

## **MODULE 3      WORD AND SENTENCE MEANING**

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Unit 2	Semantics and the Nature of the Lexicon
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Unit 4	Pragmatics and the Speech Acts Theory

### **UNIT 1      SEMANTICS AND THE STUDY OF THE WORD: SENSE RELATIONS**

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#### **1.0      INTRODUCTION**

In our study of semantic theories, we noted that viable theories of meaning should be able to explain the nature of the meaning of words as well as that of sentences. You have learnt that the meaning of a word may not always be realised from its referential or denotational characteristics. Indeed, there are many words whose basic characteristics may not be easily analysed. Such words are best studied by focusing on the kind of relationship they create with other words. These relationships are based on the sense of the words. Therefore, we study words from their sense relations or lexical relations. At this level, we shall study sense relations along the following lines:

- Synonymy,
- Antonymy,
- Hyponymy,
- Polysemy, and
- Homophony.

In this unit, we shall explore the meaning of words, using principally the principle of sense relations.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- explain sense/lexical relations;
- discuss key concepts in sense/lexical relations; and
- apply sense relations in explaining the meaning of English words.

## HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Sense/Lexical Relations Used in Explaining Meaning of English Word

We shall examine different sense/lexical relations used in explaining the meaning of English words.

#### 3.1.1 Synonymy

When reference is made to lexical relation or close relatedness in the meaning of words, we deal with synonymy. We can therefore, describe pairs of words that have very close similarities in meaning as synonyms. For example, we can have the following pairs of words as synonyms.

Friend/ally; boss/master; amiable/friendly

It has often been observed that words may not always have exact substitutes in all contexts. This observation means that we may have absolute, complete and total synonyms when there are exact substitutes as in:

- Everybody/Everyone
- *Bandit/Brigand*

There are also broad or near synonyms as in:

- rich / sumptuous
- mature / ripe

### 3.1.2 Antonymy

The relationship of oppositeness is referred to as antonymy. You will observe that in public and professional examinations in which knowledge of English is tested, there are sections on words and opposites. Antonymy occurs in two forms – gradable and non-gradable antonyms.

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

- |               |                  |                  |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| - Tall        | Taller           | Tallest          |
| - intelligent | more intelligent | most intelligent |
| - dangerously | more dangerously | most dangerously |

On the other hand, non-gradable antonyms do not occur as comparative constructions. Words in this category are expressed as complementary pairs – such that their exact opposites are the only options. For example, someone can be male or female, father or mother, dead or alive, married or single. Other examples of non-gradable antonyms are – close or open, found or lost. There are also relational opposites, which convey the meaning of reciprocal, bilateral or social relationships. Such meanings are interdependent such that membership of one of the pairs suggests the other. The following are common examples.

Teacher – student  
 Parent – child  
 Brother – sister  
 Buy – sell  
 Servant – master  
 Wife – husband  
 Employer - employee

### 3.1.3 Hyponymy

When the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another, we have hyponymy. For instance, included in animals are dogs, elephants, goat, and so on. We can also relate hyponymy to professions

to include law, medicine, teaching, banking, and so on. There is always a hierarchical relationship drawing from the general to samples.

### 3.1.4 Homonymy

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

- Bank (of a river)
- Bank (financial institution)
- Fly (an insect)
- Fly (to move in the air)
- Lead (verb to guide)
- Lead (an element used in making pencil)

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

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

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

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

### 3.1.5 Polysemy

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

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

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

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. List different sense/lexical relations, which English words attract.
- ii. Provide two examples each for antonyms and synonyms.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

We have observed that words may not be profitably analysed through their reference or compartments. This observation has favoured the relevance on the sense relations holding among words.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have studied the meaning of words from the perspective of sense relations with emphasis on synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, homophony and polysemy. We have also illustrated each of these concepts with examples from English.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. Describe the different types of antonyms.
- ii. Describe the relationship of hyponymy.

### Answers:

- i. synonymy, antonymy, polysemy
- ii. antonyms: male/female, old/new  
synonyms: still/yet, rich/wealthy

## 7.0 REFERENCE/FURTHER READING

Ndimele, O. M. (1998). *Semantics and Frontiers of Communication*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.

