

دور الدلالات في تدريس وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية

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الملخص :

على الرغم من أنه من الواضح أن اللسانيات ، كعلم للغة ، لها دور أساسي في تدريس اللغة وتعلمها ، إلا أن العديد من المعلمين والمنظرين لم يولوا اهتمامًا حقيقيًا بأدوار مجالاتها الرئيسية ، مثل : مجال علم الدلالات ، سواء كان ذلك في ESL أو EFL كان تدريس وتعلم اللغات الثانية أو الأجنبية دائمًا أقوى عندما يتم تضمين ميزات الحقول الرئيسية في اللغويات. يمكن للمعلمين بناء أساس قوي للمتعلمين ، ومع أساسيات اللغة التي يتعلمونها. يتعلمون معرفة أدوار خصائص المجالات الرئيسية في اللغويات فهي مهمة للغاية لمدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية. حيث يساعدونهم على تقديم مهارات لغوية محددة عن طريق استخدام طرق تدريس مختلفة وفقًا لمواقفهم التعليمية.

وفي هذه الورقة ، نركز على استخدام ميزات دلالات معينة لتحسين الكفاءة اللغوية وأداء المتعلمين عند تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، والهدف من ذلك هو لفت انتباه معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية إلى أخذهم في الاعتبار أهمية الدلالات في ELT ، والإشارة دائمًا إلى حقيقة أن هناك حالات تتأثر فيها نظرية تدريس اللغة بشدة بالتطورات الجديدة في مجالات اللغويات.

فاللغويات ومجالاتها توسعت مكوناتها حول تدريس اللغة والتعلم من خلال المظهر الأخير لمستويات جديدة من الصوتيات ، علم الأصوات ، وبناء الجملة ، وعلم التشكل ، والدلالات. هذه التخصصات وأساليبها في تدريس وتعلم اللغة، ومع ذلك ، فإن دلالاتها ، كنظام لغوي ، لها أهمية فريدة في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

وتركز هذه المقالة بشكل أساسي على وظائف بعض السمات الدلالية الملائمة المقال للمقام عند تدريس وتعلم اللغة الأجنبية .

Role of Semantics in English Language Teaching and Learning

Abstract

Although, it is obvious that linguistics, as a science of language, has an essential role in language teaching and learning, many teachers and theoreticians have not paid a real attention to the roles of its main fields such as the field of semantics, whether that is in ESL or EFL. Teaching and learning second or foreign languages have always been stronger when the features of main fields of linguistics are included. Teachers can build a strong foundation to their learners and with the basics of the language they learn. Knowing the roles of the properties of main fields of linguistics is very important to English language teachers. They help them to introduce specific language skills by using different teaching approaches according to their teaching situations. In this paper, we concentrate on using certain semantic features to improve language competence and performance of learners when teaching English as a foreign language. The goal is raising the attention of English language teachers and theoreticians to take into their considerations the importance of semantics in ELT and always refer to the fact that there are instances where a language teaching theory is strongly influenced by new developments of the fields of linguistics. Linguistics and its fields have been broadening their components about language teaching and learning by the recent manifestation of new levels of phonetics, phonology, syntax, morphology and semantics. These disciplines and their approaches to language and language teaching and learning



are of great significance. However, semantics, as a linguistic discipline, has its unique importance in teaching English as foreign language. Its features play a strong role in introducing and improving different language skills. Thus, this article focuses mainly on the functions of certain semantic features that are related to language teaching and learning, in special, a foreign language teaching and learning situations

Introduction

Semantics (the study of meaning), as a descriptive discipline within linguistics, has its significant role in foreign language teaching and learning. It has more information related to its role in real social contexts. Accounting to this significance, it is of no sense for a language teaching theory not to take into its consideration what linguistics argure about nature of language and its use. In fact, there are instances where language teaching theories are strongly influenced by new developments in the fields of linguistics studies. As evidences, several, classical teaching methods for foreign language teaching like Grammar Translation Method (GTM), direct methods and Audio Lingual Method are nowadays discouraged for comprehensively acceptance as main teaching methods in teaching a foreign language. The argument about their incompatibility and inappropriateness in developing communicative competences and performances has increased.

