

The Role of Context in Meaning Construction beyond Semantics to Pragmatics

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Abstract

Many language users tend to undermine the influence context exerts on meaning, which moves meaning from semantics to pragmatics. This study aims at dissecting the role of context in meaning construction. Drawing from observation and secondary data, the study reveals that context determines the meaning of linguistic units (constructions). It plays a very significant role in the way meaning is constructed and understood. Next, there is a great difference between what is said and where it is said. In most cases, speakers' utterances are understood by listeners based on the context in which the utterances are made. Leaning on socio-cognitive theory of language use, this study postulates that the hearer's mind is so flexibly elastic enough to construct, accommodate and understand more concepts than language can linguistically do so. The study concludes that the pre-determination of meaning by context shows a convergence between pragmatics and semantics. It recommends that more work should be done as to teach, learn and master the knowledge of context, meaning, context role and the correlation between pragmatics and semantics.

Keywords: Context, Meaning construction, Role, Linguistic units, Pragmatics, Semantics.

Introduction

Meaning is the thrust of both semantics and pragmatics. As far back as the 1930's, Firth (1935) wrote on context and meaning. In linguistics, his work is considered the pioneer work on context. For Firth (1935, p. 37), the complete meaning of a word is usually contextual. This means that beyond the literal or lexical meaning of every word is its contextual meaning. The context in which a word is found and used determines as well as influences its meaning. In other words, the meaning of a word is pragmatically deduced from the context in which it is used. By the 1970's, context gained appreciable attention in linguistics. Bransford and Johnson (1972) are among the notable scholars of the 1970's, whose studies roused significant attention to context in language studies (linguistics). Bransford and Johnson (1972) argue that understanding a sentence depends on both the knowledge of the language in use and that of the world around us. They go on to note that semantic anomalies only occur when it is impossible to establish a relationship between a sentence and some relevant aspects of our knowledge of the world (Bransford & Johnson, 1972, p. 1973).

Language is usually used in a context, or in different contexts. Meaning is made of what is said from both the context and the literal, lexical, etymological or ordinary meanings of words. The content of discourse is the symbolic meaning of what necessitated the

communication and what is communicated or discussed. The parties in the given discourse may come from different linguistic backgrounds. People of different linguistic backgrounds also differ ethnically, socially, philosophically and contextually. The differences include variances in culture, behaviour, idiolect, accent, perception, worldview, cultural orientation and so on (Chaika, 1994; Emeka-Nwobia, 2007). It should be noted that the type of context involved in a communication event (conversation) is usually shaped by the people involved in the given conversation(s). Essentially, the influence context exerts on, or the role it plays in, meaning construction is the manifestation of pragmatics. In other words, that is the linguistic manifestation or situation that moves meaning away from semantics to pragmatics. To prove and sustain this standpoint, the discussion shall be done under several subheadings, making logical arguments that prove and disprove some of the extant views on context and meaning. The arguments shall be advanced in conceptual, theoretical and empirical domains.

Statement of Research Problems

Poor knowledge of the role of context in meaning construction poses the problems of misconstruction, misunderstanding, misinterpretation and faulty analysis of meanings among language users. Thus, it is imperative for more studies to be done on the foregoing in order to address these problems. This study is an attempt in that direction.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to explicate context role in meaning construction, with a view to contributing to the extant literatures on context, meaning and the role of context in meaning. In other words, this study aims at dissecting the role of context in meaning construction of linguistic units and structures of different kinds. The essence is to expose language users to the impact of pragmatics on semantic meanings, which constitute the role of context in meaning construction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded by socio-cognitive theory of language use. This broad linguistic theory has several strands. Here, three of the strands are taken because their postulations tally and illustrate the views of this work. Accordingly, Fillmore's (1977 & 1985) Theory of Frames and Schank and Abelson's (1977) the Restaurant Script theorise context and participants' knowledge of the world in the meaning of a linguistic unit. On their part, Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory goes deeper into participants' intention in communication event by considering inferences. The proponents theorise that the same sentence can convey different meanings, depending on the situation in which it is uttered, the participants and their intentions and other factors that together make up the context. This postulation is a reality that reveals what semantics does not do in giving and considering meanings of words and sentences. These three theories tally and aptly suit this

study. By virtue of the theoretical concerns and scope, it is also quite clear that they are all socio-cognitive theories of language use.