Ogbulogo, C. (2005). *Concepts in Semantics*. Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publication.

Palmer, F. R. (1996). *Semantics*. London: Cambridge University Press.

## **UNIT 2 SEMANTICS AND THE NATURE OF THE LEXICON**

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- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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  - 3.3 Role Relations of Lexical Items
  - 3.4 The Nature of Empty Categories
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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Recall that we have discussed semantics in relation to word and sentence meaning. It is even more profitable to examine how semantics relates to the structure of the sentence. This requires some understanding of the characteristics of words. We have consistently noted that semantics deals with the study of meaning in natural language. Meaning is conveyed by words and their combination. There are usually deep structure forms of the meaning of sentences from which many surface forms can derive via transformation. The combinations that are permissible for words are based on the features of specific words. Interestingly, when the lexicon has been externalised and organised, we have the dictionary. Indeed, the richer and the more comprehensive the dictionary of a language, the more it has the capacity to express meaning. This study is connected with syntax and we shall, for the purpose of this unit, discuss aspects of semantics relevant to the study of syntax.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- describe the nature of the lexicon;
- explain the features of words;
- explore the sub categorisation of English words;
- identify role relations of lexical items; and
- examine the nature of empty categories.

## HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 The Nature of the Lexicon and the Feature of Words

The lexicon presents an ordered mental list of words available to a language user. As we have observed earlier, when the lexicon is externalised and generalised, it becomes the dictionary. The information provided in the lexicon or the dictionary covers the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic characteristics of the lexical items.

Phonological information guides us in pronunciation; morphological information refers to the formation of the word while syntactic information focuses on the categorical features as well as the distributional possibilities of the word. Semantic information relates to the meaning of the word. When we focus on the features of words, we deal on the specific groups such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, and so on. It is possible to classify words as content and form words. Content words have independent meaning, even in isolation. Content words have an open class system as they can accept new entries. For instance, in the age of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), such new words as laptop, facebook (an example of social media), and disc drive have been added to the dictionary of English. Form words also called function or grammatical words do not have independent meaning when they occur in isolation. Such words are used to signal syntactic or grammatical relationship within larger structures. Form words belong to a closed system because they cannot be expanded. They are also very few in number. They include- pronouns, auxiliaries, conjunctions, prepositions, determiners and articles.

Another way to classify words is to describe them as transparent or opaque. The meaning of transparent words can be deduced from the meaning of their constituent parts – for example:

Prefix	Stem	Suffix
un -	god	- liness
dis -	satisfy(y)	action

The meaning of opaque words cannot be determined from their constituent parts. Most opaque words are also structural, grammatical or form words.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

State the difference between the lexicon and the dictionary.

Read 3.1 above for the answer.

### **3.2 Subcategorising English Words**

We have noted that words of any language can be grouped into specific categories – nouns, verbs, adjectives – and so on. Apart from these groups, often referred to as parts of speech, we can highlight the properties of individual words. The process of highlighting the properties of individual words is referred to as subcategorisation. For instance, a noun can be subcategorised as proper or common, concrete, or abstract, count or mass, human or non-human.

When the rules of subcategorisation relate to all words in a class- for example, nouns, as we have observed above, we describe the rule as context-free. When there are conditions specifying how the rules will operate, we have context – sensitive conditions. For instance, it is possible to have a verb – (such as discuss) that must take an obligatory object. There are certain nouns that may not select indefinite determiner for example, information and news.

We should be able to provide some generalisations about context-sensitive characteristics of some words. For example, the verb “discuss” must take an object, which is a noun or a noun phrase. The adjective “fond” must be followed by a preposition. The information can be represented in a systematic way.



Discuss	V	-	(NP)
Fond	Adj	-	(of NP)

Every lexical item establishes some constraints on syntactic categories with which it associates. Context-sensitive generalisations are part of what we describe as strict subcategorisation.

Words are further constrained by semantic considerations. These restrictions are referred to as selectional restriction. The rule of selectional restriction shows the semantic properties of lexical items – in terms of + concrete + abstract + human. Words like tree and stone are (-ANIMATE), while fox, man are (+ANIMATE). Some abstract words like *love, eat, run* will be marked as (+ANIMATE + HUMAN).

