Meaning Negotiation in Communities of Practice

Submitted By

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Dedication

To our first teacher   prophet Muhammad (peace and prayer upon him).

To our parents , who have   taught us that the   best kind of knowledge is learnt for its own sake; they are our mirror of example and wisdom.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to the highlight the multimodal nature of communication and the need for teachers and students to be aware of this.

This paper consist of two chapters. Chapter one sheds light on meaning making in communication, types of meaning and meaning in relation to nativism as a concept.

Chapter two deals with meaning in English classroom as communities of practice and production of identity.

Finally ,the conclusion sums up the findings of this paper.

Chapter One

1.1 Meaning Making in Communication

As a concert meaning refers to speaker meaning and particularly the intention of the speaker or the desired communicative effect of the utterance. Meaning is the basis of the conviction that language is purposive: when one speaks ⸱he intend to achieve particular ends. Language use making the appropriate choices of linguistic forms for the appropriate communicative setting and cultural context (Mwihaki ,2004:125.(

Meanings are rooted in negotiation between distinctive social practices with various interests by individuals who offer or try to share some common ground. Power plays an important role in these negotiations. The negotiations can be settled for the time, in which case meaning becomes conventional and routine. But the settlement can be reopened, perhaps when a particular company introduces a new element into its social practice (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 95).

The idea of linguistic meaning is diverse and hence its definition rather problematic. This problem is apparent in the varied approach to analysis, description and definition. Scholars approach linguistic meaning in various ways, notably: as sense and reference, concept imaged on the brain, truth-value proposition or as (communicative) use (Kempson, 1977:42.(

While the various treatments of linguistics meaning have their strengths and weaknesses, the approach to meaning as use can be considered more realistic and more concrete with regard to descriptive, explanatory and evaluative adequacy. It takes into account the various forms of linguistic function as expressed in descriptive and performative sentences, including the great flexibility of word meaning (Caron ,1992:163.(

views language as an elaborate system of meanings with other grammatical categories functioning as realizations of semantic constituents. A model of Functional grammar (is a form of grammatical description originated by Michael Halliday. It is part of a social semiotic approach to language called systemic functional linguistics) is therefore represented as a semantic system accompanied by linguistic forms in which meanings are realized. According to Functional grammar each language is organized around two main components of meaning: the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions. Through the ideational metafunction one acquires knowledge and understanding of the world around us and also communicate our experiences.Through the interpersonal metafunction one uses language to establish, regulate and maintain relationships with other people. The negotiations which constitute meaning are limited by values emanating from "communities" though one needs to realize it can be contentious what constitutes a "community"or from attempts by people to establish and stabilize, perhaps only for here and now, enough common ground to agree on meaning (Mwihaki ,2004:128.(

According to Gee(2005:13) "meaning is something one negotiates and contest over socially. It is something that has its roots in "culture" in the very deep and extended sense that it resides in an attempt to find common ground."

To be effective, group interaction must be carefully planned by the classroom teacher to include a requirement for a two-way or multi-way exchange of information. Thus, the teacher's role is critical not only in providing students with access to grammatical input, but also in setting up the conditions for successful second-language acquisition in the classroom. (Doughty and Pica 1986).

1.2 Types of Meaning

According to Leech (1981:48، (the multifaceted approach to linguistic meaning baffles the student of semantics. This approach has, however, one advantage: it leads to a distinction of the types of meaning, based on the focus of language use. Linguistic meaning can be broken into seven types: conceptual, connotative, collocative, social, affective, reflected and thematic. Primarily, however, two broad types are delineated: conceptual and associative meaning.

١.٢.١   Affective Meaning

In a manner comparable to social meaning affective meaning is only indirectly related to the conceptual representation. Affective meaning is more directly a reflection of the speaker's personal attitude or feelings towards the listener or the target of the utterance. Such feelings or attitudes are usually negative or insincere in nature. They are normally expressed through such forms of language use as insults, flattery, hyperbole or sarcasm (Mwihaki ,2004:134.(

١.٢.٢   Conceptual Meaning

Conceptual meaning refers to the logical sense of the utterance and is recognizable as a basic component of grammatical competence. It is alternatively described as the cognitive or the denotative meaning (denotation). This is the basic or universal meaning and can be represented at the lexical level, as well as that of the clause or simple sentence. The semantic representation of conceptual meaning is governed by two linguistic principles: that of contrast and that of arrangement. These principles are comparable to the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. They are the two relationships between linguistic elements that define how language works, according to structuralism. They are complementary the syntagmatic relationship is how linguistic elements can be sequenced. It's syntax. And morphology. And phonotactics. The paradigmatic relationship is which linguistic elements behave in the same way in syntagmatic relationships. It's lexicon. And phonetics. And the other bit of morphology. (Lyons 1981:412.(

١.٢.٣ Associative Meaning

Mwihaki (2004:131(states that associative meaning describes a composite of six modes of language usage, which draw on certain mental connections. Such connections are based on the contiguities of real-world experience rather than the linguistic context.

