

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT OF SITUATION IN DECIDING THE MEANING OF AN UTTERANCE

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ABSTRACT

Using language, especially verbal language, is considered to be an activity that cannot be separated from day-by-day human life. The fact that the verbal language is the main means of communication makes it usually considered as something simple. Everybody can use the language. However, using the language to transfer the intended meaning of the speaker is not as easy as it seems. Using the language is not just producing utterance and understanding the meaning of each word; producing utterance is not just a matter of selecting lexicon and then putting them in accordance with the grammar of that particular language. Perfect grammatical language is not a guarantee that the hearer can really understand what is meant by the speaker. There are other things that must be known by the hearer to understand the meaning of the speaker's utterance and those things are grouped in what so-called context of situation. According to Holmes (2001) context of situation, namely participants, setting, topic, goal, is important to decide the meaning of an utterance. This is in accordance with the idea of Yule (1996) concerning how important the context of a situation is in determining the speaker's meaning. The purpose of this article is to show how changing the context of situation will change the meaning of an utterance. The data was taken from the students of the English department. They were given utterances and they had to decide the meaning from more than one context. The analysis in determining the meaning of each utterance was done descriptively by stating the utterance and then stating the context of situation so that how the meaning is obtained is clear. By doing this, it can be proven that the changing of the context of situation can change the meaning of an utterance.

Keywords: *context of situation; meaning; standardized language; utterance*

INTRODUCTION

The speaker's intended meaning is usually discussed under the topic that is called speech act and it belongs to the study of pragmatics. It studies how meaning depends on the context of situation. In relation to this statement, Mey (1993) states that pragmatics is the study of human language of which meaning is determined by the context of the society. The same idea about pragmatics is also stated by Lisnani; Arifin; Setya (2017). One of the pragmatic theories that concerns about how the speaker's utterance can also perform an action. This theory is called the theory of speech act (Austin, 1962) saying that the act of speaking has three components, namely locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Locutionary act is the act of saying something of which concern is uttering a sentence, presented through grammatical sentences. Illocutionary act is the meaning behind what is said or usually called the intended meaning. Rosyidi; Mahyuni; Muhaimi (2019) also state that illocutionary can function to serve information, to ask others to do something and to present intentions of an utterance. The perlocutionary act is the effect of someone saying something on the hearer's side. From Pragmatic point of view it is said that the hearer has the obligation of trying to understand what it is that is really meant by someone when uttering an utterance. The hearer should not only listen to the form but she also has the obligation to understand the intended meaning. It is the intended meaning of the speaker that decides the meaning of an utterance (Leth, 2019). Thus what the utterance means depends on what the speaker intends to say (Speaks 2016, 2017). The important question then comes. How can the hearer read the mind of the speaker? The hearer should not be a mind reader to understand what is meant by the speaker. Instead, the hearer has to make use of the context of situation to do it. Thus, the key element of deciding the meaning is the context of situation. The following are the ideas of context of situation presented by Halliday and Hassan (1989) and Holmes (2001). Halliday and Hassan (1989) state that context of situation consists of field (what is being talked about), tenor (the participants of the speech events), and mode (ways of doing the communication) while Holmes (2001) says that context of situation consists of participants (the ones

participating in a speech event), setting (the place/environment where the communication takes place), topic (what is being talked about), and goal (the purpose of the communication). The context of situation by Halliday and Hassan is used to select the language that will be used in one occasion while Holmes's context of situation is used to help the hearer to understand the intended meaning of the speaker. Since it is said that context of situation can change the meaning of an utterance, the changes of the context of situation can also change the meaning of an utterance. An example of the fact that the context of situation can change the meaning of an utterance can be seen when someone says "Thank you". This is a very simple phrase that is frequently used in daily life. The first meaning that can be given to this phrase is expressing gratitude and it is said by someone who receives something. However, the following different situations can make a great change in the meaning. It can mean to ask someone to leave. For instance, a secretary is talking to a guest who wants to meet her boss. Her boss was still doing another thing, so she accompanies the guest. When the boss comes he says "Thank you" to the secretary which means "you can leave now"

Having understood that context of situation is very important in deciding the meaning of the utterances, this article is written to prove that changing context of situation will change the meaning of the utterance. The context of situation presented by Holmes (2001) will be applied to support the analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The data of this article was taken from 28 students of the second semester students of the English Department. These students are not yet familiar with Pragmatics, thus their answers are based on intuition. Their age is 19 years old. The reason for choosing the respondents who have not yet learned pragmatics is to find out how sensitive they are in understanding the intended meaning of a speaker. Their responses will also show what kind of language they are familiar with, either direct or indirect language. They were given questions, asking what becomes their first consideration when they want to start communication, and they were given four utterances. They had to create their own context for those four utterances to make each of the utterances have more than one meaning. Those utterances are (1) Why don't you go to a doctor; (2) You'd better do the job well; (3) Isn't it better to think about it first?; and (4) Why is the door still opened? The theory used is the theory of pragmatics presented by Leech (1983). It says that pragmatics is the study of the speaker's meaning. This theory is supported by Holmes (2001) through her context of situation. The findings are presented descriptively, first by presenting the percentage of the respondents to show the numbers of the respondents who think that an utterance can have one or more than one meaning; second by presenting the utterance followed by one description of the context of situation to show that each of the utterances has more than one meaning. The result of what to be the first priority to determine when initiating communication with an unknown person is also presented.