As we return to Fillmore's (1977 & 1985) Theory of Frames and Schank and Abelson's (1977) the Restaurant Script, let us begin by stating that the meaning of a linguistic structure is got from the context, in combination with the participant's internalised knowledge of the world regarding what is said. This assertion reflects the theorists' main ideas. Both theories maintain that hearers can fill the gaps of information in a linguistic expression with their previous knowledge about what the information implies. This is exemplified by Fillmore's (1977, p.104 ff) the Commercial Event and Schank & Abelson's (1977, p.42 ff) the Restaurant Script. For example, eating in a restaurant entails entering the restaurant, being seated, reading the menu, ordering, etc. These make up the context of the meaning of restaurant. Upon hearing the statement 'Thomas left the restaurant immediately after a phone call;' one is bound to presume that he paid the bill before leaving, unless one is explicitly told otherwise. Also, one is bound to assume that he left in a hurry. Or, one could simply visualise how Thomas had possibly displayed hurriedness. In any of the cases, the meaning deduced from the constituent words of this linguistic structure is both word- and context-dependent. Inference and internalised experience take precedence in the process of this meaning construction. The meaning at this point is semantic, while beyond that phase of meaning generation is pragmatic meaning.

Pragmatics aptly comes into the scene to handle issues that have not been treated by semantics and other levels of linguistic (language) analysis. Such issues left out by semantics and other levels of language analysis include context, implicatures, negotiation of meaning, etc. It is with the involvement of pragmatics that one gets to know or realise that following Thomas' hurriedness or devastation, shock or impression by what he had heard on phone, he left the restaurant without paying the bill. In that case, the first meaning constructed on the basis of semantics automatically gets transformed into the pragmatic meaning on the basis of the context. Drawing inference from what is said and the restaurant context in relation to previous knowledge of such a scenario, the hearer feels or concludes that Thomas paid the bill before leaving. But with the non-semantic but pragmatic factors behind meaning construction and interpretation, one realises that the previous context only relates to the present in terms of the setting (restaurant) and the event. The meaning construction differs because of varying pragmatic factors that came to place then, and those that come to place now in the present situation.

The foregoing assertion is given credence by Requejo (2007), who notes that one of the factors in meaning construction is the context of individual's experience and background knowledge of the participants. Based on these, the hearer could rightly guess the symbolic meaning of the situation. The possibility of guessing the meaning of the above expression about Thomas leaving the restaurant largely depends on the hearer's own personal interest, previous experience, knowledge, and/or thereabout. The implication of the foregoing suggests the imperative of giving participants' intention an inferential consideration. This

reflects Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory, which goes deeper into the participants' intention by considering inferences. Proponents of this theory postulate that the same sentence can convey different meanings, depending on the situation in which it is uttered, the participants and their intentions and other factors that together make up the context. Thus, the variance in the meaning of a sentence depends on the context. Essentially, their theory passes the message that meaning is a socio-cognitive linguistic phenomenon, which combines both semantic and pragmatic impulses and situations to determine and degenerate meanings beyond what semantics produces and presents to both hearers and speakers.

Conceptualising Context

Context is variously defined from varied points of view. According to Song (2010, p. 876), different linguists define context from the point of view applicable to their fields, with a view to answering the inherent questions regarding context in their fields and in such ways that justify their own ideas and theories. In the narrow sense, Cook (1999, p. 24) notes that 'context refers to [a form of knowledge of the world about] factors outside the text under consideration.' In the broad sense, context refers to [a form of knowledge of the world about] these factors and other parts of the text under consideration, also regarded as 'co-text' (Cook, 1999, p. 24). For Cook (1999, p. 24), context is a form of knowledge of the world, which can be used in both broad and narrow senses.

In his own contribution to conceptualising context, Yule (2006, p. 128) describes context as the physical environment in which a word is used. For Widdowson (1996, p. 63), context is a schematic construct residing in the mind. He notes that context is one of those aspects of the circumstances of actual language use which are taken as relevant to meaning (Widdowson, 1996, p. 126). Besides, he states that context is 'a schematic construct' used for achieving pragmatic meaning by 'matching up linguistic elements of the code with the schematic elements of the context.' His definition highlights the existential relationship between semantics and pragmatics. It implies that context is one of the factors or phenomena that bind these two levels of linguistic (language) analysis together. Other levels of linguistic are syntax (also regarded as grammar), phonology and phonetics, and morphology. These are the elementary aspects of linguistics, upon which all others rest. This study focuses on pragmatics and semantics alone.

Also, Nordquist (2018) notes that context can be defined as [words](#) and [sentences](#) that surround any part of a [discourse](#), which help to determine the [meaning](#) of the given discourse. This kind of context is referred to as linguistic context. It can also be referred to as 'co-text' (Nordquist, 2018, p. 226). According to Yule (2006, p. 129), the co-text of a word is the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence. The surrounding co-text has a strong effect on what we think the word means. This point suggests that beyond the lexical meanings of words, words derive (their other) meanings from their fellow words based on the context in which they are used. Requejo (2007) avers that context is not some

extra information that we turn to when bare semantics is not enough. Rather, in real uses, context always comes first before a given linguistic unit can be interpreted (Requejo, 2007). This is because before the construction of a given linguistic unit or structure, some pieces of information had already been available to discourse participants, which directs them on the process of meaning construction and determines the possible sense to be made of and/or selected from the available information variables.