١.٢.٤ Collocative Meaning

Collocation is an umbrella term for the various instances of co-occurrence of meaning. It refers to the sense a lexeme may acquire on account of the meanings of lexemes that tend to co-occur in similar environments and covers all utterances which are encoded and decoded as unitary wholes of expressions (Dan and Wilson,1995:80.(

Lexical collocation may be universal or language specific. Universal lexical collocation refers to the particular sense of a general attribute, on account of a given referent. This level of collocation is exemplified in the certain cases of noun-adjective association (Ibid).

١.٢.٥ Connotative Meaning

Connotation is the real-world value a speaker associates with an expression. Real-world value is perceived in terms of socio-cultural principles, norms and rules. Connotative meaning, therefore, describes the communicative value an expression contains by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content. In other words, the connotative meaning of a term builds on the basic conceptual attributes to include the various additional non-criterion properties that we have come to learn to expect a referent to possess (Wierzbicka,19.(٩٦:٢٧٢

Connotative meaning is, generally unstable. It varies considerably according to such factors as culture, historical period, social class and the general real-life experience of a speaker or group of speakers. It can hence be described as coincidental to language rather than an essential part of it. In effect connotations

are relatively peripheral meanings in comparison with denotations. This contrast is further observed in social meaning (Wierzbicka,19.(٩٦:٢٧٢

١.٢.٦ Social Meaning

Social meaning refers to the use of language to establish and regulate social relations and to maintain social roles. This type of language use is alternatively described as social or phatic communication. The notion of phatic communication emphasizes experiences of social fellowship and the participation in social linguistic rituals (Lyons, 1981:67.(

1.3 Meaning in Relation to Nativism

Nativism is the result of culture contact. Carruthers has proved on the basis of his studies of native American tribes, that whenever a culture is under threat from another more aggressive culture, weaker awareness of its native values is expressed in many ways) Carruthers,2006:68).

The concept of Nativism appears to consist of two constituents held together in a dialectical relationship: the Self and the Other. The Self is a whole with which identifies himself / herself, almost fluctuating boundaries where a community has evolved a relatively stable form of life 'over a stretch of time. A common mode of production, a common matrix of religious, social, moral, artistic practices, a common belief structure, language, a shared history - are commonly taken as indicators of a form of life 'that has been evolved. It is not necessary that all the indicators must be present, but it is expected that many of them should be) Pica

and Doughty 1985:271).

The *Other* is that which is appreciably different from the *Self* on many of the above points. The relation between the two can be one of peaceful co-existence. But often it is conceived to be a power-relation, not a relation between *Differents* but of *Opposites* .When one community forcibly tries to bring about changes in another community, the relation obviously becomes a power relation)Ibid).

Long (1981:41) tested how native speakers (NS) modify their speech when speaking to non-native speakers (NNS). He identified two distinguishable phenomena, input, which refers to the linguistic forms used, and interaction, which refers to the function served by these forms such as expansion, repetition and clarification. The appellation of interaction is changed to negotiation in later research to avoid confusion with the wider use of interaction. Whereas input could not be ruled out as facilitating second-language acquisition, it was the modification of interaction that was the most noticeable element.

One of the problems with input theory is that it deals with only half the interactive process; communication is about input and output. It is possible that if the reception of modified input or modified interaction assists EFL acquisition, then perhaps the production of modified output would be even more useful (Papagno and   Vallar 1992:67)

Chapter Two

2.1 Meaning in English Classroom

In language classrooms, emphasis has traditionally been placed on the memorization of grammatical patterns, the expansion of vocabulary, and the practice of conversational phrases. This prevalent conceptualization of the obligations of the language class creates classroom environments where it is difficult for teachers to envisage themselves teaching culture. For this reason, the necessity of teaching cultural elements in language classrooms has been provocative. Furthermore, if culture were taught, it might still be limited to traditional surface-level caricatures such as food, clothes, and holidays)Kramsch,2011:356.(

The function of memory is critical in the assessment of the long-term success or usefulness of interaction in the classroom. Research on interaction has mostly been descriptive or has used discourse analysis to describe the process of negotiation. The author has not found any work on interaction which also looks at the long-term memory of information learned during that interaction. If it can be demonstrated that negotiation of meaning leads to long-term storage of content, then perhaps experiments can be devised which will demonstrate the long-term storage of language skills learned during the interaction process (Ibid:277).