Based on communication as the main purpose for language teaching and learning, different communicative approaches have come to the fore for their significant merits of appropriateness to such purposes. Since meanings are all what matter in real language use, the teaching of rhetoric as rules

(Widdowson 1977) for any speech acts contexts should occupy the gist of teaching activities. Therefore, focusing on some semantic communicative features like **denotation, connotation, collocation, hyponymy, synonymy and antonym as components** in teaching language for communication syllabus is a wise decision when preparing teaching materials.

Based on observational evidence, teachers of English as a foreign language at the Language Center, and teachers of early semesters of the department of English, faculty of Arts, University of Sebha (targets of this paper) do not refer to such semantic features or use them when teaching. The writers, as applied linguists, argue that there is no reason for the target teachers not to incorporate the mentioned semantic features in their language classroom activities. Consequently, the writers consider this article as a new call for giving more focus on features or functions of semantics (or any field of linguistics) related to teaching of rhetoric as rule of language use with some limitations of course.

Research question and Research assumption

As a linguistic concern with language teaching and learning, there is a problem of raising teaching and learning awareness of using linguistic features in teaching by EFL teachers, and in learning with raising learners' awareness of improving their linguistic competence to improve their communicative performance. To solve this problem, we ask the question whether teachers in the Language Center, University of Sebha consider the linguistic discipline of semantics and its features related to communicative competence in their teaching practice. Thus, the main research question of this paper is "**Do**



teachers of English as a foreign language in our Language Center apply semantic features in their foreign language classroom teaching and learning?" In order to answer this question appropriately we also consider answering the question **"Do learners of English as a foreign language use any semantic features when learning?"** However, the assumption is that we assume that teachers do not apply semantic feature to improve their language teaching process and develop their students' language competence and performance. We also assume that learners do not apply, semantic features to enrich their communicative competence.

Literature Review

Definition of Semantics

Semantics is best defined as the study of meaning. Meaning as viewed by linguists is the core of language. As Lyon (1977::3) defines it, "semantics is the study of meaning." We, as applied linguists, frequently center our academic talks about language as a meaningful human phenomenon. As teachers who want to develop their knowledge and widen their experiences, we usually ask the common questions: 'What is meaning? What is the meaning of meaning? What do words mean? Or what relations do words exist between words and objects to which they refer?' All these questions are well rooted in the history of language research. They have been confusing to philosophers and psycholinguists for ages, yet they remain controversial issues. The diversity of meaning is certainly due to nature of this concept and its reality of existence as being preexisted in mind.

Theoreticians have explained the relations between words and objects that words denote by principle of stimulus. This relation is illustrated by what is known as the triangle of meaning. See the following illustration (fig 1)

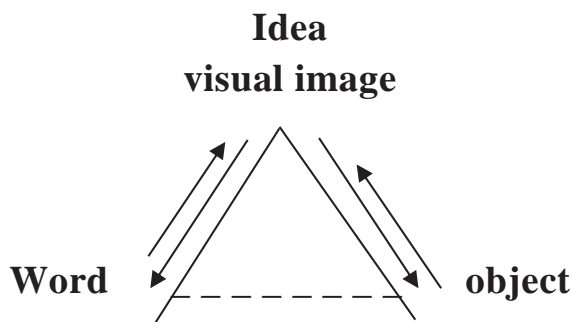


Figure 1 Semantic triangle adapted from Frank Palmer 2005 (26)

The figure suggests mental processes in which the idea (visual image) stimulates the word, and the word also stimulates the idea (visual image). But there is no direct stimulation between the word and the object. The indirect relation is represented by the dotted line.

Therefore, the idea (visual image) is the means by which the words and the objects are connected. Consequently, the connection between words and objects is not direct but through an idea. Therefore, the idea that is positively connected the word and object. The paper is not actually concerned with the philosophical and psychological speculations of meaning presuppositions of its preexisting in mind, nor it concerns with how ideas are expressed in words once they exist in mind. It tries to cover in its disruptive study the practical side of the semantic universal features of meaning that are common to all languages uses.