It will therefore be anomalous to present the following sentences

- (i) The tree loves them.
- (ii) The stone ate rice.

Meaning is therefore predictable from observing the nature of the complete semantic environment as well as from an assessment of syntactic well-formedness.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Identify the different ways we can classify English words.  
Read 3.2 above for the answer.

### 3.3 Role Relations of Lexical Items

It may not be enough to limit our knowledge of words to their basic characteristics. It is necessary to examine the functions of lexical items in a systematic way. This can be achieved by focusing on the role relations of lexical items. Indeed, role relations provide information on semantic relationships among lexical items. In doing so, role relationships help to highlight functions of lexical items. The functions of lexical items are referred to as arguments – such as agent, instrument, experience, source, goal, path, location, possessor, patient, and so on.

Nouns and noun phrases are described as arguments in relation to the verbs in the sentence. Verbs are central in determining semantic roles. These roles relate to processes, events and state of affairs associated with participants in the sentence.

The agent is usually a noun phrase marked as (+ANIMATE), and which instigate an action or an event as shown below.

- (i) *John* boiled eggs (John as agent)

When entities designated as (-ANIMATE) initiate some action, we describe the entities as *force*. For example:

- (ii) *Radiation* caused some damage (Radiation as force)

That entity that is affected by the action of the *agent* or *force* is referred to as *patient* e.g.

- (iii) John boiled *eggs* (eggs as patient)

The entity that undergoes some psychological state is the experience

- (iv) *Juliet* became happy (Juliet as experience)

The instrument is the semantic role for what is used to carry out a piece of action

- (v) She cleaned the chair with *a brush* (brush as instrument)  
*Source* indicates the origin or direction from which an entity comes. The source is usually a location.

- (vi) The teacher took out the duster from *the cupboard*. (the cupboard as source)

We can, however refer to the place an entity is situated. That is usually the location as a thematic role.

The semantic role *goal* shows the direction towards which an entity goes.

- (vii) The mango rolled *into a basket*.

The path shows the route along which an entity moves e.g.

- (viii) They reached the town *through the unused road*.

We also have the possessor or the beneficiary, describing the entity benefiting from an action. The beneficiary is always (+ANIMATE)

### 3.4 The Nature of Empty Categories

Sentence varieties are achieved by transformations some of which involve rearrangement, deletion, additional and replacement of linguistic items. These transformations involve the movement of items.

When these items are moved, spaces are left. These spaces are referred to as empty categories. In order to realise the full meaning of any sentence that has undergone transformation, there is the need to explain the nature of these empty categories.

Empty categories are of the following types:

- (i) The non-anaphoric null pronominal (PRO)
- (ii) Anaphors
- (iii) Traces

PRO – This empty category occurs as the subject of the infinitive clause as shown below:

- (i) Peter promised (PRO to return)
- (ii) Anaphors such as *themselves*, *each other* and *one another*.
- (iii) NP Trace

In transformations involving passive structures, we always have traces as shown below.

- (i) The men were promoted -t. Note that the space after the verb *promoted* has been left empty

Wh Trace- when we have WH-Questions and relative clauses, among other structures, WH- traces occur:

- (i) What did the lady cook -t-?
- (ii) You said the man who I described -t-?

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

I have observed that our knowledge of semantics will be more fulfilling with a more detailed analysis of words in their combination in sentences. This demand has been pursued in this unit as we have explored the nature of the lexicon, the features of words, the sub categorisation of words, role relations of lexical items and the place of empty categories in interpreting the meaning of sentences.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have examined the place of the structure of words in the study of semantics. We have discussed:

- the nature of the lexicon
- the features of words
- the process of sub categorisation
- role relations of lexical items
- some empty categories.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. Discuss the essential features of English words.
- ii. Highlight the basic role relations of English lexical items.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Chomsky, N. (2002). *On Nature and Language*. Cambridge University Press.

Cook, V. J. (1988). *Chomsky's Universal Grammar*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Ogbulogo, C. (2005). *Concepts in Semantics*. Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publication.