It is imperative to note that 'environment (circumstances or factors by some other scholars) in which a discourse occurs' (Song, 2010, p. 876) is one common point shared by the various definitions of context in the literature. For this study, context refers to the secondary multifaceted phase of meaning, which derives from setting and various factors other than the elementary linguistic factors behind language users' construction, understanding, interpretation and analysis of meaning. All the meanings arising or derived from context are secondary, while literal meanings are primary. Different factors come to place in the construction of context meaning. These include setting, mood, tone, manner, previous and internalised knowledge, experience, attitude, postural gestures, mindset, background, idiolect, worldview, literature, association, and registers, among others. Doyle (2007, p. 5) identifies presuppositions as one of the factors of context, which comes to place in meaning construction; adding that presuppositions make up the propositional aspects of context. At this point, it should be noted that setting is what Song (2010, p. 876) regards as 'environment', which is commonly shared by many scholars in their definitions of 'context'. Song (2010, p. 876) implies that environment entails circumstances or factors other than linguistic factors behind a discourse or a conversation. When we say a person says something out of context, we mean that the thing is said outside the suitable setting or environment and thereby not suitable in, or does not match the environment (setting) it has been imported into.

The fact that meaning is contextual is why we talk about denotative, connotative and associative meanings. Denotative meaning has to do with literal, lexical, etymological or ordinary meanings of words, phrases, clauses and sentences. Connotative meaning has to do with literary meanings of these linguistic forms. Here, the meaning of a word, a phrase, a clause or a sentence is got from what it connotes. Within this circle, a meaning that is socially or literarily acceptable is not semantically, syntactically and grammatically acceptable. Examples: Jane is a pregnant virgin; The pen is mightier than the sword; No war, no peace; He released anal blast; Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judas; The sun radiates beauty; Money takes lives; The colourful peacock won the beauty pageantry of the year; etc. The meanings of these structures (constructions) are all but only contextually–connotatively and literarily–sensible and acceptable.

Associative meaning has to do with the meanings derived from what is associated with a given thing or some given things. Essentially, connotative and associative meanings fall under the broad umbrella of meaning called 'contextual meaning'. Contextual meaning derives from conventional meaning to realise either connotative or associative meaning. Be

it as it may, context has a significant place in literal, lexical, etymological or ordinary meaning, which can also be regarded as conventional or primary meaning (of words, phrases, clauses and sentences). Basically, as individuals involve in conversation, they share the background knowledge of the content of discourse (i.e. communication content). This is because their general understanding of the concepts is fostered by a common speech community, though they may not necessarily speak the same way.

Classification of Context

Context is basically classified into two: linguistic and situational contexts. Linguistic context covers the phonetic, morphological, syntactic or textual materials surrounding the word (Requejo, 2007). On the other hand, situational context concerns or involves anything that has to do with the immediate situation and the socio-cultural background in which the language event takes place (Requejo, 2007). As Requejo (2007) rightly observes, not only objective situational context should be taken into consideration; the individual experiences, beliefs, intentions and perceptions of the participants should be considered too, because they all affect how and the way in which meaning is constructed in a given language (i.e. communication) event. Within the purview of Cognitive Linguistics, context is used in its broadest sense to include the entirety of a particular conversation, word or sentence that affects its meaning. The integration of context into meaning has remained one advocacy in Cognitive Linguistics since 1987 (Requejo, 2007). In her analysis of black to show context and meaning, Requejo's (2007) analysis of the meaning of black in its proper context demonstrates how the meaning of an utterance goes far beyond the meaning of its parts. Besides, the interpretation of a whole is previous to the meaning of each word.

Song (2010, p. 876-7) classifies context into three: linguistic context, situational context and cultural context. She identifies and concisely discusses three major roles of context viz: eliminating ambiguity, indicating referents and detecting conversational *implicature* (Song, 2010, p. 877-8). In brief, Song (2010) notes that context clears and eliminates lexical and structural ambiguities in sentences arising from homonymy and polysemy. For example, write, right, rite and Wright are all pronounced as /rait/. It is context that clears the ambiguity arising from the single phonetic/phonemic realisation of these words as /rait/. It also clears and eliminates structural ambiguities in the analysis of sentences, clauses and phrases. For examples, it is context that makes it possible for one to make meaning out of: 'I like Fred more than Tonia', which could mean 'I like Fred more than Tonia does' or 'I like Fred more than I like Tonia'.