Features of Words (Semantics and Syntax)

In analogy to some examples discussed by linguists like Wardhaugh (1977), one can categorize the words: ‘**drove, the, road, along, car, and boy**’ into two categories ‘Semantics and Grammatical Characteristics of Words’ Using the following example:

The boy drove a car along the road.

Looking at **words: ‘drove, the, road, a, along, car, boy’** are words that belong to two main different categories that can be distinguished into two sets of words. The first group consists of (**the, a, along**). From grammatical viewpoint: ‘the’ and ‘a’ are articles where ‘along’ is a preposition. These words have no physical realizations (existence), and they are called words of structure. That they do not separately provide meaning but only when they are put in a structural order that gives meaning. Whereas the second group (car, road, drove, boy) can have or be distinguished with meaning without necessarily being inserted in a structural order. The words: ‘car’ and ‘road boy’ are nouns and they can occupy nominal positions in a grammatical sentence as subjects in initial positions or objects. The word drove is a verb that indicates an event. Therefore, the nouns and verbs are (grammatically) called words of content.

Another distinction is that words of content refer to actions and things that have real existence. In other words, things that we can see or do in our daily life. But words of structure do not have these qualities as to have some physical realizations. A further distinction between these two groups is that words of content can be inflected as to accept suffixes or prefixes for

example the word car becomes cars (from singular to plural form), and road can also be roads as (singular to plural forms). Where words of structure cannot be inflected but always remain as they are (a, the, along). Another grammatical fact about these groups of words is that words of content make what is called an open set, which leads to the creation of new words and new meanings by inflection. However, words of structure do not enjoy this feature. However, the combination of the two sets makes a grammatical sentence. For example:

The boy drove a car along the road.

The meaning of the sentence is in fact the product of the meaning of its lexemes and the grammatical constructions or syntactic restrictions (rules) that relate each lexeme to the other. For more grammatical explanations to this point with reference to Finkbeiner and Nicol (2003), one can introduce the following examples.

Examples:

1. The girl wrote a letter.
2. A letter wrote the girl.
3. The girl wrote a story.

Sentences 1 and 2 are different sentences in meaning, though, they contain the same lexemes and each lexeme in both sentences has its original meaning. Therefore the difference is a grammatical one. But for sentence 1 and 3 are also different sentences in meanings because there is a different lexeme being introduced here. What happens in this case is that the letter and the story are not the same lexemes and thus the difference in meaning is a lexical (semantic) one. Where



sentence 2 is a meaningless sentence. It does not make sense because it violate the logical conventional orders of English syntax by placing a letter in the subject position. And thus lexical order is responsible for creating acceptable meaning.

As Finkbeiner and Nicol (2003) argue, focusing on grammar in ELT teaching syllabuses slows the process of developing communicative competence among learners. They criticize the current teaching methodologies adopted by teachers restricting their teaching activities to grammar. There are many evidences, as they believe, where many people can convey their messages with less than perfect grammar competence.

The preceding examples and explanations are very valuable to prove the necessity for considering semantic features in foreign language teaching activities. Teaching and learning a language is mainly for communication. And communication is for conveying meanings where meaning in turn is the core of semantics as a linguistic discipline. Therefore, teachers should be aware of such necessity for achieving objectiveness in ELT.

Descriptive and Non-Descriptive Meaning

A teacher should explain to his/her learners how they distinguish whether a sentence is a descriptive or non-descriptive sentence. This is very important skill as all sentences we produce are descriptive or non-descriptive. When a person speaks, he is to investigate its meaning or its truth-value as to say certainly true or certainly false; but not the two possibilities together. If a sentence carries truth, it is a descriptive sentence. If it carries false information, it is a descriptive sentence. Otherwise, it is a non-descriptive sentence. All non-descriptive sentences or statements are

called expressive sentences; they express attitudes that has no direct link with the intended thought.