## **UNIT 3 ASPECTS OF SENTENTIAL MEANING**

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  - 3.3 Vagueness
  - 3.4 Tautology
  - 3.5 Presupposition
  - 3.6 Entailment
  - 3.7 Anomaly
  - 3.8 Contradiction
  - 3.9 Analyticity
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Sense or lexical relations are concerned with the meaning of individual words. However, as we observed in the unit on semantic theories, the function of theories of meaning includes the explication of sentences. A great deal of the problems of communication derives from the confusion at the level of sentences. It is, therefore, important that you explore sources of these problems. We do not communicate with isolated words. Indeed, knowledge of language and the art of communication depend on our ability to combine words in a systematic way. When words are confined, we achieve sentential meaning. The study of semantics is also expected to explore meaning at this level. This is the purpose of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

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

## HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Paraphrase

In the study of meaning processes in the sentence, we shall discuss these concepts in the sections that follow.

Paraphrase is to the sentence what synonymy is to words. This means that the paraphrase explains a situation in which two or more sentences have one meaning. Indeed, a sentence can have many paraphrases. There are two types of paraphrases: lexical and structural paraphrases.

In lexical paraphrases, we have two or more sentences giving the same interpretation as a result of the replacement of one word or phrase by another. The following are examples.

- (i) The chef hired *a bachelor*
- (ii) The chef hired *an unmarried man*

In the two sentences above, the change in their structure is as a result of the substitution of a bachelor for *an unmarried man*. Both *a bachelor* and *unmarried man* are phrases. Consider further the following sentences.

- (i) The man was *agitated*
- (ii) The man was *anxious*

We have achieved the paraphrase by the substitution of the word “agitated” for another, “anxious.”

Structural paraphrase is achieved when we alter the arrangements of the sentences through transformations. The following are examples:

- (i) They bought a new apartment (Basic –subject + Verb+ object)
- (ii) It was a new apartment that they bought (Cleft)
- (iii) What they bought was a new apartment (Pseudo cleft)
- (iv) A new apartment was what they bought (topicalised)

### 3.2 Ambiguity

When an expression can be given more than one interpretation ambiguity arises. Therefore, why polysemy relates to words, ambiguity is concerned with sentences. We have two types of ambiguity – lexical and structural.

Lexical ambiguity occurs when the presence of just a specific word leads to multiple interpretations. Consider the following examples.

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

It should be noted that “goals” and “tables” can be interpreted in different easy based on the contexts.

Structural ambiguity is achieved by the organisation of the elements of the sentence. It is possible to interpret these elements in different ways. Consider these examples.

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

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

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

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

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

State the two types of ambiguity that can occur in a sentence.

**Answer:** Lexical and Structural

### 3.3 Vagueness

A sentence is vague when it has no definite meaning. This lack of meaning may derive from the incompatibility of the semantic properties of some of the words. Sometimes, a vague expression may be

grammatically well formed, yet its meaning may be farfetched. Consider the following classical example taken from Chomsky (1965).

- (i) Colourless green ideas sleep furiously together

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

- (ii) The stones consoled her

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

### 3.4 Tautology

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

- (i) This bachelor has not been married  
 (ii) The congregation are members of a church

Other instances of tautology are:

- circumnavigate *around*
- *unlawful* theft
- *can* be able

### 3.5 Presupposition

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

- (i) John: Are you able to bring Harry along?  
 (ii) Peter: That will be splendid. On our way, we shall pick up the drinks.

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



### 3.6 Entailment

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

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

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

### 3.7 Anomaly

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

- a long man
- a tall snake

### 3.8 Contradiction

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

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

### 3.9 Analyticity

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

- (i) Churches are usually attended by Christians
- (ii) Unmarried ladies are spinsters

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List the different areas of interest in the study of the meaning of the sentence.

