

THE PLACE OF LINGUISTIC PRAGMATICS IN NATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA



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Abstract

Language is one of the unique qualities that differentiate the human specie by a wide margin from other creatures. It is tied to the effective existence of man in the society such that any meaningful discussion of man must begin with it. Language enhances communication among humans, and communication maintains and animates life in the society. Linguistics is the academic discipline which studies language as a means of communication used primarily by human beings. It studies what sounds a language has and how these sounds combine to form words under phonology. Syntax in linguistics studies how words are combined to form phrases and sentences. Semantics surveys the properties of linguistic meaning of words and sentences. In recent times, linguistic research has been extended to cover the fact that semantics alone cannot adequately account for the meaning that words and sentences have in language. This is because language is properly used and understood when put in a social context. Language users rely on shared context which empowers them to use and understand language. Pragmatics is an aspect of linguistics which studies how language meaning is interpreted in social contexts. Peace and security are two concepts which are intrinsically linked. They are sacrosanct and nonnegotiable phenomena in human society. Put together, peace and security of a nation ensures absence of anxiety upon which the fulfilled life depends in the society in order to create and maintain a just order. This paper tries to explore the fact that language is a powerful tool in the hands of man as its users rely on shared social context to interpret its meaning. An utterance may constitute an act of incitement against national peace and security if the circumstances are appropriate to allow for such an interpretation. The paper concludes and recommends that we should be mindful of the social context we find ourselves before we can say anything to ensure peace and security in our nation.

Keywords: *Language, Linguistics, Pragmatics, National Peace, National Security*

Background to the Study

Language is one of the unique qualities that differentiate the human specie by a wide margin from other creatures. Crystal (1985) defines language as the “the most frequently used and most highly developed form of the human communication we possess”(p.247). Language is tied to the effective existence of human in the society in such a way that any meaningful discussion of humans must begin with it. Babatunde (2002) states that “human existence depends largely on the existence and development of language for communication” (p.2).

Linguistics is the academic discipline which is concerned with the systematic study of language as a means of communication used primarily by human beings. Akmajian, Demers, farmer and Harnish (2001) State that linguistics as a field of study is concerned with the nature of language and communication" (p.6). They further emphasize how linguistics as a field of study represents an attempt to break down the broad questions about the nature of language and communication into smaller, more manageable questions that we can hope to answer, and in so doing establish reasonable results that we can build on in moving closer to answers to the larger questions. Those who study language as a means of communication are called linguists. They study the structural components of language as well the functional properties of language. One of the insights of structural linguistic studies is that speaker of a language have different types of linguistic knowledge, including how to pronounce words, how to construct sentences, and about the meaning of individual words, and sentences, (Saeed 2003). The fundamental assumption that linguists make when they study the structure of language is that, at all levels, human language is rule governed. There are systematic rules governing pronunciation, word formation and grammatical constructions. The association of meanings with phrases and sentences of a language is also characterized by regular rules, (Akmajian etal, 2001). To reflect this, there are several subsystems at work here. Phonetics studies speech sounds without regard to their patterning in a particular language. Its studies cover the physiology involved in the production of speech sounds. Phonology on the other hand is the study of speech sounds with due regard to their patterning in a particular language or particular languages. According to Carnie (2007), “phonology is the study of what sounds a language has and how these sounds combine to form words” (p.3).

Morphology studies the internal structure of words. It is concerned with the properties of words and word building rules, (Akmajian etal 2001). Syntax studies how words can be combined to form phrases and sentences. The study of Syntax addresses the structure of sentences and their structural and functional relationships to one another, (Finegan 2008). Semantics in linguistics is the study of how language structure meaning. It surveys the properties of linguistics meaning of words and sentences. Saeed (2003), states that the basic task in semantics is to show how people communicate meanings with pieces of language.

