course overview will help you determine:

- If the course is suitable for you.
- What you will already need to know.
- What you can expect from the course.
- How much time you will need to invest to complete the course.

The overview also provides guidance on:

- Study skills.
- Where to get help.
- Course assignments and assessments.
- Margin icons.

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We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your study.

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#### The course content

The course is broken down into Study Sessions. Each Study Session comprises:

- An introduction to the Study Session content.
- Study Session outcomes.
- Core content of the Study Session with a variety of learning activities.
- A Study Session summary.
- Assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.
- Bibliography

## Your comments

After completing English Semantics we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this course. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Course content and structure.
- Course reading materials and resources.
- Course assignments.
- Course assessments.
- Course duration.
- Course support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.)

Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this course.

# Course Overview

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## Welcome to English Semantics ENG304

This course will introduce to you the concept of meaning and context. It will also expose you to semantics and pragmatics. We will also explore componential analysis, which constitutes a major aspect of semantic meaning, and speech act theory, which centres on the action humans perform in their speeches.

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## Course outcomes



### Outcomes

Upon completion of English SemanticsENG304 you will be able to:

- *examine* the concepts of context and contextual beliefs
- *point out* the similarities and differences between the terms “semantics” and “pragmatics”.
- *define* and characterise componential analysis.
- *exemplify* the principles of componential analysis with several lexical items.

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## Timeframe



### How long?

This is a 15 week course. It requires a formal study time of 45 hours. The formal study times are scheduled around online discussions / chats with your course facilitator / academic advisor to facilitate your learning. Kindly see course calendar on your course website for scheduled dates. You will still require independent/personal study time particularly in studying your course materials.

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## How to be successful in this course



As an open and distance learner your approach to learning will be different to that from your school days, where you had onsite education. You will now 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.

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. A few suggested links are:

- <http://www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/resources/studyskill.pdf>

This is a resource of the UIDLC pilot course module. You will find sections on building study skills, time scheduling, basic concentration techniques, control of the study environment, note taking, how to read essays for analysis and memory skills (“remembering”).

- [http://www.ivywise.com/newsletter\\_march13\\_how\\_to\\_self\\_study.html](http://www.ivywise.com/newsletter_march13_how_to_self_study.html)

This site provides how to master self-studying, with bias to emerging technologies.

- <http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php>

Another “How to study” web site with useful links to time management, efficient reading, questioning/listening/observing skills, getting the most out of doing (“hands-on” learning), memory building, tips for staying motivated, developing a learning plan.

The above links are our suggestions to start you on your way. At the time of writing these web links were active. If you want to look for more, go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and type “self-study basics”, “self-study tips”, “self-study skills” or similar phrases.

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## Need help?



Help

As earlier noted, this course manual complements and supplements ENG304at UI Mobile Class as an online course, which is domiciled at [www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc](http://www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc).

You may contact any of the following units for information, learning resources and library services.

### **Distance Learning Centre (DLC)**

University of Ibadan, Nigeria  
Tel: (+234) 08077593551 – 55  
(Student Support Officers)  
Email: [ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng](mailto:ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng)

### **Head Office**

Morohundiya Complex, Ibadan-Ilorin Expressway, Idi-Ose, Ibadan.

### **Information Centre**

20 Awolowo Road, Bodija, Ibadan.

### **Lagos Office**

Speedwriting House, No. 16 Ajanaku Street, Off Salvation Bus Stop, Awuse Estate, Opebi, Ikeja, Lagos.

For technical issues (computer problems, web access, and etcetera), please visit: [www.learnersupport.dlc.ui.edu.ng](http://www.learnersupport.dlc.ui.edu.ng) for live support; or send mail to [webmaster@dlc.ui.edu.ng](mailto:webmaster@dlc.ui.edu.ng).

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## Academic Support



Help

A course facilitator is commissioned for this course. You have also been assigned an academic advisor to provide learning support. The contacts of your course facilitator and academic advisor for this course are available at the course website: [www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc](http://www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc)

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## Activities



Activities

This manual features “Activities,” which may present material that is NOT extensively covered in the Study Sessions. When completing these activities, you will demonstrate your understanding of basic material (by answering questions) before you learn more advanced concepts. You will be provided with answers to every activity question. Therefore, your emphasis when working the activities should be on understanding your answers. It is more important that you understand why every answer is correct.

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## Assessments



### Assessments

There are three basic forms of assessment in this course: in-text questions (ITQs) and self assessment questions (SAQs), and tutor marked assessment (TMAs). This manual is essentially filled with ITQs and SAQs. Feedbacks to the ITQs are placed immediately after the questions, while the feedbacks to SAQs are at the back of manual. You will receive your TMAs as part of online class activities at the UI Mobile Class. Feedbacks to TMAs will be provided by your tutor in not more than 2 weeks expected duration. Schedule dates for submitting assignments and engaging in course / class activities is available on the course website. Kindly visit your course website often for updates.

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## Bibliography



### Readings

For those interested in learning more on this subject, we provide you with a list of additional resources at the end of this course manual; these may be books, articles or websites.

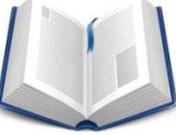


# Getting around this course manual

## Margin icons

While working through this course manual you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to “signpost” a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this course manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

			
Activity	Assessment	Assignment	Case study
			
Discussion	Group Activity	Help	Outcomes
			
Note	Reflection	Reading	Study skills
			
Summary	Terminology	Time	Tip

## Study Session 1

# Introducing Semantics

## Introduction

This Study Session will introduce to you the concept of meaning. Meaning, as a concept, is difficult to define. One major reason for this is its fluid nature subjects it to material and immaterial realisations. It is on this ground that meaning has been treated in terms of reference and sense. Some of the issues relating to this dimension will be discussed below.



### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 *define* the term ‘semantics’ vis a vis the concept of meaning.
- 1.2 *discuss* the nature of meaning.

## 1.1 Semantics and the Concept of Meaning

Let us start this unit by taking a short historical survey of the word “semantics”. The term “semantics” was coined from a Greek word with the meaning “to signify”. In terms of evolution, the term has traversed many years of usage. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it occurred as the word, “semantic” in the phrase, “semantic philosophy”. In 1893, M. Brial coined the French, “semantique”, from the Greek version. The word “semantics” was actually used in 1894 in a paper entitled “Reflected meanings: a point in semantics”. Both in 1893 and 1894, it was not used in relation to meaning but rather to the development of meaning i.e. historical semantics. It appeared in the title of Breal’s book published in 1900: *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning* in which semantics was treated as the science of meaning. This direction was sustained in Ogden and Richards’ *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) where the word “semantics” occurred in the appendix entitled “The problems of meaning in primitive languages” written by Malinowski.

## 1.2 Defining Meaning

For more than 2000 years, scholars have debated the question of meaning, and have hardly reached a consensus on its most acceptable definition. There have been as many definitions of and perspectives on meaning as there have been schools of thought. One approach to meaning which has wielded so much influence on semantics scholarship is the conceptual theory of meaning which sees meanings as ideas or concepts, “which can be transferred from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the hearer by embodying them, as it were, in the forms of one language or

another” (Lyons 1981: 136). Other theories such as Platonist, structuralist, semiotic, truth conditional and speech act theories, contend, respectively, that meaning is found outside a person’s mind, is derivable from the relationships words keep with one another in a language, is translational, is accounted for in terms of the propositions being true or false and is conceived in terms of the actions performed in speeches.

### Note

There is no universally accepted definition for meaning. This is because various scholars have looked at it from different perspectives.

Palmer (1981: 206) contends:

... semantics is not a single well-integrated discipline. It is not a clearly defined level of linguistics, not even comparable to phonology or grammar. Rather, it is a set of studies of the use of language in relation to many different aspects of experience, to linguistic and non-linguistic context, to participants in discourse to their knowledge and experience to the conditions under which a particular bit of language is appropriate

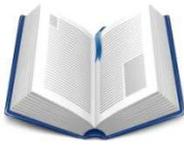
Palmer’s definition and scope of semantics emphasise the multidimensional nature of meaning which incorporates contextual variables (more on this under semantics and pragmatics in Unit 2). Lyons’ (1977:5) definition, which considers meaning in an intuitive pre-theoretical sense, and which is paraphrased as follows, complements Palmer’s: “Meaning is in society and what semantics does is to employ the reflective nature of language (i.e. ability to explicate how the speaker intends to make meaning from what is uttered and how the hearer perceives of what is heard” (Babatunde 1995:1)

For the purpose of this course, Odebunmi’s (2006: 2) definition of meaning will be adopted: “The knowledge [or perception] [of an utterance/expression] gained from a synthesis of users’ interactions with the linguistic forms engaged in communication, the context in which the linguistic forms appear, the hearers’ access to speakers’ intentions and the totality of the experiences of the participants in communication”. What this definition implies is that when analyse the semantic content of a sentence or a word, we are interested in its informative value (facts, ideas, or issues being projected), its social value (the relationship being established between a speaker and a hearer) and its expressive value (the intention and attitude being transmitted by the speaker) as enabled by the context in which the item is used.



Tip

Meaning can be defined as the knowledge of an expression gained from the synthesis of users’ interaction with linguistic forms used in communication, the context of communication, the hearers’ perception of the speakers’ intentions and the aggregate experiences of the participants in communication.



### Reading Activity

Allow 15 minutes

Read the extract below and answer the following question:

Comment on the informative, social and expressive values of the words and sentences in the extract.

The extract is from *Anthills of the Savannah* pp. 14-15 by Chinua Achebe.

'Good day, Your Excellency, Mr. President,' intoned Professor Okong executing at the same time a ninety-degree bow.

No reply nor any kind of recognition of his presence. His Excellency continued writing on his drafting pad for a full minute more before looking up. Then he spoke abruptly as though to an intruder he wanted to be rid of quickly.

'Yes, I want you to go over to the Reception quadrangle and receive the delegation waiting there..... Well, sit down!'

'Thank you, Your Excellency.'

'I suppose I ought to begin by filling you in on who they are and what they are doing here, etc. Unless, of course, by some miracle you made the discovery yourself after I left you.'

'No, sir. We didn't. I am sorry.'

'Very well, then. I shall tell you. But before I do I want to remind you of that little discussion we all had after the Entebbe Raid. You remember? You all said then: What a disgrace to Africa. Do you remember?'

'I remember, Your Excellency.'

'Very well. You were all full of indignation. Righteous indignation. But do you by any chance remember what I said? I said it could happen here. Right here.'

'You did, sir, I remember that very well.'

'You all said: Oh no, Your Excellence it can't happen here.' The way he said it in mimicry of some half-witted idiot with a speech impediment, might have raised a laugh from a bigger audience or at a less grave moment.

'Yes, Your Excellency, we said so,' admitted Professor Okong. 'We are truly sorry.' It wasn't yet very clear to him what point or connection was being made but what his answer should be was obvious and he repeated it: 'Your Excellency we are indeed sorry.'

'It doesn't matter. You know I've never really relied on you fellows for information on anything or anybody. You know that?'

Post your response on Study Session One of Course Website. See schedule date of submission on course blog.

## 1.3 Goals of the Study of Meaning

According to Morris (1938: 24), meaning can be considered as “the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable [and] the relations of signs to interpreters”. Babatunde (1991:2-3) expands this perspective in respect of the goals of the study of meaning as follows:

- (a) [Explicating] how words and utterances function to convey meaning, especially as regards the relationship between words, utterances and the world;

- (b) [Explaining] the process of understanding words and utterances, and the factors involved in this understanding;
- (c) [Making] available some format for the precise representations of meanings at the lexical, phrasal, sentential and discourse levels;
- (d) [Providing] formal definitions of meaning dependent properties of expressions and relations between expressions – [shedding] light on how words and utterances have expressed (or have not expressed) the intention of the speaker;
- (e) [Explicating] and [characterizing] how human beings relate utterances to historical, cultural, social, political and ideological background experiences, e.g. peculiarities of L2 [second language] English.

## 1.4 The Nature of Meaning

Three aspects of meaning can be distinguished, namely, speaker meaning, hearer meaning and sign meaning (Cruse, 2000). Speaker meaning refers to the message the speaker intends to convey. Hearer meaning relates to the meaning the hearer infers from the message conveyed by the speaker. Sign meaning refers to the properties of signals selected to best convey the speaker's intended message and to transmit messages.

Meaning has been observed to be intractable in nature. This is because it is difficult to account for it in concrete terms: it is fluid and potential to generate different impressions as per the perspective of the meaning explicator. Each interpreter comes into the interpretation exercise with a different orientation. According to Odebunmi (2006), this throws light on the expressive nature of meaning. For example, inputs into the pool of meaning have come from philosophy, psychology, neurology, semiotics and linguistics. Philosophers seek to know how anything means something and “what sort of relation must hold between X and Y for it to be the case that X means Y” (Cruse 2000:11). Psychologists relate language to mental states and processes, while neurologists seek to know how the implementation of these states and processes is done at the neuronal level. Semioticians concern themselves with language as a sign system, its features, linguistic signification and iconicity. Linguists study native speakers' intuitions in relation to meaning across languages. Each of these orientations goes with particular goals and intentions, which ultimately affect the meaning achieved.