According to Rambaud. M. G (2012), descriptive meaning refers to the domain of variations in meanings. It is the conceptual propositional meaning that has the quality of distinguishing between meanings. (I29). Where the non-descriptive meanings are classified as not conceptual structures of speech that are related to subjective and emotions expressive. Rambaud has provided examples a Like; ‘Gosh’! and ‘I am surprised’ explaining that these types of expressions do not carry conceptual proposals to hearers.

Examples:

1. Tom likes mathematics. descriptive/fact
2. He did not meet his friend. descriptive/ fact
3. Can she do the job? Non-descriptive/ not fact
4. Gosh! Non-descriptive/ no conceptual reference

The descriptive meaning restricts the condition of semantics to deal with only descriptive meaning. In other words, it deals with the way people use language in real world and mot how they should use it. This argument suggests that the priority in teaching a language should be given to communication. As a generative semantics concerns the way people keep generating meaningful sentences (spoken or written) in social contexts. Many scholars believe that understanding of a message is reached when the speaker and hearer share the meaning of words or phrase. This can be seen in the following paraphrased points from Christopher Gauker (2003: 4-77)



1. Based on linguistic view point, communication is the main goal of language for enabling language user to convey his ideas to hearers. The speaker usually has a specific meanings in his mind and he wants the hearer to know that he has them.
2. The speaker's ideas become the propositions of sentences he produces relevant to the context written or spoken.
3. A referent/object of word, a phrase, or a sentence is that referent the speaker has in mind. This means the referent of the description is the same referent the speaker wants the hearer to receive.
4. Understanding the message, the speaker wants to convey, by the hearer depends on the shared understanding of the meanings of these words, phrases, and sentences.

This section suggests that the more semantic features the learner is exposed to, the more communicative competent he is. This means that applying semantic features in real context of communication requires learners do many exercises in class activities.

Generative Semantics as a focus of the paper

Generative Semantics is an approach that linguists apply to make semantics interpretive. Such an attempt makes semantic components generative components and syntactic components interpretive components. The paper tries to approach semantics in a practical way as semantics in use instead of studying it as a subject at the theoretical level. Semantics and syntax should follow parallel lines in a meaningful speech acts. In teaching, this can be done by constructing contextual

meaningful sentences either written or spoken. Meaningfulness means the language user should be competent in using all those powerful semantic features such as:

1-synonyms, 2- Antonyms, 3-hyponyms, 4- homonyms
5-denotations, 6-connotations, 7- collocation etc. (see Alan Cruse, 2006 *A Glossary of Semantics and Pragmatics*).

Practically speaking, Daily speech contexts of social interactions are rich in using these features. Based on the observations conducted by the writers, this paper argues that language teachers at the Language Center are focusing on such semantic features and even if they come across their use, it is intentionally done. It also argues that teachers have no excuse not to introduce them to their learners during their teaching activities. This approach prepares learners to be ready in terms of lexis and features to react in any speech context.

Back to meaningful sentences, in this case, principally there are two structures of sentences. The deep structure of the sentence is a semantic structure and the surface structure of the sentence is a syntactic one. The syntactic structure has restrictions (rules) that lead to the physical arrangements of the sentence elements (word order) which is completely dependent on the semantic structure.

However, the semantic level and the syntactic level are required in any types of linguistic analysis. Syntax then represents the expressive interpretation of semantics (the idea/meaning). At the core level, all languages are meanings, but at the syntactic level (surface structures), they are different because each language has its own syntactic structure.



Semantically, one meaning can be expressed syntactically in more than one structure/sentence. For example:

1. Mary wrote the story.
2. The story was written by Mary.

The differences between these two sentences according to traditional grammar is that sentence 1 is an active sentence and sentence 2 is a passive one. In this case the difference is related to the surface structure. Syntactically, they are different sentences. But these two sentences are closely or even identical at other level of understanding of meaning. These two sentences share the same semantic components, which we refer to as deep structure.

The deep structure is an underlying abstract arrangement that allows surface structure to be interpretive component within the syntactic restriction (rules). Consequently, syntax has to be able of showing how a single representation of that underlying abstract level can be represented in different surface structures. Examples;

1. His brilliant way of thinking held my attention.
2. My attention was held by his brilliant way of thinking.

To make semantics generative is to make it interpretive where it allows similarities in meaning by showing various styles or stylistic forms for a single meaning as in the above sentences.