Schlager and Fusco(2004:377) language learning is a complex matter as far as memory is concerned. Firstly, there is the matter of separating content from technique: content includes useful vocabulary as well as comprehension of the subject matter; technique includes new grammatical forms and constructions. Secondly, there is the matter of the senses used in language learning; phonological memory stores the sound and stresses of a word; necessary for the comprehension of the word when it is spoken, and necessary for the oral production or reproduction of the word in order to communicate.

Lexical memory stores the spelling, perhaps etymology and word family of the word; it associates the word with synonyms to help create a 'meaning' for the word. It also might link the foreign word with the mother tongue word. Graphical memory stores images and positions, and this memory function is sometimes used for vocabulary storage by mnemonic association, whereby a word is associated with an image to assist storage and retrieval of the word (Schlager and Fusco,2004:377).

2.2 Communities of Practice

Communities of practice (CoP) means that learning occurs in social contexts that emerge and evolve when people who have common goals interact as they strive towards those goals. The concept of communities of practice is commonly credited to Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger who originated the construct legitimate peripheral participation in their studies of apprenticeship situations. From their development of legitimate peripheral participation, they created the term "community of practice" to refer to the communities of practitioners into which newcomers would enter and attempt to learn the sociocultural practices of the community (Van Dijk,1993:283).

Wenger(1998:318) developed and extended the concept in his enthographic study of insurance claims processors. Community of Practice has become associated with knowledge management as people have begun to see them as ways of developing social capital, nurturing new knowledge, stimulating innovation, or sharing existing tacit knowledge within an organization. It is now an accepted part of organizational development (OD).

The earlier work of Lave and Wenger (1991:36) had the notion of legitimate peripheral participation as the central process in Communities of Practice. Wenger abandoned the concept of legitimate peripheral participation and used the idea the inherent tension in a duality instead.

Enculturation is always found in specific, physically and symbolically situated contexts; in such contexts, learning occurs when socio-cultural activities are significant to the identities of those involved, that is, when they resonate with the living dimension of actual experience (Ibid) .

Lave and Wenger (1991:38) introduced a very popular definition for these types of situated contexts where people share significant experiences, and where learning takes place through increasing levels of engagement: Communities of Practice (CoPs). A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. The social structure of this practice, its power relations and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning.

The key process underlying learning in a Communities of Practice is called Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), which refers to the path that goes from a marginal participation, characterised by accomplishing a short range of tasks with limited responsibilities under the supervision of more experienced members (the old-timers), to a full membership and increased responsibilities (Lave and Wenger,1991:38).

Notions of community, membership and identity became more and more relevant in the context of socio-cultural research . Wenger formulated an ambitious model of social participation capable of accounting for the complex relationships between meaning, knowledge production and identity in all possible contexts of life. His idea of social participation does not only refer to situated engagement in specific activities, but also to the more general processes through which people become active participants in the practices of social communities and construct identities in relation to these communities. (Wenger, 1998: 4).

Communities of practice represent a general interpretive notion for understanding how societies and individuals interact and change; he identified three constituting elements that define a Communities of Practice(Ibid).

1- The mutual engagement in shared sets of practices;

2- A joint enterprise negotiated by the community members, a purpose and a sense of shared responsibility;

3- A common repertoire of resources including tools, stories and the specific language used in the interactions amongst members.

Wenger suggested that communities of practice are everywhere, and that one belongs to several communities at any given time, in some cases as full members, in others as peripheral participants: families, schools, organisations, professions and so on. These environments are complete part of our daily lives and they are so informal and pervasive that one one rarely fully aware of them, although they are, for the same reasons, extremely familiar (Ibid:6) .

Similarly, the process of learning in a community of practice is something one is engaged in all the time, as one carries out our normal activities, and it is related to people's ability to become more active participants, to the community's ability to refine its practices in order to make them more effective, and to the willingness of organizations and institutions to sustain and interconnect different communities. In this process, identity becomes the locus where the tension between individual and social environment is lived and articulated in practice (Reid,1994:166).

The notion of community of practice does not primarily refer to a 'group' of people. Rather it refers to a social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time. That this process ends up structuring social relationships among people involved in various ways is a secondary phenomenon. And this structuring process entails a specific type of relationship. For instance, there is a distinction between a community of practice and a team (Ibid.).

Rogoff et al. (2001:87) described socio-cultural development in a community of learners as a dynamic process where the two main components, individual and society, continuously define and influence each other. Learning in a community can be understood as a process of enculturation (enculturation is the process by which people learn the requirements of their surrounding culture and acquire values and behaviours appropriate or necessary in that culture), where newcomers are slowly accepted and socialized through interaction with others and more experienced members. A major dimension of this process is the development of a common identity, a membership identity, through which individuals can

move towards a more committed engagement.