There are two dimensions of meaning: descriptive and non-descriptive. The former, a term credited to Lyons (1977), has been called “ideational meaning” by Halliday (1978). It has also been variously described in the semantics literature as referential, logical or propositional meaning. It determines the truthfulness or falsity of the proposition expressed, and constrains the reference and identification intended (Cruse 2000).

### Note

Aspects of meaning are different from dimensions of meaning. Aspects of meaning include speaker's meaning, hearer's meaning and sign meaning. Dimensions of meaning are descriptive and non-descriptive.

Ostension, a meaning-indicative method, provides a way by which referents could be identified. Ostensively speaking, meaning is made available through pointing. For example, saying “look at *those houses*” identifies the object house within the environment in which the utterance is made. The meaning of the word ‘house’ thus becomes the object house seen when the intended referent is correctly identified. Non-descriptive meaning, on the other hand, is subjective, non-conceptual, has restricted validity and does not express any proposition (Cruse 2000). Examples of this include *Gosh!*, *Oh!*, etc.

## 1.5 The Relationship between Words and Things

The relationship between words and things has constituted a concern to scholars working in meaning-related areas across the ages. In this section, we shall examine briefly the major issues debated between the Classical and modern periods.

Traditional grammarians referred to words as the basic unit of syntax and semantics. For them, words have form and meaning. Thus, they saw the relationship between words and things as that of naming. They often alluded to the first man’s (Adam’s) role of giving names to things in the Bible as a basis for their position.

Prominent in the traditional grammarians’ concept of naming is the question of naturalness or conventionality. For the naturalist, there was the need to find the connection between form and meaning, which they tied to the duplication of the denotation. This means that they saw an inherent relationship between words and things. To explain this natural connection, they explored onomatopoeia, which is capable of demonstrating a link by associating sounds with particular animals or things, for example, “the bird chirrup”, “Dogs bark”, etc which pick out specific animals by the sounds they naturally make.

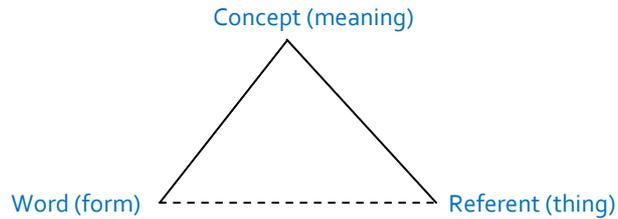
Naturalists also pointed to a link between the source of a name and the name. To them, that the name “Adam”, for example, came from the Hebrew “Adams”, meaning “creation” suggests its meaning. Beyond the Classical thinking, it is possible, though mostly accidental, to find a connection between a name and the manners or ways of the bearer. A good example is the name of a former Lagos State governor, “Otedola” (meaning conspiracy transforms into honour), which symbolises his journey to fame, his rise to governorship being conspiracy-laden in a way. Another example is the name of the incumbent Nigerian President, Jonathan Goodluck, whose entire life has ridden on fortune paths. While naturalists saw the names things bear as inherent in their nature, conventionalists saw the names as striking an arbitrary relationship with the things. They were thus preoccupied with:

- (i) What the original word was, and
- (ii) Who coined them

Medieval grammarians maintained that there is an indirect relationship between the form of a word and the thing it represents through the concept associated with it i.e. the word. This triadic relationship between words and things has culminated in the evolution of the theory of

signification. Ogden and Richards (1923) illustrated the relationship with the triangle below:

Fig 1.1



The chart shows that the Concept is associated with Word and Referent independently, which means, no relationship exists between the word and its referent. For example, there is nothing between the letters “d” “o” “g” (dog) and the four legged domestic, carnivorous animal, “dog” to point to the animal. That the word came to be associated with the animal was merely by convention, making the relationship arbitrary, as conventionalists would argue. It should be noted, however, that the notion of signification cannot account for meaning in all its ramifications, especially where abstract entities such as love, beauty and happiness are concerned.



### Reading Activity

Allow 15 minutes

Read the extract below and answer the following question:

With reference to the passages below, discuss the relationship between words and things.

'The world is a Sea, in many respects and assimilations. It is a Sea, as it is subject to stormes, and tempests; Every man (and every man is a world) feels that. And then, it is never the shallower for the calmnesses. The Sea is as deepe, there is as much water in the Sea, in a calme, as in a storme; we may be drowmed in a calme and flattering fortune, in prosperity, as irrecoverably, as in a calme and flattering fortune, in prosperity, as irrecoverably, as in a wrought Sea, in adversity; So the world is a Sea. It is a Sea, and it is bottomlesses to any line, which we can sound it with, and endless to any discovery that we can make of it. The purposes of the world, the ways of the world, exceed our consideration; But yet we are sure, the Sea hath a bottome, and sure that it hath limits, that it cannot overpasse; the power of the greatest in the world, the life of the happiest in the world, cannot exceed those bounds, which God hath placed for them; So the world is a Sea.'

JOHN DONNE: Sermon LXXII  
(1619)

'I have often been pleased to hear Disputes adjusted between an Inhabitant of Japan and an Alderman of London, or to see a Subject of the Great Mogul entering into a League with one of the Czar of Muscovy. I am infinitely delighted in mixing with these several Ministers of Commerce, as they are distinguished by their different Walks and different Languages: Sometimes I am justled among a body of Armenians: Sometimes I am lost in a Crowd of Jews; and sometimes make one in a Groupe of Dutch-man. I am a Dane, Swede or Frenchman at different times; or rather fancy my self like the old Philosopher, who upon being asked what Countryman he was, replied, That he was a Citizen of the World.'

ADDISON: The Spectator (1711-12)

'It must be a movement then, an actuality of the possible as possible. Aristotle's phrase formed itself within the gabbled versed and floated out into the studious silence of the library of Saint Genevieve where he had read, sheltered from the sin of Paris, night by night. By his elbow a delicate Siamese conned a handbook of strategy. Fed and feeding brains about me; under glowlamps, impaled, with faintly beating feelers: and in my mind's darkness a sloth of the underworld, reluctant, shy of brightness, shifting her dragon scaly folds. Thought is the thought of thought. Tranquil brightness. The soul is in a manner all that is: the soul is the form of forms. Tranquillity sudden, vast, candescent: form of forms'.

JAMES JOYCE: Ulysses (1922)

Post your comments on Study Session One of Course Website.

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## Study Session Summary



### Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed semantics, the study of meaning, and its evolution. We explained that semantics explicates how words and utterances function to convey meaning, explains the process of understanding words and utterances, makes available a linguistic representation format, provides a format for accessing meaning relations and intentions, and characterises contextual influences on meaning. We also pointed out that different professionals come into the study of meaning with diverse interests, making the concepts of speaker meaning, hearer meaning and sign meaning a relative engagement. Finally, we discussed two schools of thought connected with the discourse of the relationship between words and things: traditional grammar and medieval grammar

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## Study Session 2

# Semantics and Pragmatics: Convergence and Divergence

## Introduction

This Study Session will introduce the term “pragmatics”, which is also a study of meaning. If the two studies meaning, how can we tell one from the other? This is the focus of the present session.



### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 define the term “pragmatics”
- 2.2 point out the similarities and differences between the terms “semantics” and “pragmatics”.

## 2.1 What is Pragmatics?

**Pragmatics** the study of language use in particular communicative contexts or situations.

There have been many definitions of the term “**pragmatics**”, offered by scholars such as Morris (1938), Levinson (1983), Leech (1983), Adegbija (1982, 1998), Thomas (1995), Yule (1995), etc. Levinson (1983:5), trying out several definitions in search of an acceptable description of pragmatics, says: “pragmatics is the study of language usage”. He also defines it as the study of “those principles that will account for why a certain set of sentences are anomalous, or not possible utterances (Levinson 1983:5) According to Odebunmi (2003: 42), “this definition forces us to ask if pragmatics is a concept of grammar or meaning”. *The Encyclopedia of Language and Languages* (1990:310) defines pragmatics as:

The study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on their participants.

“This definition identifies, as elements of pragmatics, the language user, the context and the hearer” (Odebunmi 2003: 42). Barton (1990: 6) provides the following definition: “[pragmatics is] the meaning that consists of interpretation within context”. Leech (1983:6) defines the term, “for the purpose of linguistics, as the study of meaning in relation to situations”. In the words of Thomas’ (1995: 22), “pragmatics is “meaning in interaction”. Yule (1996:3) spells out the specific coverage of these definitions by his series of definitions:

1. Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning
2. Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning
3. Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said
4. Pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance

All of the above definitions were finely harmonised by Adegbija (1999: 189). We adopt that definition in this book because of its representativeness:

[Pragmatics] is the study of language use in particular communicative contexts or situations. This would take cognizance of the message being communicated or the speech act being performed, the participants involved, their intention, knowledge of the world and the impact these would have on their interaction, what they have taken for granted as part of the context (or the presupposition) and the deduction they make on the basis of what is said or left unsaid; the impacts of the non-verbal aspects of interaction on meaning.

From the above definition, pragmatics can be said to involve language use in particular contexts. This takes into consideration:

- (i) the message being communicated
- (ii) the speech act being performed
- (iii) the individuals who communicate ideas or perform the speech acts
- (iv) particular intentions being passed across, which spring from the knowledge that these individuals share
- (v) the effect of the speech act or the expression of intention on other interactants or individuals in communication
- (vi) the assumptions that the participants/ interactants make
- (vii) their displayed understanding of the ideas/ speech acts expressed
- (viii) the effects and value associated with the non-verbal acts.

The above point to the fact that for pragmatic meaning to emerge from the utterances or sentences made or constructed in communication, several factors have to be considered, among which are the message, the people involved in interaction and the different levels at which contextual variables constrain what they communicate.

#### Note

Pragmatics, to a very large extent, deals in meaning that is *ad hoc* i.e. meaning that is not permanent. It is in this sense that semantics is said to deal with sentence or conventional meaning while pragmatics deals with utterance or strictly contextual meaning. The point is that pragmatic meaning does not necessarily come within the convention of regular language usage.

Let us look at the example below:

I also want my '*bread*' now

'Bread' here hardly has any pragmatic association except we consider the foregrounding effect that the inverted commas and italics are potential to exert. The possible pragmatic meaning cannot emerge until the context is provided in terms of where the statement is uttered; who utters it; the intent behind uttering it; the effect intended by its utterance; and the possible assumptions shared by participants. One possible pragmatic

meaning of 'bread', in Example 1, is 'money', if the word had been a code between participants to refer to money. This means that the meaning here is not conventional, but contextual, and holds if and only if participants with appropriate shared assumptions come together in interaction. It should be noted that other pragmatic meanings of bread (such as "share", or "sex turn"- in the context of rape, for example- are possible depending on what the context determines. Note that while the semantic or conventional meaning of bread as food is completely ruled out with the double foregrounding of the word, each of the interpretations essentially depends on this food concept. This establishes the point that, in large measure, connotations emerge from denotations

Thomas (1995) rightly observes that deference is not a pragmatic affair until it has been impinged upon by context. For example, if someone who is a professor is addressed as 'professor' in any context, no pragmatic implication occurs. A pragmatic meaning comes in when instead of him/her being addressed as a professor, he/she is deliberately addressed as 'Mr/Mrs', especially by someone who is aware of his/her designation, to achieve a particular effect, for example, insulting, denigrating or embarrassing. A good example of this can be found in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* when Sam, His Excellency, addresses Professor Okon as Mr Okon, to express his disappointment with the professor's ingratiating tendencies and incompetence (cf Odeunmi, 2008).



### Discussion Activity

What are the possible pragmatic interpretations of each of the following sentences with your classmates:

- 1) Let Mother tell my mother that I am his daughter, though a man
- 2) This is not the head for my department
- 3) This something is something only for the woman
- 4) Your father is not your father here
- 5) I am a new person everywhere
- 6) Your long stick is troubled
- 7) Let us know if this place is a hell in the final analysis
- 8) Olamiposi ate the tummy each time
- 9) Ayotomiwa drove the telephone around
- 10) The baby, Gloria, now gave the doctor a cheque

Provide response and join your tutor and other class members in an online discussion on this topic in Study Session Two forum page on course website

## 2.2 Between Semantics and Pragmatics

The fact that semantics and pragmatics account for meaning naturally makes it difficult to differentiate between them. Yet, some rewarding attempts have been made in the literature to differentiate the two.

