

On Linguistic Manifestation of Social Meanings and Their Processing

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ABSTRACT

In our paper, we address some issues related to the methods of linguistic manifestation of social meanings and possible ways of its formalization and conjugation with meaning of lexical items. We shall try to create a methodological ground to reconcile the notion of meaning in social science with linguistic meaning. Explicit or implicit indexical expressions can be portrayed as a constant function from linguistically and socially determined variables. It is a double sensitive function: besides being context-sensitive, it is also circumstances-sensitive. This regularly manifested but not unified circumstances-sensitive and speaker-dependent semantic operational component of utterance can be at least partially identified with social meanings and included in NLP procedures.

Keywords

NLP, social meaning, meaning production, context-sensitive semantics

1. INTRODUCTION

1. The processing of textual information should be based on the integral human knowledge not only on language, but also presupposes knowledge of social rules and conventions regarding its usage and context-dependent changing of lexical meaning. In our paper, we address some issues related to the methods of linguistic manifestation of social meanings and possible ways of its formalization and conjugation with meaning of lexical items. We shall try to create a methodological ground to reconcile the notion of meaning in social science with linguistic meaning. The concept of "meaning" is fundamental not only in linguistics and semiotics but also in M. Weber's sociological theory: the subject of sociology is the understanding of "the meaning of behavior": "Action is social insofar as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" [1: 88]. Based on this definition, we suggest the transdisciplinary symbiosis around the study of the problem of meanings and its manifestation in linguistic forms.

2. The socio-semiotic view on language "as social semiotic" [2] provides an opportunity to connect linguistic approach to social meaning with the basic ideas of interpretative sociology where the concept of meaning is crucial and esp. with Niclas Luhmann systemic theory. "Meaning is co-present as a reference to the world in everything that is actualized,... Society is a meaning-constituting system." [3:21]. Luhmann's sociological concept of meaning makes it possible to correlate the

different "meanings of meaning": "meaning" as a semiotic relation between signifier and signified vs. "meaning" as an aim or causal relation between different events - both of them are caused by different but interconnected permanent processes of self-referential meaning production.

3. Communication is not limited to operations on signs and texts but also determined by patterns of behavior and interpersonal interaction. The semantics of linguistic structures is generated as a dynamic context-dependent derivate from linguistic, social, cognitive and referential characteristics. Meaning production is understood as a result of the conjunction of linguistic and extra-linguistic systems in the process of social interaction (cf.: [4]). This semantic conception is to be a synthesis of social semiotics with interpretative sociology, assigning meaning to complexes of verbal and nonverbal actions: "Each meaning thus means itself and other things... Meaning exists only as a meaning of operation using it, and, hence, only at the moment, in which operations determine it". [3: 20, 19]. The meaning production is considered as a juxtaposition of linguistic and extralinguistic systemic factors in the process of communication and social interaction. The semantics of linguistic structures is generated as a dynamic context-dependent derivate from linguistic, social, cognitive and referential characteristics. The dynamic approach allows reflecting a capacity of an utterance to produce new meanings in the process of its generation and functioning. Semantic interpretation is not limited by operations on lexemes and sentences but is also based on conventional frames and models of social behavior and interaction. The apparatus of semiotics can be used as a (meta-) language; It provides possibilities of mutually acceptable translation between the theories developed in various fields of humanitarian knowledge.

4. Meaning production is understood as a result of the conjunction of linguistic and extra-linguistic systems in the process of social interaction and communication. This allows to convert actional meanings into linguistic meanings, and vice versa. This approach is demonstrated when describing the semantics of the pronoun *my*: it is considered as a language game based on social conventions and their contextualization. This language game can be described as a set of rules based on the ability to operate with social and linguistic entities and contexts. The collocations *My + Noun* denote some unspecified relation between speaker and something, which is indicated by this noun. This relation is determined under some social conditions and constraints (property, affiliation, location, devotion, etc.) and it has not any invariant meaning (cf.: *my school – My homeland – My state – My home – My hotel – My wife – My woman – My girlfriend – My book – My favorite book – My opinion*

– My station – My hand – My principal – My doctor – each of them is paraphrased in a different way)

5. The ability to calculate an appropriate meaning is based on some common knowledge of social norms and convention and is resulted from a blending of linguistic and social context-sensitive meanings of MY. The linguistic context-sensitive meaning of MY (at any context to point out who is “I” in respect to the given context and establish some relation with some “X”) is combined with social context-sensitive meaning of My (to calculate which relation may be estimated between “I” and “X” in accordance with frame-semantics of “X” and social status of “I” . However, such a description is not complete. One needs more explicitly refer to speaker-centred nature of these semantic variables:

{my} in (w; t; c) == cA (cA is a speaker/agent of c, w - world, t - time, c - context);

{my X} (w; t; c) == the set of things that in respect to (w; t; c) can be described by description “A’s X” .

The semantic of MY can be represented as a function (relation) from set n {x} – to subset { A’s X } under abovementioned conditions and is determined by some set of socially appropriate possible relationships between A and X. In this case, the first person pronoun can be replaced by any name of the animated subject Y: Y ’X (Y’s books, Y’s hotel ...). Nevertheless, a speaker-centred orientation still remains a valid parameter: a relationship between subject Y and object X is based on speaker’s (pre-) supposed knowledge about Y and his/her status.

In general, such explicit or implicit indexical expressions can be portrayed as a constant function from linguistically and socially determined variables. It is a double sensitive function: besides being context-sensitive, it is also circumstances-sensitive. Maybe, this regularly manifested but not unified circumstances-sensitive and speaker-dependent semantic operational component of utterance can be at least partially identified with social meanings. (cf.: [5: 448]). These semantic changes should be included in NLP procedures.

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