2.3 Learning as the Production of Identity

The focus on the social aspect of learning is not a deposition of the person. Conversely, it is an assertion on the person as a social participant, as a meaning-making entity for whom the social world is a resource for constituting an identity. This meaning-making person is not just a cognitive entity ,but all human senses express themselves in the process of negotiation .It is a whole person, with a body, a heart, a brain, relationships, aspirations, all the aspects of human experience, all involved in the negotiation of meaning (Fox,2000:853).

The interest for learner identity originates from an interest in the individuals' subjective experience of being learners. The same way people can recognize themselves as, for example, professionals or members of a particular ethnic or gender group, they should also be able to recognize themselves as learners. At present time this recognition of oneself as a learner is practically neglected or unheard-of, both among professional, policy makers and the learning individuals (Falsafi,2010:6).

While the construction of other identity types, such as gender and ethnic identity, is attended to and included in the educational agendas of many western societies, the construction of learner identity is not identified as an issue. This is may be mainly because the fact that the idea of learner identity completely unknown and conceptually absent. Yet, there are indications that this concept is needed and that it could ease the fulfilment of several of the societal future amis and challenges (Ibid).

Learning is not just acquiring skills and information; it is becoming a certain person a knower in a context where what it means to know is negotiated with respect to the regime of competence of a community. Participants have their own experience of practice. It may or may not reflect the regime of competence. Learning entails realignment. When a newcomer is entering a community, it is mostly the competence that is pulling the experience along, until the learner's experience reflects the competence of the community (Wenger et al,2000:35).

Conversely, a new experience can also attract a community's competence along as when a member brings in some new element into the practice and has to negotiate whether the community will embrace this contribution as a new element of competence or reject it. Learning can be viewed as a process of realignment between socially defined competence and personal experience whichever is leading the other. In both cases, each moment of learning is a claim to competence, which may or may not be embraced by the community (Ibid).

Purpose of this process identification as well as dis-identification with the community. In this sense, identification involves modulation: one can identify more or less with a community, the need to belong to it, and therefore the need to be accountable to its regime of competence (Rosch,19(٧٧:٢١٢.

Creating an experience of knowledge ability (or lack of knowledge ability) involves a lot of identity work. Through this process of identification and the modulation of it, the practice, the community, and one's relationship with it become part of one's identity. Thus identity reflects a complex relationship between the social and the personal. Learning is a social becoming(Ibid.).

Wenger(1998:174) admits that the concept of identity just as fundamental and essential as community of practice. It acts as a counterpart to the concept of community of practice. Without a central place for the concept of identity, the community would become "overdeterminant" of what learning is possible or what learning takes place. The focus on identity creates a tension between competence and experience. It adds a dimension of dynamism and unpredictability to the production of practice as each member struggles to find a place in the community.

The concentrate on identity also adds a human proportion to the idea of practice. It is not just about techniques. Gaining a competence entails becoming someone for whom the competence is a meaningful way of living in the world. It all happens together. The history of practice, the significance of what drives the community, the relationships that shape it, and the identities of members all provide resources for learning for newcomers and oldtimers alike (Wenger,1998:175.).

Naturally, by the same token, these resources can become obstacles to learning. The long beak that made a species successful can be its downfall if circumstances change. Communities of practice are not immune to such paradoxes. Remaining on a learning edge takes a delicate balancing act between honoring the history of the practice and shaking free from it. This is often only possible when communities interact with and explore other perspectives beyond their boundaries (Wenger,1998:175).

Conclusion

This study explores the design and development of students'
meaning-making practices and communicative strategies. Although the goal of
those acquiring a first language and those learning in a classroom are essentially
the same to map form and function to produce meaningful utterances based upon
their language experiences ,it is clear that there are many differences, and that
learning a language is too complex an undertaking to be explained through a list of
factors alone.

Language is a sign of creativity and the ability to conform form of language
to appropriate setting is one realization of this creativity. Through interaction and
interpersonal relationships, creative language use plays an important role as the

learners engage in discussion to meet the mutual understanding. If students are to claim that their language learning is meaningful, it should be embedded in conversation.

In many learning situations that are externally imposed, choices are limited to control and management of internal thoughts and feelings; behavioral choices are few. Another important distinction, therefore, is whether motivation is a natural response to the learner's curiosity or whether the learner must exert effort to manage feelings arising from negative thinking about external conditions (e.g., teacher, curriculum, instructional practices. The challenge task engages students in challenging their beliefs, actions, and imagination by having them investigate and respond to issues relating to survival and quality of life, solve problems, and/or create products. The curriculum is designed to create learning experiences that involve both critical and creative thinking skills by requiring students to define the task, set goals, establish criteria, research and gather information, activate prior knowledge, generate additional ideas and questions, organize, analyze, and integrate all this information.

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