One major distinction that has been drawn between semantics and pragmatics is expressed in the interrogatives: what does 'x' mean? (used with respect to semantics) and what do you mean by 'x'? (used with respect to pragmatics)(see Leech 1983; Thomas 1995; Odeunmi 2006). This means that semantics deals in objective account of meaning i.e. it

explains meaning in terms of how it is documented in the dictionary and how it is found to be used. Pragmatics, on the other, hand goes beyond the objective account to provide the particular meaning intended by users in specific contexts.

Another distinction between the two fields occurs with respect to semantics dealing in meaning that is conventionalized, i.e. more or less stable meaning, while pragmatics ventures into meaning that is negotiated between the hearer and the speaker in particular language situations. Let us look at this example:

The man is a *girl*

The principles of semantics may not be able to account for this statement because of its anomaly. If we use the method of componential analysis (more on this later), which is a semantic procedure, we shall come up with this result:

- i) Man = +male  
          +adult
- ii) Girl = -male  
          -adult

This schema already shows a contradiction as a man (who is male) cannot be a girl (who is female). This is compounded by the age difference which does not make the two to match. Within the conventionalised knowledge of meaning, therefore, the statement is meaningless. But in a pragmatic enterprise, a high degree of meaningfulness is possible. All that is needed is a consideration for the contextual influence: Who made the statement? Where was it made? Why was it made? What backgrounded it? What was the standard of the society about the man or the girl? What aspects of the man were being spoken about? In the long run, a pragmatic analysis would offer a meaning such as:

An adult male person *x* who possesses the attributes of a young female person, or who behaves in a way typical of the way expected of a young female person *x*, as defined by society *y*.

Context is now further needed to complete the gap: is this attribute/quality/behaviour inexperience, indolence, weakness, shyness, etc?

The differences between semantics and pragmatics are tabulated below:

Semantics	Pragmatics
What does <i>x</i> mean? (-language based)	What did you mean by <i>x</i> ? (-user based)
Conventional meaning	2) Context determined meaning.
Deals with words and sentences	3) Deals with words and sentences as used in particular contexts i.e. utterances.

Finalising this section, it should be noted that while several points of divergence have been identified between semantics and pragmatics, these

should not be stretched too far. Taking the two fields apart or collapsing them is highly dependent on how each is perceived. Leech (1983), for example, identifies and discusses three approaches to meaning, namely, semanticism, pragmaticism and complementarism. “Semanticism presents semantics as the broad term under which pragmatics is located. This order is reversed in pragmaticism i.e. pragmatics is the broad term under which semantics is located. In complementarism, “the two are interrelated entities, which perform complementary roles” Odeunmi (2006:1). If we subscribe to semanticism, pragmatics becomes a sub-set of semantics, and vice-versa; but if we favour complementarism, the two are not separated; rather, their distinct features are recognised and explored as partners in the meaning explication process. This approach has been largely subscribed in the literature. Fillmore, Langacker and Lakoff, for example, see the distinction between semantics and pragmatics as a needless venture (cf Odeunmi 2006). Goddard (1998:16) expresses the opinion that no matter how much effort is put into separating the two fields, they necessarily converge “if we are ever to achieve a satisfying theory of linguistic communication”. According to Odeunmi (2006: 1-2), “it is difficult to pass a judgment on the debate over the two fields; ... semantics and pragmatics have areas of convergence and areas of divergence. The overarching fact is that the goal of the two is accounting for meaning”.



### Reading Activity

Allow 10 minutes

Read the extract below carefully and then:

- a. Do a pragmatic analysis of, at least, 5 sentences or expressions from the extract
- b. Differentiate between semantics and pragmatics, citing examples from the text

#### Extract

‘You were telling me about the white girl and your big friend,’ she said abruptly, switching on the bed lamp I had just turned off and holding back my hand reaching again for the rope-switch. Before I could answer she said: ‘Why did you call here a miracle worker?’ I had said I would go at BB’s pace but I’d be damned if I would spend the rest of the night talking about Sam and Gwen who had already come up for mention at lunch with Ikem and his new girl, Joy. So I went straight to the point.

‘In the morning after a very exhausting night this girl, Gwen, wakes him up and wants to begin again. I remember how Sam put it: *My brother, there was absolutely nothing left in the pipeline*. So Gwen swings herself around and picks up his limp wetin-call with her mouth. And from nowhere and like magic life surges back into it. Sam had never seen that kind of thing before.’

BB didn’t respond immediately except to get a little closer to me. Then she asked: ‘You mean people actually do that?’

‘All the time.’

‘Disgusting,’ she said.

‘Well, I don’t know.’

‘You sound as if you wouldn’t mind yourself. Or perhaps you have done it already’.

‘No, I haven’t. It’s the girl who does it.’

‘All right Mr Smart. Has any girl done it for you?’

‘Let’s not make it personal.’

‘OK. I won’t pry any more. But I think it is disgusting, don’t you? And

they didn't even shower first, did they?'  
 'I wasn't there, you know; but I don't suppose they did. She woke him up as I understand it and went straight to work.'  
 'With all that stuff on it!'  
 'Dry and caked, yes.'  
 'Disgusting, I won't do that. Not for anybody.'  
 'Don't worry, love. I won't ever ask you.'  
 'What? I see. But isn't that the whole point?'  
 'Na Breatrice you de ask? Na me de tell de tori, no be you?'  
 'Well that's the whole point, I am told. To give I to her right in the month.'  
 'You're joking!'  
 'I swear.'  
 'Chris, are you sure you haven't done it?'  
 'No. It's the girl who does it.'  
 'Oh shut up; you know what I mean. And don't you start anything because I won't wash it in my mouth.'  
 'We'll shower first.'  
 'You are joking. Oh Chris! Please.'

Provide response and join your tutor in an online discussion on this topic on Study Session One forum page on course website

## Study Session Summary



### Summary

In this Study Session, we considered several definitions of pragmatics, and have narrowed the concept down to strictly context-constrained accounts of meaning. We observed that semantics and pragmatics differ on the ground that one considers conventionalised meaning while the other operates with use-determined meanings.

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## Study Session 3

# Context and Contextual Belief

## Introduction

In this Study Session, we will be concerned with the issue of context and the beliefs or assumptions that interactions carry into conversations, discourses and meaning interpretation.



### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 3.1 *examine* the concepts of context and contextual beliefs.
- 3.2 *identify* types of context and features of contextual beliefs.

## 3.1 Defining Context

**Context** is central to the realisation of meaning in linguistic form.

**Context** refers to the environment in which language is used. This environment may be physical, psychological, socio-cultural or linguistic. This means that what one says or writes is always backgrounded. Hence, context has been defined by Odeunmi (2006:1) as “the spine of meaning”.

The idea of context is that something, thought about, is said or written in a particular place, in a particular way and under the influence of particular social and cultural factors. The point being made here is that each linguistic behaviour is psychologically or socially motivated. The following can instantiate this point:

### Example 3.1

A: If only my wife can say the truth

B: Just persuade her

*Evidence of context:*

- (i) Two people are speaking in a particular place and at a particular time.
- (ii) What “A” says comes from his psychological and social experience as he refers to his:
  - (a) wife
  - (b) marriage
  - (c) marital experience.
- (iii) What ‘B’ says comes from
  - (a) The situation in which he/she finds him/herself
  - (b) His/her experience of the world.

*What the foregoing means is that the way we use language is constrained by the*

*context in which we operate.*

## 3.2 Types of Context

We shall examine four types of context, namely, physical/situational, linguistic, socio-cultural and psychological contexts. Each is taken in turn.

### 3.2.1 Physical/Situational Context

The **physical/situational context** refers to the actual place in which language is used. This covers the physical structures, the objects in the environment (living and non-living), the location of the structures and objects (e.g. street, valley, seaside, etc) and persons in interaction. For example, what can be said inside a worship place (e.g. a church, a mosque or a shrine) is measured. For example, expressions such as “you are crazy”, “you are a bastard”, “this incantation will work” and “shoot him right in the head” are not expected in a church or mosque except as exemplifications of certain issues or occurrences in religious drama performances. This is because the religious context prescribes morally and socially positive behaviours which must reflect in the verbal output of discourse participants in the institution.

Among the faithfuls of all religions, there is a limit to which words could be freely used when worship/sacred objects such as the Bible, the Quran or the diviner’s beads are held. In this instance, context is not just a matter of place or physical environment, but rather of the constraints imposed by the symbolic attachments of the objects held in the religions. For example, irrespective of where the interactants are located, the Bible, the Quran or the diviner’s beads could not be held while swearing falsely. In this connection, if any of the objects is held, an expression such as “remember you are holding the Bible”, or “Don’t bring doom on yourself” may be uttered to index the religious implications of the circumstances. To understand the context of the interaction, the religious standing of both the holder of the object and that of the speaker need to be known.

Also, the location of the physical environment constrains how language is used, and so also does the time in which interaction occurs. The freedom that could be taken with language varies by one’s location in a secluded or open space; or the time of the day e.g. daytime or night. It is obvious that even within the different parts of the physical structure, language is used differently. In the living room, for example, all forms of linguistic behaviours can take place; but in the bedroom, especially where only couples are found, whispers, non-verbal communication and short phrases are more common.

#### Note

Physical context, sometimes, constrains how we speak and what we say. It also validates our utterances.

Sometimes, talk or language use is constrained by interactants’ current spatial occupation. Restrictions are observed when people are not in their possessed spaces. Also, sometimes, the persons in the space(s) may constrain what is said, and how what is said is said. For example, when

African elders are not comfortable with a stranger in a particular setting, they may resort to speaking non-linguistically or proverbially.

### 3.2.2 Linguistic Context

The linguistic context refers to the placement of a word/an expression in a grammatical structure, usually a sentence. It has to do with the co-text i.e. the lexical surrounding of a word or utterance. The meaning of the item(s) lies in the constraints imposed by the surrounding elements. All the items in a text referring to a subject could serve co-textual purposes in that context. An example follows:

Nothing unites politicians like common adversity or common prosperity. In Abuja now, the honourable men in the Senate and the House of Representatives are united in their celebration of the new on fall. It is called furniture allowance.

(Odebunmi 2006: 38-39[*Tell* Sept. 13 1995, p5]).

“Honourable men” is co-textual with the preceding “politicians”, and “new wind fall” and “furniture allowance” with “common prosperity”. Therefore, knowing the meaning of “honourable men” presupposes knowing the meaning of “politicians”, the latter having come earlier, and the former having connected with it anaphorically with the use of the definite article “the” and the word honourable falling within the semantic field of politics.

### 3.2.3 Socio-Cultural Context

The socio-cultural context refers to the tracing of talk and interaction to the values and beliefs of a culture or society. This means that the collective outlook and worldview of a people or a group within the society determine the range of lexical choices that the interactants in oral or written discourses reach for. Examples:

- a. Non-mentioning of the word “snake” in the afternoon or night in the Yoruba culture for the belief that animal could emerge from the blues and bite the speaker. The phrase “earth rope” is preferred.
- b. The preference for “commercial sex workers” among prostitutes as against “whore” or “harlot” to express and justify the belief that their professional choice is legitimate.
- c. Dispreference for the word “Macbeth” among the acting community in Britain for the belief that it is associated with bad luck.
- d. Non-mentioning of the name of the dead in Malagasy Republic for the society’s legislation against such.

### 3.2.4 Psychological Context

The psychological context refers to the location of an utterance or lexical item in the state of mind of a speaker or writer. Verbalized in this context may be the grief, doubt, joy, desperation or excitement of the speaker or writer; e.g.

1. "But I don't deserve this" (said by a jilted lady)- showing the grief and disappointment of the lady;
2. "I am useless without him" (said by a widow) - indicating the dependency of the widow;
3. "If I should let him know, eh! I am doomed" (said by a subordinate in an office) – showing fear of the junior staff member in the office;
4. "The maga is a good deal if only the security man could agree. Well, he could die! (said by a yahoo fraudster) – expressing the desperation of the criminal.



### Discussion Activity

**Point out and comment on the types of context that are manifest in the following conversation:**

Doc: ((Humming))

(0.10)

Pat: Morning=

Doc: How are you? =

Pat: Fine sir=

Doc: What's your name? =

Pat: Christiana =

Doc: Christie::ns eh Unamka=

Pat: En =

Doc: From eh where ↑? Are you Karo? Eh, eh? How do you greet? Terahin? No nono. How do you greet?

Pat: ()--

Doc: Say it now--

Pat: () =

Doc: I don leave in Pankin before =

Pat: Uhm um @? (.)

Doc: How your ↓body↑? =

Pat: Fine sir =

Doc: How your ↓body↑? Any problem? (.)