Answer: paraphrase, ambiguity, vagueness, tautology, presupposition, entailment, anomaly, contradiction, analyticity.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

A great deal of the problems of communication derives from the misinterpretation of the meaning of the sentence. It is always profitable to explore the full range of meaning, potentials in the sentence.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

We have studied in this unit, different area of emphasis in the mechanisms for deriving the meaning of sentences. We have focused attention on paraphrase, ambiguity, vagueness, tautology, presupposition, entailment, anomaly, and analyticity.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i. Describe lexical and structural paraphrases.
- ii. Distinguish between ambiguity and vagueness.
- iii. Discuss the nature of presupposition and entailment.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Huford, J. R. & Heasley, B. (1983). *Semantics: A Course Book*. London: Cambridge University Press.

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## **UNIT 4: PRAGMATICS: CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURE AND SPEECH ACTS THEORIES**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Pragmatics is concerned with the range of choices and constraints available to users, and based on the context. In pragmatics, emphasis is on the pairing of sentences and their appropriate contexts. The choices made in language have been found to affect the listeners and their responses. It is possible to observe norms of politeness, appropriateness, formality and respect in the way language is used. It is believed that pragmatics determines the appropriate interpretation of sentences since there could be differences between literal and implied meanings. Differences in meaning are at the instance of the situation, the shared background and the linguistics context of the expression. It will be most inconceivable to limit the study of semantics to the abstract study of meaning. Indeed, a dependable theory of meaning should explore language use. The relationship between semantics and language use is referred to as pragmatics. We shall explore this relationship in the course of this unit.

Pragmatics, according to Kempson (1986) is the study of the general principles necessary for retrieving information from a specific utterance based on the context. Emphasis is not necessarily on the grammatical or structural properties of the sentence. Indeed, a great deal of what we do in human communication is determined from the context. This means that the meaning of any stretch of communication is based on the interpretation of the listener. We also lay emphasis on the message, the participants, and the deductions to be made from the utterance, the implications of what is said or assumed and the impact of the non-verbal aspects of the interaction on the meaning.

In terms of objectives, pragmatics deals with the totality of the processes through which utterances convey meaning, bearing in mind the context and how participants respond to the meanings intended. It will therefore be easy to say that the common tie between pragmatics and semantics is language. However, while semantics is concerned with language meaning, pragmatics is concerned with language use. This will necessarily mean that the contextual approach to meaning will be relevant to pragmatics. Since the full manifestation of language from the point of use deals on the implied processes, we shall explore the nature of implicature.

It is always common to hear people argue over what is meant, and what is implied. This means that there could be differences between what a speaker says and how the listener interprets it. However, success in communication depends on how well the meaning intended by the speaker and how the implicature of the listener converge. This is usually possible when participants in communication obey principles of conversational implicature. Implicature, a term coined by H. P. Grice, refers to what is suggested in an utterance and which may not have been *expressed*.

The speaker deliberately breaks the rules of a conversational maxim to convey additional meaning. For instance, it is possible to respond to the question:

1. Do you really believe Betty?

The answer could be

2. She was speaking grammar.

The answer implies, among other things that Betty was not telling the whole story.

It is expected of people in communication to obey certain co-operative principles.

These principles have been presented as maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner.

*Quantity* – provide the right quantity of information; that is:

- i. Make your contribution informative enough.
- ii. Do not make your contribution more informal than necessary.

*Quality* – make your contribution true; that is:

- i. Do not say what you believe is not true
- ii. Do not say that for which you lack evidence.

*Relation* – Be relevant

*Manner* – be perspicuous, that is:

- i. Avoid obscurity of expression;
- ii. Avoid ambiguity

There are also conventional implicatures used for communicating non-truth-conditional meaning for specific linguistic expressions.

For example:

1. Ade is an Ibadan businessman, he is very rich.

This will have the conventional implicature that all Ibadan businessmen are rich; however, this is not always the case.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- define pragmatics;
- relate pragmatics to the meaning of sentences; and
- explain the three levels of speech acts.

## HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The Speech Acts Theory and Types of Acts in Language

Austin (1962) describes the Speech Acts theory as an approach that explains the roles of utterances in shaping the attitudes of participants in interpersonal communication. Speech acts reveal the intentions of speakers and the effects the speaker's utterances and expressions have on the hearers. The implication of speech acts is that every utterance has a purpose, which derives from the specific context. It has been observed that language use depends on such contextual factors as social and physical conditions, attitudes, abilities, beliefs and the relationship existing between the speaker and the listener.