The functional properties of linguistics focus on the relationship between language and society. Language cannot exist in a vacuum. It has to be situated within a given society which it belongs and is made to function. Language enhances communication because it has meaning. The meaning that language has helps to convey human perceptions and conceptions in the form of messages. This is why Babatunde (2002) sees meaning as “a creation of the decoder of the message in the light of the experience he has in the society. Society creates meaning for language and language ensures the meaningful existence of the society. Language meaning and society thus provide the needed ingredients for communication” (p.2). In the light of the above, recently, linguistic research has been extended to cover the fact that semantics alone cannot adequately account for the meanings that words and sentences have in language. This is because, language is properly used and understood when put in a social context. Finegan (2008) agrees with this and states: Historically, the central focus of language study has been... patterns of speech sounds, word structure, sentence formation, and meaning. More recently, attention has also focused on the relationship between expression and meaning, on the one hand and context and interpretation on the other. This field is called Pragmatics (p.23).

The thesis of this paper is that peace and security are sacrosanct and non-negotiable phenomena in human society as they work together to ensure absence of anxiety upon which a fulfilled life depends in the society. And language is a powerful instrument in the hands of man in the society. It ensures the effective existence of man in the society. The survival of peace and security in the society therefore depends on appropriate use of language. When we pay attention to both grammar (patterns of speech sounds, word structure, sentence formation and meaning) and social context, we will understand and appreciate how language works to ensure peace and security in the society.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the paper is to explore the fact that language is a powerful tool in the hands of man as its users rely on shared social context to interpret its meaning.

Literature Review

The Place of Pragmatics in Linguistics

Language achieves its major function of communication because it has meaning. And as stated by Babatunde (2002) communication maintains and animates life in human society. Semantics, as earlier stated, is a field in linguistics that studies how meanings are associated with words, phrases and sentences. However, it is important to note that there are other aspects of meanings which are not derived solely from the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. Language users rely on shared context which empowers them to use and understand language. The context makes us look at the meaning of language beyond words and sentences that is extra-linguistically. Here, the

analysis of meaning is slightly outside the scope of linguistics. This why Bariki (cited in Hatim and Mason 1991 p.32) observes that “the inability of semantics to explicate the sociolinguistic and other non-linguistic components of verbal communication gave birth to pragmatics. Pragmatics is therefore, language in action, action determined by society interlocutors”. Ndimele (2004) compares and contrasts semantics and pragmatics to further clarify the issues that may be confusing here. He states that they both share a common denominator, which is “meanings of expressions” (p.103). The boundary between them is that, semantics studies meaning devoid of context while pragmatics is concerned with the context-dependent aspects of meaning. Pragmatics deals with those aspects of meaning not covered by semantic theory. Finegan (2008) also agrees with this and states that “syntax and semantics are not only regulators of language. A sentence may be grammatically and semantically well-formed but still exhibit problems when used in a particular context” (p.249).

It is in view of the above that pragmatics is generally defined in linguistics as the study of meaning of language in context. According to Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) “Pragmatics is the interpretation of linguistic meaning in context” (p.199). Crystal (1985) also agrees and defined pragmatics as “the study of the rules governing our use of language in social contexts” (p.244). Akmajian (2001) define pragmatics “to cover the study of language use and in particular the study of linguistic communication, in relation to language structure and context of utterance” (p.361). Through pragmatics, contextual meaning can be exploited and analyzed to understand not only what the words and sentences mean, but what the speaker of the words and sentences intended to convey. There are real world conditions which words and sentences are used, that is a shared and living context which they are appropriately interpreted. These are all covered under the scope of pragmatics.

The Concepts of National Peace and Security

Peace and security are two concepts which are intrinsically linked. Peace in its early studies was assumed to be the opposite of war. It was defined as the absence of war particularly because its early studies were strongly motivated by the reflection on the tragedies of the Second World War (Matsuo 2005). And by logical extension, when there is war, there is no peace. It can be said that the peace concept at the time consisted of only one peace value, that is, absence of war. At a time in history, there were no wars but the tragic and miserable situations in developing countries manifested in famines, poverty, underdevelopment and gross human rights violations awakened peace studies. It is against this background that peace researchers began to ask whether the absence of war really meant peace. Dasgupta (1968) in his conception on peace went far beyond the absence of war and proposed the notion of “peace-less-ness” which refers to the situations, especially in developing countries, where in spite of the absence of war, human beings are suffering just as much from poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, oppression and so on, as from war.