Pat: °Yesterday, and today self°, the baby DEY CHUK CHUK =

Doc: He dey kick. The baby dey kick well well. The baby dey kick for inside =

Pat: \*Un\*.For here ( ) deychuk ( ) still dey pain. Deychuk =

Doc: What of today? =

Pat: >Yesterday and today<. But today dey pain me(.)

Doc: But you no vomit =

Pat: Ah, no vomit =

Doc: Let me check your ( ) =

Pat: En en, my::, sometimes, my waist =

Doc: But i dey pain you. You don take your first injection, abi? Go and lie down; let me check you. Let me see what is happening.

(1.07)

Doc: Get down. Let us pray.

°((Prays))°

(0.18)

I will give you something. That one weydeychuk for your chest , she will stop; en? (0.25). How many pikin don born? =

Pat: One=

Doc: Eh? =

Pat: [One]

Doc: How many?]

(0.04)

Pat: Um, Matron > talk about scan lask week<

(0.03)

Doc: Eh? =

Pat: Your madam abi? He talk about scanning =

Doc: Tell about what? =

Pat: The scan date, the scan =

Doc: [Scan]

Pat: [Eh eh]

Doc: The scan. When did you see your period last? On the four of January, eh? You do your scan on the fourth of, you saw your, you are going to be due on fourth of March =

Pat: An↓ an↑ =

Doc: So around January =

Pat: Eh↓ eh↑? (.)

Doc: When you are seven months. It's not good to do it now =

Pat: Eh eh =

Doc: If you do it, you are going to repeat it at that time =

Pat: An↓ an↑ (.)

Doc: Better to wait so that it will be in the position to come. So, don't worry. Then, when the time reach, we go tell you. You, you know. So, you come back eh on the Thir:::ti. That's when you'll take your second injection =

Pat: [Ta:: ] ti

Doc: [On the] Thir:::ty. Go and meet them. They'll give you medicine for that chest. Then they'll give you tonic. Which you like: capsule or liquid? (.)

Pat: Last time they give me caferous tonic =  
 Doc: You like it; you like it like that? =  
 Pat: Any one weydem give me be the one weydem give me =  
 Doc: Go and meet them. They will call you. When you come next time, tell me if  
 he still dey do you for chest =  
 Pat: Na only yesterday self. When he deyTUR::: N like this, he go come ( ) for  
 here=  
 Doc: Don't worry. I don give you medicine for it.  
 (Culled from Odebunmi 2012)

Provide response and join your tutor in an online discussion on this topic on Study  
 Session One forum page on course website

## 3.3 Contextual Beliefs

### 3.3.1 Definition and Model

#### Contextual beliefs

The properties of interaction that provides background to the use of language by participants in discourse.

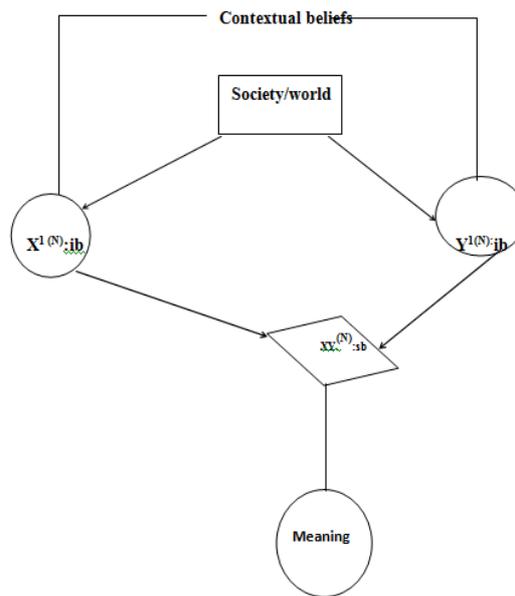
**Contextual beliefs** or contextual assumptions refer to the properties of interaction that provide the background to the use of language by discourse participants. This means that elements of context indexed by language emerge from human experiences which necessarily have to be shared, though initially independently experienced by individuals, for effective communication to take place.

Odebunmi (2006) identifies two levels of beliefs or assumptions: language level and situation level (Odebunmi 2006). According to him, “at the level of language, meaning is potentially possible if interactants have access to the same language of communication” (Odebunmi 2006:27). This means that interactants must speak the same language, and must operate within the same lexical repertoire. They will work at interactional cross-purposes if they could not talk mutually intelligibly. “At the level of the situation, assumptions are held on the basis of interactants’ shared code (linguistic or non-linguistic) and experience” (Odebunmi 2006: 27). Here, interactants’ experiences count a good deal in decoding meanings in interaction. Odebunmi presents the model below to explain his concept of situational contextual beliefs, which tie in perfectly with Bach and Harnish’s (1979) “mutual contextual beliefs” and the concept of pragmatic presupposition.

#### Hint

Contextual beliefs operate at the levels of language and situation.

Fig 3.1 Contextual Beliefs



Key:

N = many interactants (speakers or hearers)

X¹ = one speaker

Y¹ = one hearer

XY = speaker and hearer

ib = independent belief

sb = shared belief

The chart indicates that humans encounter events (in the world or society) separately ((X¹) or in groups(X¹ N) – discourse initiator (s) - / (Y¹(N);ib) – co-discourse participant (s)). These represent individuals’ independent beliefs (ib), which come into contextual effect when such experiences are expressed in interactions where the two groups of individuals who have the same set of experiences (XY(N);sb) interact. Meaning results from the shared knowledge of these parties.

Odeunmi (2006:32-34) identifies three types of situational level beliefs, namely, shared knowledge of subject/topic, shared knowledge of word choices, referents and references and shared socio-cultural experiences, previous or immediate. What follows is his treatment and exemplifications of these types, with some additional comments and examples added:

### Shared Knowledge of Subject/Topic

Knowing the discourse topic or subject of interaction enables participants to contribute without hitches and gain a good knowledge of the linguistic items engaged in discourse. It is this reason that makes it difficult to understand utterances made in transit, if the background to the them is not shared. For example, if a discourse participant says, “the drivers are queuing” by which he means to imply fuel scarcity, say in Nigeria; he could only be understood to refer to the subject or topic of fuel scarcity by another individual or other individuals who also know about:

- a. The fuel scarcity situation in Nigeria
- b. What happens during fuel scarcity in Nigeria

### Shared Knowledge of Word Choices, Referents and References

If the lexical choices made in interaction are known to all discourse parties, no problem will occur in understanding utterances. A problem may arise here is if one of the participants is not familiar with the words selected, and therefore cannot locate the referents or references intended. Sometimes, this occurs when technical jargon items with which a participant is not familiar are introduced into the discourse. In hospital for example, if a doctor deliberately says to a patient's mother, "Your child's case is a case of retroviral infection", when he knows quite well that the patient does not know that the term refers to "HIV/AIDS", he/she might not intend the woman to understand what he/she has said.

The issue of shared knowledge of word choices, referents and references can also be related to the fuel scarcity example above. For a co-discourse participant to understand the referents of the items selected, he/she, apart from having grips of the terms, should know:

- a. The actual group of people referred to as drivers
- b. The Nigeria-peculiar concept of "driver" as different from "motorist"

The culture of the society playing host to English may also impose its peculiarities on English, resulting in a different meaning, especially in the native ear. Mey's (2001:262) anecdotal illustration is relevant here:

Suppose you are a newly appointed teacher at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Your salary not being that grand, and the general situation in the country being what it is, you decide to get a cheap apartment close to the university, so you can ride your bike to school. However, not being prepared for the state of the local roads, on your first trip your bike hit a big hole, you and your bike a toppled and your books are all over the pavement. As you begin to reassemble yourself and your belongings, a friendly local passer-by stops up and says: 'sorry for that, man'. Whereupon he proceeds on his way without offering any further comments or help. You are puzzled, to say the least. Why did the guy say sorry, when it wasn't his fault in the first place?

The fact is that the non-Nigerian university teacher will be puzzled because he does not share knowledge of the use of "sorry" by the passer-by. In Nigeria, "sorry" is extended beyond its semantic shades in the native context. It is used to sympathize with victims of mishaps whether or not one causes the problem. Many Nigerianisms have the tendency to cause confusion for non-Nigerian users of English who do not share knowledge of their meanings. Some of these are 'corner', meaning 'bend of the road'; 'wife', meaning "one's wife", "one's brother's wife", "one's relations' wife", etc. Where this knowledge is not shared, meaning may be difficult to achieve.

### Shared Socio-Cultural and Situational Experiences, Previous or Immediate

Interactions move on smoothly when participants have common socio-cultural and situational experiences. Exemplifying with the subject of fuel scarcity above, it would be observed that without the knowledge of the following, it is practically impossible for a co-discourse participant to fully understand what is implied:

- a. Knowledge of what happens when fuel is scarce in Nigeria
- b. Knowledge of what drivers do to address the situation
- c. Knowledge of where the action/activity pointed to, i.e. “queuing” takes place



#### Activity

Using Odebunmi's (2006) model of contextual beliefs, analyse the conversation below:

- A: Are you aware of the strike?
- B: Yes, I think so.
- C: It's two weeks, after that what happens?
- B: You people should not rely on the two weeks o! because sometimes these people are ready to stick to their demand.
- C: Why?
- B: Dr.Adekoko told the daughter that she should not put her mind in going for service this year because of the way they are taking the strike.
- A: What about the supervisors; will they be supervising our work?
- C: I'm not sure o!
- B: No wahallasha. I'll be taking my work to Shagusa [where the supervisor lives]
- D: Ugockoi see now
- C: I'm talking can't you see?
- D: You are a stupid girl!

Note your analysis in your journal

## Study Session Summary



#### Summary

We defined “context” and “contextual beliefs” in this Study Session. We discussed types of context, namely, physical/situational, socio-cultural and psychological. We also discussed the two dimensions of contextual beliefs: language level belief and situation level belief. Also explained to you are three types of situation level beliefs, namely, shared knowledge of subject/topic, shared knowledge of word choices, referents and references, and shared socio-cultural and situational experiences, previous or immediate

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## Study Session 4

# Theories and Types of Meaning

## Introduction

This Study Session will be devoted to the discussion of the theories and types of meaning. These should be of great help to you when you are faced with the need to logically account for what and how a word means.



### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

4.1 discuss at least four theories of meaning.

4.2 discuss at least five types of meaning.

## 4.1. Theories of Meaning

Theories of meaning are scientific facts and categories, which explain the match between words/reference and their meanings/sense. Five of these have been highlighted below:

### 4.1.1 Conceptual Theories

- The theories propose that meaning resides in the mind of the speaker.
- It works on the idea that the human mind is a clean slate at birth, which is stuffed as the individual gathers experience by interacting with his or her environment.
- This experience gathering is possible because it is believed that humans have shared organs, and hence experience the world in the same way, and thus have more or less the same basic idea.

### 4.1.2 Platonist Theories

- The theories conceive of meaning as an abstraction i.e. meaning is found outside a person's mind.
- The theories are obviously a contrast to conceptual theories
- A version of the theories has a metaphysical slant which maintains that meaning is reached intuitively in a perfect world of ideas

### 4.1.3 Structuralist Theories

- These theories see meaning as derivable from the relationships words keep with one another in a language.

- The method adopted by structural theorists is componential analysis.

#### 4.1.4 Semiotic Theories

- The semiotic approach to meaning has also been called the translational approach
- The theorists maintain that meaning is not a particular thing but rather what one lives, hence, they believe that human whole lives are related to meaning
- To account for meaning, the theories translate a word to an easier-to-understand expression.

#### 4.1.5 Truth Conditional Theories

- According to these theories, “knowing the meaning of a sentence is a matter of knowing what the world would be like for it to be true” .
- In other words, meanings are accounted for in terms of propositions being true or false.

#### 4.1.6 The Speech Act Theory

- This theory deals with meaning in terms of language users performing certain actions in their speeches.
- Such actions performed in speeches are called speech acts.
- This theory operates with the three terms locution, illocution and perlocution (more details later).



#### Activity

Using any or a combination of the theories of meaning above, explain the text below:

Emotion [refers] to a specific identifiable affective state such as angry, fearful, happy and excited. An emotion is a dynamic and multifaceted construct that has a source, consists of an appraisal, and results in action tendencies.

[Post your response on Study Session Four assignment page on course website.](#)

## 4.2 Types of Meaning

In this section, we shall discuss meaning types as provided by Leech (1977). Each of the seven types of meaning identified by Leech shall be fully discussed in relation to its possible contextual realisations. These meaning types are: denotative/conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, stylistic meaning, affective meaning, reflexive meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning.

### 4.2.1 Denotative Meaning

**Denotative meaning** The basic or ordinary meaning of a word.

This is also called the cognitive, conceptual, basic or logical meaning. **Denotative meaning** is the surface side a word or expression turns to a hearer or reader. This meaning is descriptive and often objective in nature. Let us look at the following examples:

1. Joke is a woman

## 2. David is rather womanish

The dictionary provides the meaning of ‘woman’ as ‘a fully grown human female’, and womanish as ‘like a woman in character, behaviour, appearance etc. Note the minuteness of the descriptive details. For the two words, all the features needed to identify the referents are named. These features simultaneously possess comparison and contract value.