There are different types of speech acts, the most common being the following.

- (a) Representative Acts;
- (b) Declarative Acts;
- (c) Directive Acts;
- (d) Expressive Acts; and
- (e) Commissive Acts.

**Representative Acts** – These acts describe events, processes and states. Usually, the speaker is committed to the truth of the assertion, claim, report, suggestion, prediction, description, hypothesis or conclusion.

**Declarative Acts** – These are acts that immediately change the state of affairs to which they apply. These acts are used in arresting, christening, marriage, sentencing, acquittal and so on. Consider the following:

- (i) I discharge and acquit the accused
- (ii) I hereby name this baby Amanda

**Directive Acts** – In directive acts, the addressee is instructed to carry out some instruction by responding verbally to an utterance or by performing some physical actions. The acts can be questions, commands, requests, pleas or invitation. For example:

- (i) Kindly lend me some money!
- (ii) Please, be my guest!
- (iii) What is your name?

**Expressive Acts** - Expressive acts show the psychological states – feelings and attitudes towards some events and affairs. These usually occur in greetings, scolding, condoling, appreciating, thanking, congratulating, apologising, and so on. For example:

- (i) We congratulate you on your success
- (ii) I apologise for my mistakes

**Commissive Acts** - In commissive acts, the speaker is committed to some future action as in challenging, betting, promising, offering, threatening, vowing, warning, etc.

- (i) I pledge a hundred thousand Naira
- (ii) We promise to build them a house

It should be noted that commissive acts carry specific performative verbs – promise, swear, name, pledge, warn, advise, declare, and bet.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

List the types of speech acts.

**Answer:** Read 3.1 above for the answer.

### 3.2 Levels of Speech Acts

There may be some confusion regarding types and levels of speech acts. We have already discussed types of speech acts – representative, declarative, directive, expressive and commissive. For levels of speech acts, emphasis is on the different stages of interaction between the speaker and the listener using speech acts. Three distinct levels are usually observed – locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

**Locutionary Acts** – These are observed as the processes of producing grammatical and meaningful utterances, which can be recognised by the hearer.

**Illocutionary Acts** – Illocutionary acts are the force behind the utterances. Indeed, the speaker performs these acts to achieve the purpose of communication as a statement, a question, a command, an invitation, a threat, a request, an apology, and so on. It is possible, for instance, to use a sentence that has the structure of a statement for the purpose of a warning – e.g.

- (i) You will lose all your deposits – (from a financial adviser to a client).

This sentence may be a *warning* or a piece of advice.

Therefore, it is possible to use identical utterance types for different tokens based on the intentions of the speaker and the context.

**Perlocutionary Acts** – These are the effects of the speaker's utterance on the behaviour of the hearer. They are the acts performed by the

hearer as a result of the effect of the speaker's utterances. It is assumed, for instance, that the hearer will respond to a question of the speaker in a specific way, or behave in accordance with the demands of the context.

It should be noted that the illocutionary force is the intended effect of an utterance on the hearer from the point of view of the speaker. The perlocutionary effect is the actual effect of the speaker's utterance on the action, behaviour, attitude or belief of the hearer.

Maximum communication is achieved when there is illocutionary *uptake*. This situation arises when the listener understands the intended effect of the speaker. This demand is at the core of semantics since meaning must be shared.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Identify the levels of speech acts.

**Answer:** locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We have explored meaning beyond the abstract level of deep structure sentences. Indeed, we have examined language in use. This is the core of pragmatics. Our focus in this unit has been on speech acts.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have explored different dimensions of the speech acts theory. In specific terms, we have discussed:

- the concept of pragmatics
- types and levels of speech acts
- the place of illocutionary uptake in achieving maximum communication.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- i. Discuss the different types of speech acts.
- ii. Explain the different levels of speech acts.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**



- Cook, G. (1989). *Discourse*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Grice, H. (1975). "Logic and Conversation". In Cole, P. & Morgan, J. (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics*, vol 3, New York: Academic Press, pp 41-58.
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- Kempson, R. (1986). *Semantic Theory*. London: Cambridge University Press.
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- Searl, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.