Galtung (1969) forwarded a broader approach to the issue of peace which deals not only with the issue of war, but also issues of poverty, disease and human rights violations. He defines peace as absence of violence and defines violence as everything which produced a gap between the physical and mental potentials of human beings and their actual conditions. His definition of violence captures poverty, underdevelopment, oppression and other social ills afflicting billions of people in developing like Nigeria as manifestations of violence. It is in view of the foregoing and other new innovations in peace studies the concept of peace is expanding more and more. Ibeanu's definition of peace (as cited in George-Genyi, 2013) is in sociological terms as a condition of social harmony in which there is no social conflict and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs, aspirations and expectations". Peace of a nation is therefore a process to consolidate a new way of seeing, understanding and living in a nation, starting with oneself and continuing with others horizontally, forming a network to provide confidence, security and promoting mutual exchanges, overcoming distrust in order to remove threats and anxiety for a harmonious living in the nation.

Security (intrinsically linked with peace) is a relevant phenomenon to people everywhere, in rich nations and in poor nations. It has been central even in primitive societies. It was the need for security that necessitated the social contract in which people willingly surrendered their rights to a government who oversees the survival of all (Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2013). Like the concept of peace, the notion of security has been changing and evolving. The classic concept of security, the so-called "national security" focused on the military defence against external aggression. However, since the seventies this focus has been questioned as it is now accepted that there are new transnational security risks who cannot be tackled by focusing on the military defence of national borders. Some of the threats identified in this period are environmental threats, organized crime or human rights violations.

Otto and Ukpere (as cited in Adebakin & Raimi 2012 p.9) define security as "protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life... Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) refer to security as the search to avoid, prevent, reduce or resolve violent conflict-whether the threats originates from other states, non-state actors, or structural socio-economic conditions. Modern peace and security studies place emphasis on absence of threat or anxiety to acquire values or tendencies that would undermine national cohesion and sustainable development. Peace and society in a nation work together to ensure the removal of violence and threats that makes individuals and groups to achieve their full potentials.

Linguistic Pragmatic Issues in National Peace and Security

Since independence, Nigeria has its fair share of conflicts and war. Since the end of the civil war in 1970, Nigeria has never been completely formed from politically and ethno-religiously motivated tensions. These are clear indications that peace and security are lacking. This is why matters of national peace and security have become topical issues of concern in Nigeria today. And most of the causes of these challenges to national peace and security stem from misuse or inappropriate use of language. In order to achieve national peace and security, there is every need for us to understand that humans rely on language as a powerful tool in the society to generate meanings for communication. And the meanings we generate from language can only be understood by other language users in a shared social context. This notion is captured in Mey (2001) submissions that as language users, we are situated in a social context which empowers us to produce and interpret language meaning.

Accordingly, lacks of peace and insecurity have contributed to the state of underdevelopment in our nation. The major solution to this is appropriate use of language in all social situations so that suspicion will not be created. If suspicion is created, it may gradually develop to violence which can sometimes result to war. And it is violence and war that are clear indicators of lack of peace and security which can cause underdevelopment. We need to view language beyond grammar (expression) and meaning. The base of language use is context. Language can be best viewed as a three-sided of expression (grammar), meaning and context. Expression encompasses sounds, words, phrases and sentences. Meaning refers to the senses and referents of the elements of expression. Context refers to the social situation in which expression is uttered. It also relies on generally shared knowledge between speaker and hearer. What links expression and meaning is grammar. What links grammar and interpretation is context. Without attention to both grammar and context, we cannot understand how language works (Finegan 2008). And when we don't understand properly how language works, we cannot ensure peace and security because it is language that defines our humanity in the society

Conclusion

Language is a powerful tool in the hands of man that can be manipulated appropriately to achieve national peace and security. In its use to achieve these noble acts, there is need to be mindful of the fact that the expressions we use carry meanings which arise out of the interaction between language and circumstances (context), rather than being encapsulated in the language itself. An expression may constitute an act of incitement against national peace and security if the circumstances are appropriate to allow for such an interpretation.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that the use of language to express ourselves in whatever circumstances should be in view of the existence of context. Context here is more powerful than the words and sentences we use. We can say anything we like in theory, but in practice, we should be mindful of the social context we find ourselves in before we can say anything. This will help tremendously to maintain peace and security in our nation.

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