Denotative meaning derives from the idea of a word as a symbol. Words are symbolic in the sense that they represent something else. That is, an arbitrary relationship holds between a word and its referent. As already pointed out in Chapter One, what is the relationship between the word ‘dog’ and the four-legged animal that it is called after? Of course, ‘dog’ is linguistic, while the referent is an animal. Thus denotative meaning is referential meaning. Look at the following examples:

- a) A cow sleeps in the open space
- b) Marriage are no longer sacred

In example 1, ‘cow’ is a signifier of ‘a fully grown female type of cattle, kept on farms’ (the signified, which invariably is the denotation); ‘sleeps’ signifies an action. ‘rest in sleep’, and ‘open’; a location i.e. a stretch of land. In example 2, ‘marriage’ is a signifier of ‘a human social institution involving a man and a woman’, ‘sacred’ signifies a quality i.e. ‘holy’.

### 4.2.2 Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning goes beyond the conceptual or denotative meaning. It refers to “what is communicated by virtue of what language refers to” (Leech 1977:23). It derives from the basic meaning of a word, but depends strictly on context and varies by history, culture or individual experience. It is also inelastic. Let us look at the following instances of connotative usage.

1. Akintola eventually baited the woman
2. The camel is the ship of the desert
3. I cherish my gold.

We shall discuss the sentences in turn, considering the place of the italicised words in their meaning.

#### **Sentence 1:** Akintola Eventually Baited the Woman

In this sentence, that ‘Akintola’, a man, is mentioned as subject and ‘the woman’ as object, already forecloses the possibility of a literal interpretation of the word “baited” as ‘put food or something like food on (a hook) to catch fish, or in (a trap) to catch animals’. A bait is essentially attractive, and therefore, desired by the victim. Premising our interpretation of the sentence on this background, we can conveniently say that Akintola baiting the woman connotes wooing her through material attraction.

#### **Sentences 2:** The Camel is the Ship of the Desert.

Ordinarily, a camel is not a ship. Also, while a camel is found in the desert, a ship is not. The metaphor forged by ‘ship’ makes the camel to possess the ability of the ship to carry heavy luggage across the desert. The sentence could, therefore, mean the camel is the sole means of transportation in the desert, slow though.

**Sentence 3: I Cherish my Gold**

Gold, denotatively as “a valuable yellow metal that is a substance... used for making coins, jewelries”, is a generic noun. The use of gold in the description here, or other possible descriptions such as ‘coins’ or a ‘gold’, or a gold medal’ does not attract any connotative meaning. But if the context further specifies the ethnic background of the speaker, say Yoruba or any other cultural group that associates gold with mother, then the connotation will come out very clearly. The word ‘cherish’ will keep a better compatible company with the metaphor ‘gold’ to give us the meaning: ‘I love my mother dearly’.

The foregoing has ostensibly shown that connotative meanings are meta-conceptual in nature. They are largely figurative and many times, require subjective judgement.

The poem below contains some examples of connotative meaning:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow,  
creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
to the last syllable of recorded time;  
and all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
the way to dusty deaths. Out brief candle.  
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player  
that struts and frets his hour upon the  
stage.

And then is heard as more.

It is a tale told by an idiot,

full of sound and fury signifying nothing

(Shakespeare 1990:219).

**Words/Expressions and their Connotations:**

- a. That *tomorrow creeps in petty pace* connotes mortality
- b. *Brief candle, life’s but a walking shadow ... signifying nothing* etc. connote that life is ephemeral, vain, inglorious and meaningless.



**Tip**

Connotative meanings are derived from denotative meanings of words, but depend strictly on context and varies by history, culture or individual experience.

**4.2.3 Social/Stylistic Meaning**

Social/[stylistic] meaning refers to “what is communicated of social circumstances of language use” (Leech 1977: 23). This usually has an association with the different relationships within the society and the

cultural context of interaction. Prominent in this situation is Malinowski's phatic communion – language as used to cement social relationships. Expressions such as *Good morning; how are you? "What a beautiful day this is!, etc.* exemplify social meaning. In interactions where these utterances feature, it is expected that meaning will be appreciated on the basis of the shared assumptions that mere pleasantries and culture and society-imposed rituals are being exchanged.

**Note**

Social/stylistic meaning relates to language as it reflects social circumstances.

The interlocutors' geographical background and the social relations between the speaker and the hearer are important in stylistic meaning. The speaker is constrained by his attitude to the hearer, the subject matter and the purpose of communication. He, therefore, selects his style, based on the constraints, from the following (a) stiff/relaxed (b) formal/informal (c) cold/warm (d) impersonal/friendly.

The style of speaking or writing determines the words used, and consequently constraints the meaning achieved. Therefore, it is not common for a word to have the same stylistic and conceptual meaning. That is why it is difficult to have true synonyms. Let us look at the following examples.

1. Come here, nigger
2. Tell that blighter to stop coming to my house.
3. Don't bark at him, you.

Note that in example 1, the speaker's scornful attitude leads to the selection of 'nigger' which in that context, means more than 'a black person'. It covers such shades as 'worthless' 'slavish', etc. In example 2, the speaker expresses his hatred by the use of the word 'blighter'. In example 3, the speaker uses 'bark' rather offensively to describe his addressee as animalistic, noisy, wild and harmful.

#### 4.2.4 Affective Meaning

**Affective meaning** The meaning that is communicated by a speaker's/writer's feelings and attitudes.

**Affective meaning** refers to "what is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer" (Leech: 23). It depends on other types of meaning such as conceptual, connotative and stylistic meanings. An instance of affective meaning is clear in this common expression: 'we build houses to make homes'. The emotive usage here attempts to distinguish between the physical 'house' and the abstract 'home'. Also, a word like "lion", apart from its idiomatic association, as seen in "The lion's share" etc. could connote kingship, power or dominance. In fact, in the Bible, 'the lion of Judah' connotes God, the Almighty.

In expressing affectionateness and profound love, certain words are often favoured. Such include, 'honey', 'love', 'darling', 'sweet heart', 'my dear', 'cynosure', etc. A word like 'friend' does not express the kind of emotion carried by these words. It can sometimes be used to express annoyance, and show offence or social detachment. Some years ago, a former Nigerian military president, General Ibrahim Babangida formally asked a former Inspector General of Police the question: "My friend where is Anini?" Obviously, given that Anini was a notorious armed robber long due for arrest by the Nigerian police then, given also that the situation

where the question was asked was formal; 'friend' was not used any affectionately but rather affectively to express accusation and apprehension.

### 4.2.5 Reflected/Reflexive Meaning

Reflected/reflexive meaning arises in 'cases of multiple conceptual meaning in which one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense (Babatunde, 1995). Look at the word "intercourse": when sexual intercourse rather than social intercourse is meant 'intercourse' echoes senses such as ejaculation, erection, etc. Note that the meaning is not direct. It is only reflected. People often employ euphemisms to avoid the taboo sense of a word. For example, 'abroad or bang' is a euphemism for 'intercourse' or 'copulation', 'machine' is a euphemism for 'erection', etc.

### 4.2.6 Collocative meaning

This refers to the meaning that concerns the coming together of words through common usage. When words occur together, they acquire certain associations; for example, heavy+smoker= heavy smoker, rancid+butter=rancid butter, rabid+dog=rabid dog, heavy+sleeper = heavy sleeper, etc. However, some combinations are awkward, e.g. nice+tree= nice tree, eat + the+ water= eat the water, drink+ the+ stove= drink the stove, etc. Note that the companies words keep affect their meanings. In a sentence like "The dog barks" or "The cat mews", our meanings derive from the compatible combinations of dog +barks and cat + mews. Confusion, however sets in with combinations like nice+ tree, eat + water and drink +stove.

Collocations are either free or fixed. They are free when the combinations are flexible. Consider the following examples.

1. They *enjoy absolute bliss*
2. Ogbomoso North Local Government can *sink boreholes* for you if you contact the chairman
3. That *egg* has gone *rancid* (rancid egg, not spoiled egg)
4. Egrets are *migratory birds*
5. He got involved in the *heated argument*
6. *Burning issues* sometimes require *divine intervention*
7. The young man *took to his heels* when the lady's father arrived
8. It was a really *putrid show*
9. Bosede later *took seriously ill*.
10. He has a rather *scrawny hand*
11. I don't like this *soggy ground*
12. She gave a *soulful song* at the function
13. This *office* is *roomy* enough for all your gadgets
14. Many Nigerian *administrators* are largely *profligate*.
15. Many *professors* often become *peripatetic*

Note that free collocations largely consist of adjectival collocations, prepositional collocations and freely formed compatible structures (with combinations like verb-adjective, verb-noun), etc.

Collocations can also be fixed in nature. A collocation is fixed when it is rigid in structure and meaning. Altering the structural ordering of

the collocation affects its meaning. Look at the following instances: a *freak of nature* (**not** a monster of nature), *keep the peace* (**not** retain the peace), *peace of mind* (**not** peace of heart), *bring to a halt* (**not** drag to a halt), *room service* (**not** hotel service), *breach of the peace* (**not** break of the peace), etc. Fixed collocations also appear as idioms. According to Odebunmi (2006: 55):

An idiom is a set of words that has a fixed structure and a fixed meaning. It is therefore more useful to find out what idioms mean, rather than how words have been strung together to form idioms. Take for example “out of the blue” which means ‘unexpected’. Idioms can be figurative expressions, pairs or near pairs of words or phrasal verbs. When they are figurative expressions, certain figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, personification, paradox or euphemism are employed. We should however not confuse idioms in this class with figures of speech generally, since the structures of the latter are not necessarily fixed. Examples of figurative idioms are: “spill the beans” (metaphor), “throw up one’s hands” (metonymy), “as easy as pie” (simile) etc. Note that the following are not idioms, though they are figurative expressions, “as fast as a hare”, “as wild as a lion”, “a pool of ideas”, etc. Idioms can also be pairs or near pairs of words. These include “high and mighty”, “high and dry”, “cats and dogs”, “birds and bees”, “hook, line and sinker”, “touch and go” etc. When idioms are phrasal verbs, they are usually a combination of verbs and prepositions with meanings not predictable from the orthographed words or expressions. Examples are “run into”, ‘look up to’, “come upon”, “come to”, etc. Note that particle verbs such as “go up”, “climb up”, etc. do not have any idiomatic complexion. But some wise sayings may be regarded as idioms; for example, “a bird at hand is worth two in the bush”, “a stitch in time saves nine”, “one man’s meat is another man’s poison”, etc.

### 4.2.7 Thematic Meaning

The theme is the beginning point of a sentence; the rheme is every other thing that comes after the theme. More often than not, the theme corresponds with the grammatical subject, while the rheme tallies with the predicate i.e. the verb phrase. This is, however, not necessarily so. Any part of the sentence can be fronted to prioritise and achieve a particular contextual meaning. Consider the following examples:

1. Olamiposi killed the thief (actor thematised)
2. *The thief* was killed by Olamiposi (victim thematised).
3. *It was the thief* that Olamiposi killed (contrast thematised; it was the thief not anybody else that was killed)
4. *It was Olamiposi* that the thief killed (contrast thematised i.e. it was Olamiposi not anybody else that he thief killed).

5. What Olamiposi did was kill the thief (contrast: Olamiposi did not praise the thief, but rather killed him).
6. Who Olamiposi killed was the thief (contrast: other people might have killed somebody else, the speaker was sure Olamiposi was the one who killed the thief).

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## Study Session Summary



### Summary

In this Study Session, we talked about the following theories of meaning, namely, conceptual, Platonist, structuralist, semiotic, truth-conditional and speech act theories. We also discussed all the seven Leechian types of meaning: denotative/conceptual, connotative, stylistic, affective, collocative, thematic and social meanings.

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## Study Session 5

# Meaning/Lexical Relations

## Introduction

This study session will pay attention to relations of meaning which include synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy and homophony. We will consider each of these in terms of definition and semantic value.



### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

5.1 *examine* meaning/lexical relational elements.

5.2 *consider* their value for meaning explication.