ANALYSIS

This part of this article presents the finding started by saying that all the respondents say that the first thing that they have to think of before starting to communicate is who the other interlocutors are. But up to this point they only think about what kind of language that they must use, Indonesian or local language, formal or informal one. However when they come to the point where they have to decide the meanings of an utterance, they could understand that the form and the meaning of an utterance can be similar or they can be different. The followings are the overall findings initiated by the presentation of how many students really realize that each of the utterances has more than one meaning.

For the utterance "Why don't you go to a doctor" 3 respondents (10,71%) said that it is just a question while 25 respondents (89,29%) said that besides a question, the utterance is also a suggestion as well as regretting. For the utterance "You'd better do the job well" 13 respondents (46,42%) said that the utterance is only a suggestion which is confirmed by the use of "you'd better" while 15 respondents (53,58%) said that besides having the meaning of suggesting, the utterance, with different context can also serve the meaning of showing anger and threatening. For the utterance "Isn't it better to think about it first?" 15 respondents (53,58%) said that the utterance is a suggestion marked by "isn't it better" while 13 respondents (46,42%) said that besides having the meaning of suggestion, the utterance also means

disagreeing. For the utterance “Why is the door still opened?” 4 respondents (14,28%) said that it is merely a question but 24 respondents (85,72%) said that besides being a question, the utterance served as a strong instruction. These numbers show that all respondents actually know that the form of a sentence quite often is not similar with the intended meaning of the speaker. The meaning is changeable depending on the context. To prove that context of situation can determine the meaning of an utterance, two different contexts are provided for each of the utterances.

1. **Why don't you go to a doctor?**

Context of situation a.

Someone says that she is sick. Her friend who knows that she has not seen a doctor asks her the question. In this situation she uses the question form for suggesting. In this situation the form is not similar to the meaning. The form is a question but it is not intended to ask a question. The meaning is suggestion.

Context of situation b.

Seeing that her friend has been sick for a long time and never gets better even though she has been visiting a traditional healer, she asks her the question. This question form is used to ask questions. The form and meaning are similar that is asking a question. Maybe there is also the feeling of regret knowing that the traditional healer cannot heal her friend. Thus, this utterance in this situation can be asking a question and regretting.

2. **You'd better do the job well.**

Context of situation a.

A director of a company feels very upset when his secretary keeps on making mistakes in typing a letter. He was angry because of the mistakes he had to postpone the meeting. He expresses his anger by saying that statement. Besides expressing anger this situation can also create the meaning of threat because usually that statement is completed by “or I will”. Actually this statement has the meaning of threatening because a threat is initiated by anger.

Context of situation b.

A mother sees that her daughter is cooking in the kitchen in a very careless way. The way of cooking will make the kitchen dirty. She does not want it to happen because since there is no housemaid, she is the one who will do the cleaning up as usual after cooking. Before the kitchen gets dirtier, she advises her daughter by using the statement above. The relationship between a mother and a daughter makes the statement an advice instead of a threat.

3. **Isn't it better to think about it first?**

Context of situation a.

A wife suggests to her husband that they should buy a new car. Her husband, who is having a financial problem in his company, does not agree with it. So the question form he utters has the meaning of disagreeing with his wife.

Context of situation b.

A father is told by his daughter that she wanted to quit her permanent job to get another job that she thought is more promising. Her father who is very democratic leaves it to her to decide but as a father he feels obliged to give a suggestion. Thus, he utters the question above to present the suggestion.

4. **Why is the door still opened?**

Context of situation a.

A sister asks her brother to close the door when she is entering the house. She cannot do it because her hands are full carrying the things that she has to put in the kitchen. When she turns around, she sees that her brother is still sitting, playing his phone. Then she said that question and immediately responded by saying: “Okay, Sist. I will close it now”. The response actually shows that the question she utters functions as instruction and her brother does the instruction.

Context of situation b.

A son who is asked to close the door says that he has done it. However when the father is passing by the living room, he finds out that the door is still opened. Then, he uttered the question to his son. The son apologizes by saying: "I am sorry Daddy. The one I closed was the door to the backyard, not the one in the living room." The response shows that the question form is really used to ask a question.

The two different contexts (a and b) that have been given to each of the utterances have shown that an utterance can have more than one meaning, that the form is not always similar to function or meaning.

CONCLUSION

The discussion and the analysis above show that sentences without context are meaningless. The context of situation will decide the meaning of utterances spoken by a speaker. The fact that the hearer has to figure out the intended meaning of the speaker makes communication a very active activity. Failure in making use of the context of situation in a communication, quite often leads to communication breakdown. It can also be used as the findings as to how those respondents have been raised in their family. Are they used to direct language so that they become less sensitive to the indirect language, or they were confronted quite often to indirect sentences so that they become sensitive. The analysis has proved that those respondents are sensitive enough to understand the indirect language.

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