The Practical Side of the Paper Nature of the Observations
The observations intended to check if teachers at the Language Center refer to the use of rhetorical elements in their teaching activities. In this paper, we refer to rhetorical elements as features of semantics. For the sake of maintaining value for

this article, we limited the list of semantic features to the followings:

1-synonyms, 2- Antonyms, 3-hyponyms, 4- homonyms, 5- denotations, 6- connotation, 7- Collocation

1-synonyms

Synonymy semantically refer to words (lexical) which have the same meanings. Synonymy does not mean that words should be identical in meaning, Synonyms do not mean absolutely identical but they are very close in meaning to a point that one word can be used instead the other in a sentence without a change in contextual meaning as examples: smart - clever, important - essential, core - gist

2- Antonyms

Antonym in semantics is a word that has an opposite meaning to another word such as big - small, far- near, expensive - cheap e.t.

3-Hyponyms

Hyponymy in semantics is a word that denotes an entity as a part from a whole class of relationship such as: apples - fruits, dog - animals, son - family e.t.

4- Homonyms

Homonymy semantically refer to words that have the same form and pronunciation but they are different in meanings. For example:

He uses his left hand. He left two hours ago. Dogs eat leftovers.

They should park near the park.

5-Denotations

Semantically, denotation is the relationship between a word and the object it signifies as a meaning.



6- Connotations

Connotation of a word is the idea or additional meaning beyond the literal meaning of a word.

Connotation in semantics as is the referent or idea behind the meaning of a word.

7- Collocation

Collocation (n.) A term used in lexicology by some linguists to refer to the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items. It refers to instances where one words is followed by another as in pay attention. Check it out, and sometimes e.tc.

These semantic features are encountered in every day speech acts. Therefore, language teaching/learning tasks should intentionally prepared for practice.

Methodology

Data Collection

There is one stages of data collection used in this paper. It is classroom observation. Observation involves using various procedures such as note taking, audio recording and a questionnaire. The selection depends on the type of the research and its focus. Note taking is our choices of observing teachers. However, the following sections will explain the data collection procedure in relation to the teachers' classroom observation.

Observation

Different teaching situations are observed to investigate the assumption of this paper that whether teachers apply semantic features to achieve their goals of TEFL and motivate their students' learning ability of the target language. We directly observe teachers in our teaching situations. We select some items

to concentrate on while observing teachers. Observation, especially, classroom observation, is an important source of information. Hammersley and Atkison (1995: 20) state that "the data collected through observation provides personal insights into events". Observation can also help in recording classroom events which can be easily studied later for research purposes. Simpson and Tuson (1995: 03) regard observation as "one of the most useful ways of gathering information".

As explained, we state the objectives and motives of the research, and specify the subjects to observe. Then, we contact the different teaching situations for obtaining the required permissions for carrying out the observation of the study. The subjects are told about the aims and objectives of the study, but they are told nothing about focuses we concentrate to observe.

Data Analysis

We analyze the data based on the purpose of this research paper. Seliger and Shohamy (1989: 201), state that:

data analysis refers to sifting, organizing, summarizing, and synthesizing the data so as to arrive at the results and conclusions of the research.

In order to make sense of the findings obtained from the data, we re-examine the data many times and make notes of relevant points.

Observation

The purpose of doing observation is divided into two parts. The first part concentrates on general issues about teaching; and the



second part is concerned with the role of semantics in ELT. The second part is the main part. It mainly concentrates to know how the process of teaching EL is going on in a natural setting inside the classroom and the potential application of semantic features to improve the process of teaching and learning. Thus, we concentrate on semantic features in relation to the methods and approaches used in the EL classrooms. Generally, we know that teachers, in our teaching situations, use the Grammar Translation Method in their EL classrooms to present their lesson. That is an evidence that the teachers do not use an appropriate method to enhance students with the use of EFL. It is claimed that the Libyan syllabuses' follow the Communicative Approach. Teachers are supposed to apply the teachers' role of this approach, but it is clear that the teachers are not yet trained to use this approach.