## 5.1 Lexical Relations

**Meaning/lexical relations** simply refers to the relationship of meaning holding between words and utterances in language. Each of the relations mentioned above is taken in turn below:

### 5.1.1 Synonymy

Synonymy is the concept of similarity i.e. sameness of meaning of words. A number of English synonyms have historical influences. For example, during the Middle English Period, certain French synonyms were introduced into English through the Normans. Some of these, as mentioned by Ogu (1992: 31) and tabulated by Odebunmi (2006:69) are:

Table 5.1 Synonyms of English Words from French

SN	English words	French synonyms
1.	Help	Aid
2.	Friendship	Amity
3.	Clothe	Dress
4.	Folk	People
5.	Stench	Aroma
6.	Hearty	Cordial
7.	Holy	Sanity
8.	Love	Charity
9.	House	Domicile
10.	Wish	Desire
11.	Begin	Commence

12.	Hide	Conceal
13.	Feed	Nourish
14.	Ask	Demand

Also, some English synonyms are dialectal variants of other native English forms (e.g. American English, British English and Scottish English). Examples are:

Table 5.2 Synonyms Got Through Dialectal Differences

	Synonyms	Dialects		
		A	B	
1.	Car	Van	British	American
2.	Taxi	Cab	British	American
3.	Boot	Trunk	British	American
4.	Windscreen	Windshield	British	American
5.	Bonnet	Hood	British	American
6.	Sidelight	Parking light	British	American
7.	Number plate	License plate	British	American
8.	Paraffin	Kerosene	British	American
9.	Winder	Roller	British	American
10.	Bandage	Gauze	British	American
11.	Plaster	Bandage	British	American
12.	Pavement	Side walk	British	American
13.	Semi-detached house	Duplex	British	American
14.	Garage	Yard	British	American
15.	Aerial	Antenna	British	American
16.	Dustbin	Garbage can	British	American
17.	Kerb	Curb	British	American
18.	Magistrate	Bailie	Standard	Scottish
19.	Borough	Burgh	Standard	Scottish
20.	Ta	Faucet	British	American
21.	Woman/girl	Mistress	Standard	Scottish

Many English synonyms occur as collocative differences. In the words of Odeunmi (2006: 70) “When a word that collocates with another word is able to carry the meaning of another independent word, especially that which can substitute for it in the context in which it occurs, we say such words are collocatively synonymous”. Examples include:

1. *great* expectation also *big* expectation
2. *great* mistake also *big* mistake
3. *profound* thought also *deep* thought
4. *huge* amount also *large* amount

5. *absolute* madness also *total* madness
6. *fierce* argument also *heated* argument
7. *marked* improvement also *distinct* improvement
8. *absolute* idiot also *complete* idiot
9. *tremendous* admiration also *enormous* admiration
10. *intimate* friends also *close* friends

Quite a number of synonyms result from mere closeness of meaning of words or from overlaps of meaning. Some examples are:

1. case: box, bag, covering, container.
2. diddle: to cajole, swindle.
3. hortative: inciting, encouraging, giving in pairs.
4. hot: very warm, fiery, pungent.
5. lief: beloved, dear.
6. scent: to smell, to sniff, to perfume.

Caution is, however, needed in using words in this category as synonyms because many of them only have related senses but different stylistic or affective implications.

### 5.1.2 Antonymy

Antonymy is the relationship that holds between a proposition and its negation (Babatunde 1995:6). This is to say that antonymy is the concept of oppositeness. Unlike synonyms, antonyms could be true or exact; for example, the opposite of 'white' is 'black'. However, this oppositeness becomes less exact when we introduce the negator 'not' e.g. "not white", which opens up other possibilities like 'brown', 'yellow', 'pink', etc., in fact, all colours other than white. The same situation presents itself when we apply the negator 'not' to words like 'hot' (not hot), brilliant (not brilliant), open (not open), etc. The inexactitude of this nature puts on display the lexical paucity of a language user. Except sometimes in pairs, with prefixes, like exact/inexact, experienced/inexperienced, legal/illegal, rational/irrational, etc. English users are encouraged to look for the exact/lexical opposites of words being sought. We shall discuss two types of polar antonyms; namely, Gradable antonyms and Non-gradable antonyms:

#### Gradable Antonyms

Gradable antonyms show oppositeness in terms of degree. Look at the following examples: tall/short, cold/hot, wet/dry, high/low, big/small, beautiful/ugly, hard/soft, etc. Gradable antonyms are so called because they are capable of expressing comparative and superlative ideas. Of course, the antonymousness of many words is determined by this gradability. Look at these examples:

1. He is the *shorter* of the two boys.  
Antonym = 'taller', not 'tall'.
2. Gloria is *more beautiful* than her friends.  
Antonym = 'uglier', not 'ugly'.
3. Give me the *biggest* plate of food  
Antonym = 'smallest', not 'small'

### Non-gradable Antonyms

Non-gradable antonyms reveal polar contrast or complementarity. This means that they show the reality that many things in life are complements to each other. Examples include: man/woman, girl/boy, lion/lioness, lady/gentleman etc. These antonyms do not ordinarily express comparative or superlative ideas, for example it is not possible to have “It is *lioner* than the other”; “He is *boyer* than Johnson”. It need be said however that in strictly affective situations, it is possible for normally non-gradable words to be graded. Consider the following examples:

1. He is now *most alive* to his responsibility  
Antonym = most dead (most insensitive)
2. I need a *more boyish* idea  
Antonym = more girlish (more mature)

Note that selecting the appropriate antonyms depends strictly on your ability to compare contrast the features of words to bring out their similarities and differences. Note as well that the context in which a word appears often spells out the antonyms it could take.

### 5.1.3 Homonymy

Homonymy is the relation that exists between two or more words with the same structure but divergent senses. Two categories of homonyms can be identified viz: homophones and homographs. We have homophones when words are pronounced the same way but are different in meaning; for example, sum/some, new/knew, rite/right, etc. Note that homophones are differently spelt. Homographs occur when words are structurally the same (i.e. in terms of spelling) but are different in meaning. Look at the following examples; sole/sole, bank/bank, board/board. Consider the following sentence realizations of homophones and homographs.

1. I need a large *sum* of money.
2. *Some* man came looking for you.
3. I have the *sole* right to bury my father.
4. The *sole* of Oke’s shoe is bad.

### 5.1.4 Hyponymy

Hyponymy refers to a relation of inclusion holding between words. For example, ‘scarlet’ is included in ‘red’, ‘goat’ in ‘mammal’ and ‘hibiscus’ in ‘flower’. In hyponymy, we have a superordinate term and co-hyponyms of the same lexeme. This relationship is shown in words like family, vehicle, cat etc. The superordinate term for a family, for example, is “family”; the co-hyponyms are father, mother and children. For cats, the word “cat” is the superordinate term for co-hyponyms which fall under domestic and wild cats.

### 5.1.5 Polysemy

Polysemy is the relation of multiple senses. Odeunmi (2006: 78) cites the following examples:

1. bob:
  - (i) to move quickly up and down,
  - (ii) to curtsey
  - (iii) to ride a bobsled
  - (iv) to fish with a bob
  - (v) to move in a short jerking manner
  - (vi) to be fooled
  - (vii) to take by cheating
2. boggle:
  - (i) to stop or hesitate as if at a boggle
  - (ii) to start with fright
  - (iii) to make difficulties about a thing
  - (iv) to equivocate
3. board:
  - (i) a broad and thin strip of timber
  - (ii) a table
  - (iii) supply of food
  - (iv) provision of meals
  - (v) council-table
  - (vi) a council of authorized body
  - (vii) a slab prepared for playing a game
  - (viii) a notice board.
4. skip:
  - (i) to spring or hop lightly
  - (ii) to make jumps over a twirling rope
  - (iii) to pass discontinuously
  - (iv) to overlap
  - (v) to omit
5. remit:
  - (i) to relax
  - (ii) to pardon
  - (iii) to refrain from exacting or inflicting
  - (iv) to give up
  - (v) to desist from
  - (vi) to transfer
  - (vii) to transmit as money.



### Activity

#### **Identify and explain the synonyms used in the extract below:**

- BABA FAKUNLE: How much did he give you boy?
- BOY: Ten cowries, Baba.
- BABA FAKUNLE: Hand him back nine. All I am taking is one cowry for *Esu* the messenger of *Ifa* and *Olodumare*. No more.
- ODEWALE: Give it back then. You do not deserve it anyway. Now go and eat without shame the dirty money of your masters, murderers.
- BABA FAKUNLE: Again you force words from me (Hotly) you force words from me again you ...you bedsharer!
- ODEWALE: What was that?
- BABA FAKUNLE: I said you ... bedsharer!
- CHIEFS: (Restraining ODEWALE). My Lord – your highness, peace – will you listen to this? Patience, my Lord –

ODEWALE: Does he think because he is old and blind he can use words freely on me?

BABA FAKUNLE: Your hot temper, like a disease from birth, is the curse that has brought you trouble.

ODEWALE: Listen to that!

(Extracted from *The Gods are not to blame*, by Ola Rotimi)

Post your response on Study Session five assignment page on course website.



Discussion Activity

**Comment on how lexical relation elements have been used to achieve meaning in the text below:**

The atmosphere that pervades today's Africa is that of uncertainty and despair. Pessimism now takes the place of euphoria of the immediate post-independent era. Old regimes are challenged and sometimes outsted. Old ideologies are contested and often discarded. New, but harsh economic and social realities make their debuts on the socio-political landscape of Africa as the day slips by. And with all this has been a trail of violence variously and freely manifesting in African states. The continent now wears the gloomy picture painted of it some years back, as the scene of a strange and stirring commotion. Many states have literally collapsed. More are daily being packaged for destruction. Yet, the carnage in Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi not to talk of the socio-political uneasiness in Nigeria, Algeria, Congo, Sudan, to mention only a few of the many theatres of war and human decimation in Africa, reminds us how desperate an enduring and workable solution to the African crisis has become.(Extracted from *Africa and the Challenge of Development* edited by Chris Uroh).

Provide response and join your tutor in an online discussion on this topic on Study Session five forum page on course website

## Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the relations of meaning holding between words and utterances in language. The various lexical relations of synonymy, antonymy, homonymy, polysemy and hyponymy were explained and the insight gained reveals how the knowledge of these elements helps in a better understanding of English texts.

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## Study Session 6

# Componential Analysis

## Introduction

In this Study Session, we will explore componential analysis, which constitutes a major aspect of semantic meaning. We shall consider its features and how it helps us in accounting for meaning.



### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

6.1 *define* and characterise componential analysis.

6.2 *exemplify* its principles with several lexical items.

## 6.1 Componential Analysis

**Componential Analysis (CA)** is a scientific approach to the study of meaning which describes the meaning of a word based on its distinctive or contrastive features. This approach is found within structural semantics which views the sense of an expression as the totality of its possible relations with all other words. Thus, in CA, semantic analysis is carried out by 'systematically comparing and contrasting related words and summarising the similarities and dissimilarities in the most economical way' (Goddard, 1998:43). Thus, the semantic difference between 'man' and 'boy' is based on a set of semantic features:

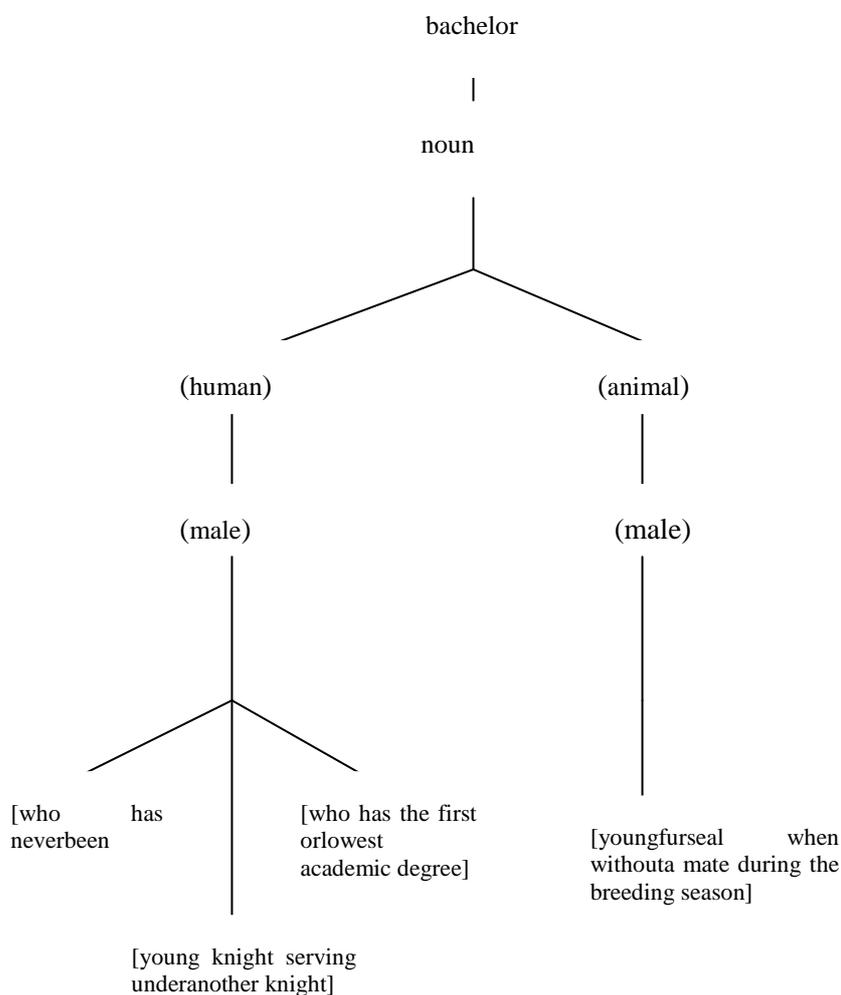
'man'	'boy'	
+	+	male
+	+	human
+	-	adult
-	+	child

This method is also useful in distinguishing members of a lexical set (words that are so semantically related that they overlap):

clean	pure	unadulterated	chaste	clear	
+	+	+	-	-	unmixed
+	+	-	-	+	physical substance
+	+	-	+	-	person
+	-	-	-	-	washed
-	-	-	-	+	visibility

CA, as a semantic approach, can be traced to Katz and Fodor (1963) who posited that a sentence can have more than one meaning and it is only its CA that can reveal the actual meaning intended. Thus, a word can have two sets of features: markers (general characteristics) and distinguishers (specific characteristics). Markers are placed in curved brackets ( ) while

distinguishers are placed in square brackets [ ]. An example taken from Palmer (1981:173) is given below:



### 6.1.1 Features of Componential Analysis

A. CA makes use of binary feature formats of semantic components realised in the presence (plus) or absence (minus) of a given feature. An example follows:

Man = + adult + human + male

Boy = - adult + human + male

B. CA deals with relational predicates where a particular word is defined in relation to another word. Thus, for a word like ‘mother’ to be analysed, it has to be in relation to another person. If these two people are X and Y, then we can have the following:

X is mother of Y = X is + female, X is parent of Y.

