



# THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL COMPONENT IN WORD SEMANTICS

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<b>Article history:</b>	<b>Abstract:</b>
<b>Received:</b> 11 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	It is quite imperative to note that meaning has a significant role to play in human communication. Consequent upon this fact, semantics as a field of study has become an issue of debate. Linguists are still in oblivion with regard to consensus on single and workable definition of semantics. This controversy has led to several unending attempts to define semantics. The emphasis of this study is centred on the semantic roles of words in a given context upholding extensionalist opinion as a background or theoretical framework.
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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of meaning for ages as it relates to the study of Semantics has been an issue of debate. Obviously, Philosophers as well as Contemporary Linguists are still finding it difficult to reach consensus over the nature of meaning as it affects the human language. Lord (1966) opined that meaning is full of ambiguity, controversy and contradiction. Consequently, the difficulty posed in adopting a single and acceptable definition has opened window to several and frequent attempts aimed at redefinition. For convenience, a description of what Semantics represents might not be out of place as it would serve as a spring board to this study. Etymologically, semantics is traceable to ancient Greek "semantikos", 'significant' which means the linguistic and philosophical study of meaning. It deals with the relationship between signifiers like words, phrases, signs, and symbols and what they stand for their denotation.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Every definition still remains an attempt and inadequate as there is always a vacuum to be filled. Nevertheless, Palmer (1981) defines meaning as a concept or ideas which can be transferred from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the bearer by embodying them as it were in the forms of language or another. Critics dismissed the above coupled with the claim that it is too vague or too general to support the weight needed by its role as the cornerstone in the traditional conceptual theory of meaning.

Katz (1972) asserts that several attempts to give direct response to meaning have met challenges. Besides, too many theories complicate the concept of meaning, for example referential theory, the stimulus response theory and the use theory. Each theory tends to identify or gives meaning of a sentence constituent with some extremely observable object, event and act.

In the recent past, Linguists preoccupied themselves with lexical meaning more than the sentence. Bienwisch (1969) observes that the study of 'meaning' deals with the way words and sentences are related to object and processes in the world and, on the other with the way in which they are related to one another in terms of such notions as synonyms, entailments and contradiction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semantic analysis of natural language presumed the meanings of lexical items are not indefinable whole, Car-nap (1956) postulates two ways through which word meaning analysis could be carried out.

1. meaning Postulates
2. Semantic components into which the lexical meaning are analysed.

A semantic role is the basic idea or information of an encoder in conformity with the action words perform in a given context. It is the actual activity participant carried out in some real/imagined situation, apart from these linguistic encoding of those situation. It is also referred to as the underlying relationship that a patient has with the main verb in a clause. Semantic roles according to Gawron(2013) are roles that participants play in events and situations. They are part of the content of linguistic communication, therefore they are defined in terms of prototypes and the labels we give them are convenient approximations of the semantic roles. In their views, Jurafsky and Martin (2015) describe it as representations, that express the abstract role that arguments of predicate can take in the event, these can be very specific.

The door is opened John is at home	} }	predicated
The door is opened The door swung open	} }	Change of states or location
John has a new book John bought a new book	} }	processed, acquired or exchanged

In describing semantic roles, inner roles play a significant role, in other to classify verbs a distinction between role that are closely related to the verb and those that are not should be clearly stated. For example, all verbs may admit best one noun phrase in any given inner role. Multiple noun phrases must be connected by conjunction. For any given verb if the role is binding, it could be regarded as inner role. Consider this;

*Karim and Lola went to the River. (Valid)*

*Karim, Lola went to the River. (Invalid)*

Semantic roles (SR) also thematic roles (TR) attempts to identify the similarities and dissimilarities in verb meaning that are reflected in argument expression with emergent generalizations that will contribute to the mapping from semantics to syntax.

Characteristics of SR

- Completeness; the argument of every verb is designated TR or the other.
- Uniqueness; designated only on TR.
- Distinctiveness; every verb is differentiated from the other argument by the role it is assigned.
- Independence; each role is given a consistent semantic definition that applies to all verbs and all situations.

The survey is basically undertaken on the work of George Yule (1986) *'The study of Language'* on Semantic roles. The emphasis has been the semantic roles of word in a context adopting the extensionalist approach as a theoretical framework to the study. The theory holds the view that language constitutes words put together in a context to enhance communication among those who possess and live in the same linguistic environment. Lexeme here is not considered as an entity nor treated in isolation (basic) as found in the lexicon but rather in a context. Words in isolation only have basic meaning except if given in context, in order word made to work. However, in the event of one word sentence, for example 'come' it is assumed there is a second person being addressed who invariably creates a situation that enables communication effective and comprehensible.

The concept of meaning itself is an issue over time, the study, however does not preoccupy itself with definition but precisely reveals the truism that what is claimed to be meaningful largely depends on what information conveyed and deduced by the decoder as meaningful through the manipulation of appropriate words as determined by the scenario. A Sentence (structure) might be meaningless if words are not systematically ordered. For instance, 'Grass eats goat' structurally and prescriptively is correct because the rule of grammar-subject and predicate is observed. Nevertheless, the sentence is meaningless since ideally, grass can never eat goat, rather *'Goat eats grasses'*.

As asserted by several experts including reputable philosophers, meaning of a word and/or utterance could be decoded by its usage. Lyon (1969) argues that to interpret any syntactic elements and its semantic relations require the knowledge of lexical items and how they inter relate. The idea suggests understanding the basic meaning of every word prior to its connotative application.

Furthermore, findings indicate that meaning deals with the manner words and sentences are related to object and processes involve in the world. The above further substantiate the view where semantic relations and syntactic elements require the knowledge of lexical items and how they inter relate.

Also, the study shows meanings of lexical items are not indefinable whole. On the general note, until words are assigned roles in an utterance both written and spoken, they remain indefinable. The rationale is based on the fact that linguistic items are multifunctional and physical entity can assume two distinct semantic functions.

### CONCLUSION

This study has shown the significance of assigning roles to lexeme as formative factor to effective communication. Effective communication should take into cognizance denotative and connotative knowledge of words which must be in tandem with context of discourse. Every lexical word has meaning, but its social application designated by its role could enhance good communication or otherwise. Communication is meaning oriented whether in written or verbal form. In order to avoid ambiguity, misinterpretation or being misconstrued the semantic roles of words in contexts must be explicitly explicated. It is therefore necessary to conclude that roles are assigned to words in our daily interactions (official and unofficial), consequent upon the fact that linguistic items are multifunctional and often polysemous. In other words, words could consist of more than one meaning.

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