The most important thing in TE is to know the problems and the difficulties that teachers face when teaching.

For this reason, we concentrate to observe whether an interactive teaching approach is used. It is observed that the EFL teachers face many problems and difficulties while presenting their lessons. This happens because of different reasons. Some of these reasons are the poor proficiency level of learners, the lack of motivation to learn EL, insufficient teaching aids, inappropriate teaching resource material, lack of training to teach EL, lack of the variety of activities in each lesson. It is clear that learners find difficulties in improving the four language skills.

To know which activities and techniques that teachers use with the available materials in their classroom, we observe

the activities and techniques used in the classroom. It is clear that the use of different activities do not enjoy a significant place in the language center of Sebha. It is clear that teachers are not aware of the benefits of using different activities in the classroom, or because they do not know these activities.

If the process of teaching and learning is going on in a perfect way, that means the verbal interaction play the basic role in the classroom and also means that the students use the target language. The next point concentrates on **Learner's participation in the classroom (verbal interaction)**. It is clear that the amount of learners participation is quite less than what we expect. Most of the learners do not take active part in classroom. It is noticeable that in interaction participating activities most students feel bored and uninterested in the classroom. We observe that the teachers follow classical ways in using texts with similar teaching procedures all the time. There is no interaction between teachers and the students and between students to students. In other words, most of the teachers activities are heavily linguistic based. Some students seem to be bored with the similarity of these linguistic activities in the classroom. For example, in reading class we observe, a teacher asks students individually some reading comprehension questions. Then she asks students' opinions individually. It seems that the main classroom dynamic is teacher – students, and there is no pair work or group work. While the teacher asks one student, the rest of the students sit quietly and waiting for their turn.



As a result, students are more engaged, they remember more, and achievement increases. Students learn better when they enjoy what they are doing. Bailey, (1999: 37) states

Giving students the opportunity to display their talents, learn new skills without fear of embarrassment or failure, and laugh in the process makes the learning experience rewarding for both teacher and student.

The reason for collecting information through observation, is that we need to support some comments of teachers about the students and their levels moving on to their strategies.

Part two of the observation is concerned with using semantic features as a means of teaching by ELT teachers and a strategy of learning by learners. In the first part of observing teachers in their teaching situations

Observation Main criterion

As teaching for communication concerns, students' talking time (STT) contrasted to teacher talking time (TTT) should be maximized as much as possible ($TTT \leq STT$) by engaging them in real rhetorical behaviors. Teachers in this case are directors; they trigger the tasks and let students do the rest. The main purpose of the observation was to have a close contact with teacher in classrooms practices as in the following points.

- 1- Teachers real teaching procedures
- 2- Students activities in class
- 3- Students' teacher inter actions
- 4- Students – student interactions
- 5- Skills and tasks

Observation Findings

Through several visits to each teacher, there were no significant changes in teaching procedures of each teacher. There were also no significant differences between teachers' procedures of teaching. All teachers were following the textbook page by page title by title. Directions of instructions were mostly teacher students. There was no role-play taking place during class activities. There were no obvious lesson plans followed by teachers. When teachers were asked: if they followed lessons plans, they answered 'yes', but they left them at home. Therefore, the judgment information about lesson plan were missing. Students were not active participants in class. Each student remained so quiet in his/her seat following the teachers' as she read the drills or dialogues. When teachers asked questions, students were not ready to raise hands for answering but wait for the teacher to call a certain student to answer. There were no group interactions. Students were not able to bring into practice their won expressions using real experience situations talks. All language practices (skills and tasks) were limited to the textbook exercises. Student were not encouraged to come up with their won initiations of speech acts.

Conclusions

However, the textbooks are based on new trends of teaching language for communication, teachers were not actually aware of how to implement such approach in real teaching practice. Teacher were trying to be modern in the teaching activities, they are following, to a certain extent, a classical way of teaching. Most teachers are still influenced by the grammar translation methods principles. The writers suggest that teachers of ESL specially the new ones, should attend some training programs in the field of ELT methodology. Teachers should be aware of their roles as modal and they need to upgrade their learners to be independent learners



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