C. CA is economical in its semantic analysis as it makes use of the plus and minus sign and the decomposition of meaning into a set of lexical features which makes meaning more accessible i.e.

Rise= [become] [more] [high]

Raise= [cause] [more] [high]

Woman= + female + human + adult.

- E. CA distinguishes between general features and specific features in its definition of lexical items. For example, [male] and [animate] are general features while [feline] is specific to a cat. These features have been referred to as markers/distinguishers, semes/classemes, diagnostic/supplementary, etc, by different scholars.
- F. CA accommodates non-binary features when the need arises. An example can be seen in the definition of run: [movement] [through space] [by a human being] [using the limbs] [in 121212 order] [with recurring movements when neither foot touches the ground]

### 6.1.2 Criticisms of Componential Analysis

- I. CA is limited in its area of coverage. It is believed that CA covers fields that are compartmentalised such as kinship terms. It is also doubted that CA can be used in semantic fields that are clearly delimited.
- II. CA cannot be said to be universal as a word may not have the same meaning(s) in different languages when translated. For example, ‘ora’ in Yoruba could mean nylon or fat, and these are different words.
- III. CA does not take the referents of words into account. Although man is defined as + human, + adult, + male, one must have known what a man looks like before one can successfully provide such a definition.
- IV. Definitions in CA tend to be circular and using it to define words for language learners may pose some difficulties. For example, ‘parent’ is defined as mother and father; ‘mother’ is defined as + female,+ parent
- V. CA tends to overgeneralise the meaning of words. For example, man is defined as +human, -male + adult. This will make the phrase, ‘female man’ to be semantically anomalous as one of the features of man is –female. However, a female man is a man who behaves like a woman. The same applies to the word “womanish”, which describes a man who behaves like a woman.

Despite its limitations, the componential analysis is useful in specifying extensions and intensions. Thus, by marking *man* as (female) and *pregnant* as (-male), we can rule out *pregnant man*” (Palmer 1996:111).

## Study Session Summary



### Summary

In this Study Session, we observed that componential analysis describes the meaning of words based on its distinctive or contrastive features. This approach considers the sense of an expression as the totality of its possible relation with all other words. We also discussed the criticisms

| of componential analysis.

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## Bibliography



Reading

## Study Session 7

# Speech Act Theory

## Introduction

Our focus in this Study Session will be on the speech act theory, which centres on the action humans perform in their speeches. We will be concerned with some aspects of the history of the theory and its major components.



### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 discuss the historical motivation for speech act theory.
- 7.2 discuss the types and characteristics of the theory.

## 7.1. Brief History of Pragmatics

The credit of what is today known as pragmatics has gone to the philosopher J.L. Austin, despite the fact that other philosophers such as G.E. Moore and Wittgenstein had also done works similar to Austin's. The pervading influence wielded by Austin's ideas on pragmatics has however been traced to four factors (see Thomas 1995:28):

- a) The appearance of the most influential collection of Austin's papers (*How to do things with words*) was very timely coinciding as it did with a growing frustration within linguistics with the limitations of truth conditional semantics;
- b) Austin's writing is admirably clear and accessible;
- c) Although over the years he refined and modified his ideas considerably, his work represents a consistent line of thought;
- d) His work foreshadows many of the issues which are of importance in pragmatics today.

Details of Austin's ideas and the philosophy that gave birth to speech acts shall be discussed presently. What is basic however is that pragmatics was conceived by philosopher(s), but has been taken over in linguistics. Austin "himself foresaw that it would be within an expanded science of linguistics that his work would be developed" (Thomas 1995:28).



Tip

Though scholars such as G. E. Moore and Wittgenstein contributed to the development of pragmatics, J. L. Austin is still regarded as the father of pragmatics.

## 7.2 The Concept of Speech Acts

As said previously, J.L. Austin has been regarded as the father of pragmatics, with the view expressed in his posthumously published epochal book, *How to do things with words*. Austin's approach was developed against the move to refine language (grammar) spearheaded by logical positivists such as Russell and others. These latter philosophers intended to rid language of its imperfections and illogicalities, and then come up with an ideal language. In the words of Thomas (1995:29):

The response of Austin and his group was to observe that ordinary people manage to communicate extremely effectively and relatively unproblematically with language just the way it is. Instead of striving to rid everyday language of its imperfections, he argued, we should try to understand how it is that people manage to cope with it as well as they do.

Austin's pragmatics was predicated upon the conception that we perform certain actions when we speak, i.e. language is not only used in saying things, but in performing actions. By this inspiration, he developed the theory of illocutionary acts, which deals with what we do in our speeches, how we do such, and how such either succeeds or fails. He pursued these by first investigating the performative hypothesis. Although Austin later abandoned this hypothesis, its importance comes in its showing how his ideas developed, demonstrating the difference between "a truth-conditional approach to meaning and Austin's view of 'words as actions' and showing that performatives are a subset of illocutionary verbs" (Thomas 1995:32).

Austin distinguished between constatives, i.e. expressions which indicate the truthfulness or falsity of a statement, and performatives, which indicate that a speaker has performed an action. A constative needs to be verified as either true or false; for example: "I drink here daily". A performative on the other hand does not require such verification; for example, "I name this baby David", or "I apologise for my lateness". These two expressions show that actions of naming and apology have taken place. Austin noted that different types of performatives exist, but he did not tidy up his idea on this aspect. It has however been systematized, simplified and sometimes expanded by Thomas (1995), who has, in addition, named the different types of performatives: metalinguistic, ritual, collaborative and group performatives.

### 7.2.1 Locution, Illocution and Perlocution

Austin later dwelled on the distinction between the utterance of a speaker and its illocutionary force. This was realized in the three-tier division of locution, illocution and perlocution. Locution refers to the exact utterance. Illocution is the intention the speaker has to utter the statement, and perlocution is the effect the utterance has on the hearer. Words uttered can be intended to serve as a warning, make a request or appeal, persuade, apologize, etc with the expectation that some actions corresponding to the speaker's intention would be embarked upon by the hearer. The tobacco advertisement in Nigeria would make **an** interesting

instance. In recent times, the Federal Ministry of Health has made it mandatory that all tobacco advertisements should be followed by a warning;

Smokers are liable to die young.

a caveat indicating the health hazard of the product. The locution is the exact words used, which are tendentious to intend a threat or warning. Perlocution is achieved if fear is generated in the smokers, or if they, having been sufficiently threatened by a short life span associated with smoking cigarette, abandon the habit.

### **The Locutionary Act**

Locution or the locutionary act, has been conceived by Austin (1962) to cover phonetic act, phatic act and rhetic act. The performance of a phonetic act is indicated by the utterance of certain noises; that of phatic act goes with “uttering certain vocables or words i.e. noises of certain types, belonging to or as belonging to a certain grammar”; and that of rhetic act is marked by “using vocables with a certain more or less definite sense and reference” (Austin: 95). Obviously, the meaning-related units of locution, by Austin’s conception, are phatic and rhetic acts. For Odebunmi (2006a: 26) therefore “Locutions are vocabulary items that have certain senses and references when engaged in certain contexts by interactants”.

What the speaker says, i.e. the locutionary act performed, could be referred to as the operational meaning of his/her utterance. This operational meaning is determined by (a) the sense(s) of the sentence uttered (b) the identity of the objects in the real world referred to by the speaker and (c) whether or not the speaker is speaking literally or figuratively (Fraser 1986:32).

The task of determining the sense(s) of the sentence uttered is not an easy one, especially where the sentence is potentially ambiguous. This is because the intention of the speaker is largely often conjectured, and not accurately scientifically located. “On the assumption that in uttering a sentence the speaker always means one and only one sentence to be understood, the task of the hearer is to determine which one” (Fraser 1986: 32). The intended meaning of the speaker depends on the context of use i.e. who is speaking? To whom is he/she speaking? What circumstances led to his/her utterance? When is he/she speaking? etc.

Reference relates to knowing the operational meaning of a word. The deixis, i.e. that of place, time and person, is very important in this context. Deictics of time appear as temporal adverbials and tense items. They represent time as diurnal or calendrical units, and ultimately refer to roles of participants. Markers of time such as “today”, “tomorrow”, etc indicate items that are relative to speakers (cf. Mey 2000). Tense is deictic in the sense that “nearly all sentences when uttered are deictically anchored to a context of utterance” (Levinson 1983:77). In this regard, time deictics prove useful in management of time in utterances. Place deictics relate to “the encoding of spatial locations relative to the location of the participants in the speech event” (Levinson 1983:62). Objects in spatial reference are either described/named or simply located. Either referencing is achieved through demonstratives and place adverbials.

These items locate objects along the proximal or distal dimension. ‘Here’, ‘this’ and ‘these’, for example, indicate proximity, while ‘there’, ‘that’ and ‘those’ suggest distality. Person deixis “depends upon the notion of participant roles and upon their grammaticalization in particular languages” (Goddard 1998:638). It is realized through personal pronouns in several contexts of use. The first person pronoun includes the speaker, the second person includes the addressee, but the third person excludes both the speaker and the addressee (cf. Levinson, 1983). Smith (1989) notices that the first person pronoun can make multiple references to someone other than the speaker, a group of people, an imaginary person and an impersonal item. Mey (2000:46) soundly argues that “personal pronouns are important in establishing the current point of view and as such are extremely sensitive to changes in that perspective”. Emphasizing the place of context in deictic appreciation, Kataoka (2004: 410) contends that “the use of deixis in naturally occurring discourse has been regarded as the battleground of what is denotatively represented and connotatively presupposed/created..., and ... that the spatio-temporal deixis is inevitably meshed with interpersonal configurations created among discourse participants...”

### The Illocutionary Act

Linguistic communication takes place largely when we perform illocutionary acts, i.e. when our intentions e.g. making promises, offers, apologies, etc are communicated to the hearer. Linguistic communication is best considered in terms of what the speaker says beyond the structural composition of the sentence. We may consider the following expressions:

I will buy a dog tomorrow.

Will I buy a dog tomorrow?

The propositional content of these expressions i.e. the idea that the sentences express, is that the speaker would buy a dog on the next day. But often, what the speaker says transcends the bounds of the propositional content. For example, “I will buy a dog tomorrow” could be (a) a promise (b) a prediction or (c) a threat. The sentence could be uttered as a promise to a group of kids, probably the speaker’s children who perhaps have asked the father for a pet. It is also possible to be regarded as a prediction of an event that would take place in the future. Lastly, it can be considered as a threat if the hearer fears and, consequently, dislikes dogs.



Tip

- A locutionary act is what a speaker says/writes.
- An illocutionary act is what a speaker does with what is said/written.

