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THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN THE FORMATION AND INTERPRETATION OF LINGUISTIC MEANING

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Abstract: Context plays an essential role in determining the meaning and communicative functions of linguistic expressions. The interpretation of words, phrases, and sentences depends not only on their lexical and grammatical characteristics but also on situational, cultural, and social factors. This article examines the relationship between linguistic meaning and context, focusing on lexical ambiguity, pragmatic interpretation, discourse organization, and communicative intention. The study employs descriptive and theoretical-analytical methods. The findings of the theoretical analysis indicate that contextual information contributes significantly to accurate interpretation and effective communication.

Keywords: linguistic context, semantic interpretation, pragmatics, discourse, lexical ambiguity, communicative intention, contextual meaning.

1. Introduction

Language is a complex system in which meaning emerges through the interaction of linguistic structures and communicative circumstances. Although words possess conventional meanings, their interpretation frequently depends on the context in which they are used. The same expression may communicate different information depending on the speaker's intention, the listener's knowledge, and the surrounding discourse.

Context is particularly important in modern linguistic research because communication involves more than the transmission of literal information. Speakers frequently employ indirect expressions, metaphors, culturally specific references, and ambiguous constructions. Understanding these phenomena requires an integrated semantic and pragmatic approach.

The purpose of this article is to examine the principal functions of context in linguistic interpretation and explain its significance for effective communication.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between meaning and context has been investigated by numerous linguists. Firth (1957) emphasized the importance of examining linguistic expressions within their contexts of situation. Halliday and Hasan (1976) investigated textual cohesion and demonstrated how linguistic elements establish relationships within discourse.

Levinson (1983) examined the role of context in pragmatic interpretation, while Sperber and Wilson (1995) developed relevance theory to explain how communicators infer intended meanings. Yule (1996) also highlighted the importance of contextual knowledge in understanding linguistic communication.

These theoretical approaches demonstrate that linguistic meaning cannot always be interpreted independently of the circumstances surrounding an utterance.

3. Research Methodology

The study employs descriptive, semantic, and pragmatic methods. Descriptive analysis identifies the main types of context, while semantic analysis examines how contextual information influences lexical interpretation. Pragmatic analysis focuses on speaker intentions and indirect communicative meanings.

Selected examples from English and Uzbek are used to illustrate contextual interpretation. The study is theoretical and does not present original experimental or quantitative findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Linguistic context and lexical meaning

Linguistic context refers to the surrounding words, phrases, and sentences that influence the interpretation of an expression. It is particularly important in understanding polysemous words.

For example, the English word bank may refer to a financial institution or the side of a river. The intended meaning becomes clear through expressions such as open a bank account and sit on the river bank.

Similarly, the Uzbek word bosh may refer to a body part, a leader, or the beginning of something. Its interpretation depends on the surrounding linguistic environment.

4.2. Situational context

Situational context includes the physical environment, participants, and circumstances of communication. The same sentence may perform different functions in different situations.

For example, It is cold here may simply describe temperature. However, when spoken near an open window, it may function as an indirect request to close the window.

The Uzbek expression Bu yer sovuq ekan can perform a comparable communicative function.

These examples demonstrate that contextual interpretation extends beyond literal sentence meaning.

4.3. Cultural context

Cultural context influences the interpretation of expressions associated with traditions, social relationships, and communicative conventions.

In Uzbek, the use of siz may communicate respect or social distance, while sen often indicates familiarity. English generally uses you in both situations, expressing politeness through other linguistic strategies.

Such differences demonstrate the importance of cultural knowledge in intercultural communication and translation.

4.4. Context in discourse organization

Context contributes to textual coherence by connecting linguistic expressions with previously introduced information.

For example, in the sentences The student entered the classroom. She opened her notebook, the pronoun she is interpreted through its relationship with the preceding noun phrase.

In extended discourse, contextual relationships help readers identify participants, follow arguments, and understand logical connections between statements.

Consequently, contextual interpretation is essential for academic writing, everyday conversation, and professional communication.

5. Conclusion

Context is a fundamental component of linguistic interpretation. The theoretical analysis demonstrates that lexical meaning, grammatical structure, and communicative intention interact with linguistic, situational, and cultural circumstances.

Contextual information helps resolve ambiguity, identify indirect meanings, and establish coherence within discourse. The comparison of English and Uzbek examples illustrates how linguistic and cultural differences influence communication.

Further corpus-based and experimental research could provide additional evidence concerning the mechanisms of contextual interpretation in different languages.

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