Austin (1962) classifies illocutionary acts into five groups, namely verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives. Verdictives relate to giving a verdict; exercitives involve exercising power/influence such as appointing, ordering, urging, etc; commissives relate to promising or announcing intention; behabitives have a link with attitude and social behaviour such as apologizing, congratulating, condoling, cursing, etc (Austin 1962); “expositives make plain how our

utterances fit into the course of an argument... [eg], "I reply", "I argue", "I assume"... (Austin 152). In this classification, Austin claims as he did with performatives, that English language verbs correspond accurately with speech act categories; but this is not necessarily so (cf Leech 1983, Levinson 1983, Thomas 1995). Searle (1969) identifies five types of illocutionary acts, namely: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. We shall take them in turns. Representatives are utterances that describe situations through assertions, conclusions, claims, etc, for example, "Tade is guilty of the offence".

Speakers through representatives are committed to the truth of the proposition stated. A directive is an utterance which uses ordering, commanding, begging, requesting and asking to get something done through the hearer; for example, "Please, help me to lift this chair up". Commissives are acts that get the hearer committed to getting something done. These are promising, vowing, pledging one's allegiance etc; for example, "I will buy you a video set". Expressives are acts that reveal the psychological workings of the hearer, e.g. thinking, apologizing, congratulating and condoling. Examples of these include: "I'm sorry to keep you waiting" "It's nice you have your Ph.D. at last", etc. Declarations go, to a large extent, with institutionalized situations. Typically a declaration causes a change to be in such situations, e.g. christening an object or a baby, firing a worker, excommunicating a member and declaring peace; for example, "I hereby name this baby Victor".

No doubt, some of the acts stated, e.g. declarations had already appeared in Austin's performatives. Also, many of the acts are not universally acceptable. Yet, Searle's classification of illocutionary acts has been observed to have positive effects in cross-cultural pragmatics. Searle (1969:18ff) proposes a principle called "the principle of expressibility" i.e. whatever can be meant can be said. However, the successfulness of an expression is tied to the ability of such an expression to meet particular contextual conditions. What constitute such conditions are the illocutionary forces that can be performed, whose realizations vary, in a systematic way, according to the speech acts being performed. Searle, therefore, believes that speech act groups should be determined by certain preconditions set for their performance, and that the form of these preconditions should be used as a criterion to tell one speech act from another.

Searle proposes four conditional yardsticks. These are: (a) Propositional content (b) Preparatory conditions (c) Sincerity conditions (d) Essential conditions. The propositional content states specifically the features that should be considered in dealing with the meaning of an utterance. For example, requests require that one look forward i.e. to the future, but, apologies, on many occasions take one backwards, i.e. to the past. Preparatory conditions specify the features of context required for the performance of a speech act. These may include whether or not the hearer is able to perform the act requested e.g. of assuring, Sincerity conditions specify the wants and beliefs of the speaker. The speaker, for example, may wish that the hearer perform the act requested, or that he/she recognize, in apologies, that an offence has been committed. Essential conditions refer to the conventional way in which the utterance made is

taken to be an effort at getting the hearer to do something (e.g. in request) or a step to undertake, e.g. in apologies, to correct a disharmony. Searle's rules of speech acts, as represented in the conditions above, have been offered for promising, requesting, asserting, questioning, thanking, advising, warning, requesting and congratulating. We present his rules for promising below:

**Propositional content:** Speaker (S) predicates a future act (A) of Speaker (S)

**Preparatory Condition:** S believed that doing Act A is in H's (Hearer) best interest and that S can do A.

**Sincerity Condition:** Speaker intends to do act A

**Essential Condition:** S undertakes an obligation to do act A.

(Thomas, 1995:94).

By and large, Searle's approach to pragmatics has been built on the hypothesis that when we speak a language, we engage ourselves in a form of behaviour that is rule-governed. His contribution can be summarized thus:

First, the speech act constitutes the basic unit of communication. When we speak a language, our performance is in agreement with the rules. Speech acts are thus intentional behaviours. Second, Searle differentiates between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. For him, the perlocutionary act has to do with the effects of the illocutionary act on the hearer.

Third, he differentiates between utterance acts and propositional acts. Austin calls the former phatic acts; the latter is co-terminous with Austin's rhetic acts. The utterance act refers to the act of uttering words, while the propositional act refers and predicates.

Fourth, Searle, expanding the notion of rules, differentiates between regulative rules and constitutive rules. "The regulative rules regulate antecedently or independently existing forms of behaviour" (Searle 1969:33). They are exemplified in the form "Do X' or if Y, do X (like regulative rules), or "X counts as Y in context C." They either constitute themselves into a system or are part of such a system. For example, football or chess rules both regulate the games, and "create the possibility of playing such games" (Searle: 33). Searle therefore sees the performance of speech acts as a conventional activity.

Fifth, Searle reviews and adopts the Gricean semantic notion that if S means something by X, S intended his utterance of X to produce a certain effect on H by the latter recognizing the intention. For Searle, this idea of meaning dealing with the effect intended does not include the degree at which meaning is a conventional matter. He also mixes illocutionary acts with perlocutionary acts. He stresses that it is essential to clearly understand aspects of these acts that are intentional and those that are conventional to be able to account for illocutionary acts (*see* Adegbija 1999)

The strength of this approach lies in its blending crucial aspects of Grice's intentional approach of meaning with Austin's conventional

approach of speech acts. However, Searle's idea of intentionality is faulty. Contrary to his view, the intention to produce an effect is very important to any account of speech acts (see Adegbija 1999).

Kent Bach and Robert Harnish (1979) propose the concept of intention and inference to speech acts. They assert that linguistic communication is essentially an inferential process. They call this inference pattern "speech act schemata." To make an inference from S's utterance, it relies on the presumption of literalness (PL), that is S is speaking literally if (in the context) S is speaking literally. On the other hand, if H is certain that S is not speaking literally, then H thinks S not to be speaking literally. H therefore attempts to identify the non-literal illocutionary act. When S is non-literal, he may end up producing an indirect speech act, where he says something and means another thing, or performs an illocutionary act while simultaneously performing another. In this connection, if S says to H:

It is too cold in this room with your AC on

S is giving the information to H that, there is cold in the room because the air conditioner has been put on, and simultaneously asking that the AC be put off. It is important that the uptake of the second part of the meaning depends on the recognition of the first. Bach and Harnish's approach therefore takes care of literal and non-literal speech acts.

Bach and Harnish (1979) contend that recognizing the illocutionary intention of the speaker makes an act communicatively successful. Therefore, contrary to Searle's view, they opine that perlocutionary acts are restricted to effects intentionally produced on the hearer. Part of the merits of this concept is that it demonstrates that the process of identifying illocutionary acts is elaborate and comprehensive. The approach also assists in making inference from indirect speech acts. However, it puts excessive emphasis on recognizing the intention of the speaker. Also, it does not fully characterize the Mutual Contextual beliefs (MCBs), (See Adegbija 1999).

### **The Perlocutionary Act**

According to Austin (1962:119)

Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons... we shall call the performance of an act of this kind the performance of a perlocutionary act or perlocution ... (perlocutionary acts) are not conventional, although conventional acts may be made use of in order to bring off the perlocutionary act ... It is characteristic of perlocutionary acts that, the response achieved or the sequel can be achieved by additional or entirely by non-locutionary means: thus intimidation may be achieved by waving a stick or pointing a gun.

The following points can be deduced from Austin's operational definition of perlocution:

- (i) The effect the speaker produces on the hearer as a result of the utterance made or the force of such an utterance is called the perlocutionary act;
- (ii) Perlocutions are non-conventional in nature, but can be achieved through conventional acts;
- (iii) Perlocutions can be achieved through verbal and non-verbal means.

The effect produced on the hearer may or may not be intended by the speaker. If the speaker intends to surprise, frighten, amuse or confuse the hearer, and the latter is, consequent upon the speaker's utterance and force of utterance, surprised, frightened, amused or confused, a perlocutionary act is performed. The same kind of effect e.g. intimidation can be achieved, albeit unintended by the speaker, for instance,

Accept my congratulations.

This utterance, even if made sincerely by Speaker to felicitate with Hearer, may annoy rather than make him/her happy if he/she had expected it earlier than the time it was being given. The success of a perlocutionary act is not as certain as that of an illocutionary act (see Fraser 1986). For example, to discourage someone from following a bush path, one can say.

Leopards do occasionally cross that path into the forest.

One may be bold to say that the hearer will recognize the speaker's intention, but one is not sure if other actions would follow on the part of the hearer after recognizing the speaker's intention, i.e. if he/she would be sufficiently convinced that it is dangerous to follow the path. The unpredictability of this nature has generated the view that "perlocutionary effects do not occur as a part of linguistic communication, but because of linguistic communication and how it relates to some more general area of human interaction" (Fraser 1986:54).

Perlocutionary effects have standard association with illocutionary acts. This association is of two types (a) associating intended effects with the particular act itself; (b) associating intended perlocutionary effects with the content of the act itself. We shall take the two in turns. First, certain intended effects can be associated with the particular act itself. It is necessary to note that the intentions are only associated with, but are not part of the act, by definition. We can look at apologies, forgiving and promise.

(a) Apology

Speaker's intention = to express his/her regret for a previous act he believes he/she is responsible for.

Intended perlocutionary effect = to make amends for a past strained relationship. Sometimes apologies are made without the intention of bringing a strained relationship back to form, but to throw off a nuisance. This is the difference between 'apologizing' and 'being sorry'

(b) Forgiving

Speaker's intention = to set Hearer off from a sense of guilt.

Intended perlocutionary effect = to give Hearer socio-psychological freedom.

As in apology, forgiving, except of God, may be said with no sincere intention

(c) Promise

Speaker's intention = to please the hearer about something.

Intended perlocutionary effect = to make the speaker happy and optimistic.

As in apology and forgiving, a promise can be made for the sake of it, not necessarily to please H.

The second type of intended perlocutionary effects has to do with the content of the act itself. A good example of this is an insult. A large number of insults take the form of a simple representative, for example, a claim. "However, the content of the claim embodies some characteristic that is devalued in that society" (Fraser 1986:55). A literal example is:

You are the most slow-witted person I have ever seen,

We can also cite Fraser's example:

Your breath is so bad it would knock a buzzard off a manure wagon.



Discussion Activity

**Present a speech act analysis of the text below for discussion, using either J.L. Austin's or John Searle's model of the theory.**

Doctor: ((to an attendant)) Call in the next patient

(0.2)

Attendant: Baba Sunday Azeez

(0.2)

Patient: Yes::: s

(0.4)

Doctor: O:::h (.) Mr.Azeez (.), good morning (.) You welcome--

Patient: Ye:::s (.)

Doctor: What's the problem?

(0.2)

Patient: Eh, actually, for some days ago, (.) I have discovered that I have some kind of enlargement in my::: stomach =

Doctor: Stoma:::ch↑--

Patient: Yes. Eh, couple with pains (.), couple with eh (.) bloody (.) stooling, (.) difficulty in breath[ing]

Doctor: [o:::h]--

Patient: Eh, a kind of - I have a kind of congestion in my (.) left breast. And, then I have not been able to (.) eh eheh (.) breathe well. (.)

Doctor.: You'll be better. For how long now?--

Patient.: It's like, I think, about twenty days ago.--

Doctor: Twenty days ago↑ And what have been taking?--

Patient: Actually, I have gone to - gone to, kind of these traditional (.) healers (.) They gave me some form of concoctions (.) that I have been taking, but eh like it was not abated. Then, I tried to go through this eh (.) patent medicine store.--

Doctor: (((laughs)) you are fu:::ning; from tra:::ditional healers to patent medicine. Okay,↓. There is no problem. Have you been having fever since the onset of this illness? =

Patient: [Yes]

Doctor: [ Headache? ]--

Patient: Headache, yes. I have been having headache.--

Doctor: And eh have you been visiting toilet regularly?--

Patient: Actually, normally, I used to ( ) but since the onset of eh this condition (.) I have not been able to eat well. So, that one has prevented me from (.) going to toilet (.)

Doc.: And when was the last time you visited toilet =

Patient: Three days ago. --

Doctor: Three days ago↓ And what was the nature of the faeces. Was it bloody? Was it watery?--

Patient: It was eh! bloody, and eh semi (.) ah \*pa\* and watery--

Doctor: All I can tell you is that you will get better. So, just put on a good smile \$.

And eh, we have to carry out some examinations. I have to examine you, examine the urine and probably the stool and ( ) we can see if there is anything. But, you know ° people should know that when they have complications like this.... For about 20 days ago, you have been visiting traditional healers, patent medicine, and now you are just presenting. It's almost-it's not too good°. Okay, so↑let's prepare the couch and set him on it. You can just go to that side--

Patient: Thank you, doctor.

[Post your presentation on Study Session seven forum page for online discussion on this topic on course website.](#)

## Study Session Summary



### Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the speech act theory, which was started by Austin. The theory has been very useful in the field of pragmatics. The theory reveals actions that humans perform in their speeches and utterances. We also talked about concepts like locution, illocution and perlocution which are very crucial to the understanding of the speech act theory.

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