Context and Meaning

The importance of context in meaning construction and the interpretation of the meaning impulses of linguistic constructions cannot be over-emphasised. This reality makes it imperative for language users across the world to recognise the importance of context in the interpretation of the speaker's utterances. Bearing in mind and mastering this linguistic

reality betters interpersonal communication and prevents avoidable communication mishaps, such as misunderstanding and misinterpretation of what is said by a speaker. This is because with this knowledge, the listener (hearer) looks up to context, and is conscious of its role in the meaning of what the speaker constructs linguistically. Linguistic units, constructions and all what make up linguistic property are used to construct and convey meaning of different kinds. Besides, they have meanings imbedded in them. That is, they carry meanings in and with them. Be it as it may, meaning is largely context- dependent and -determined. This does not mean that meaning is only dependent on and determined by context. Demonstrating with examples of how the objects of verbs are derived in sentences, Doyle (2007, p. 4) has noted that it is fairly uncontroversial to assert that context affects meaning. The meanings of some words depend on the context of the sentence in which they occur. Context shows varied references. That is, the meaning of what is being referred to varies from one context to another.

More so, meaning is central in all forms of communication. It is primarily what grounds the message encoded and passed on by the speaker to the listener. As Requejo (2007) notes, every word has different shades of meaning. Also, Requejo (2007) notes that context is affirmed to be what makes meaning to be 'meaning in use' and an element of 'both semantics and pragmatics'. She goes on to note that both linguistically and situational, context is often considered as a posteriori factor in linguistic analysis' (Requejo, 2007, p. 169). Yet, when considering language in use, context comes before meaning and rather directs meaning right from the beginning (Requejo, 2007, p. 169). For some cognitive linguists, words have no meaning. Rather, words are mere instructions for constructing the meaning of a linguistic expression (Evans & Green, 2006; Croft & Cruse, 2004; Talmy, 2000; Langacker, 1999; Dirven & Vespoor, 1998; Fauconnier, 1994; Langacker, 1991 & 1987).

Reacting to the above, this study argues otherwise that every word has and bears an individual meaning, which grounds its secondary meaning(s) in varied contexts of usage and appearance. It is the symbolic meaning of each word in series that conveys the meaningful instructions words are used to pass messages across to the hearer by the speaker. The fact that words are used to construct larger linguistic forms other than words does not mean that they have no individual meanings. If words have no meanings, they cannot serve as instructions for constructing the meanings of linguistic expressions, as such scholars claim. It is because they have meanings and are capable of being used for constructing various meanings that they can serve the purposes for which they are known for. This study also argues that the contextual meanings of words are dependent on their lexical, etymological or ordinary meanings that are rather independent of their contextual meanings. Yet, there is an age-long nexus between the literal, lexical, etymological or ordinary meanings of words and their contextual meanings. The reason for this is that context had grounded the nomenclature, classification, meaning and usage assigned to each word from time being, when created.

Also, it should be noted that the foregoing reality lies solidly behind the existence of polysemy. On one hand, polysemous words have their usual three and above lexical (literal), etymological or ordinary meanings. On the other hand, they have contextual meanings too. The conventional meaning of a word is also regarded as the literal (lexical), etymological or ordinary meaning of words. This meaning constitutes the meaning of an utterance. It is one cue or an integral part of a whole that guides the process of meaning construction. All other constituent cues that constitute a whole linguistic construction come from context (Requejo, 2007, p.172). As Requejo (2007) reiterates, most words are polysemous and their possible uses in different contexts are organised in radial prototypical categories. What this means is that context determines the exact or particular meaning of a given polysemous word used at a given time and place. For instance, context determines whether the use of 'bank' in a conversation implies where money is saved, a river side or its other meanings. Likewise, it is context that points to one particular meaning of 'bar', 'postmortem', 'broadcast', etc. at a given time or in a given sentence. This is because each of them has several meanings. Their meanings are context-dependent and determined. The foregoing highlights the role of context in meaning construction. In what follows hereunder, the role of context in meaning construction shall be given a fairly detailed explication as well as analysis.

The Role of Context in Meaning Construction

Context helps in determining meaning (Doyle, 2007, p. 5). In discussing the role of context, Doyle (2007, p. 7) expresses the thought that the importance of context can be seen in its significant place in many fields. The lead fields, where context plays significant roles, include Artificial Intelligence (AI) research (Akman, 1997), Philosophy (Gauker, 1998), Anthropology (Hanegraaff, 1998), Psychology (Baars, 1988), Literary Theory (Harris, 1988) and Linguistics (Harris, 1988), among others. With these fields being concerned with context, it is quite clear that scholars and professionals of other fields, other than linguists in the field of language, are preoccupied with context and meaning as well as semantics and pragmatics. Accordingly, in AI, context is seen from a broad perspective, which stems from acknowledging that interpretation only takes place within shared contexts (Akman, 1997). In Philosophy, the notion of context lies behind the recent debate over relativism (Rorty, 1980; Schneider; 1995; Doyle, 2007). Besides, as Doyle (2007, p. 9) aptly notes, 'there are issues, such as whether one might be able to use pragmatic rather than principled distinctions to delineate contexts, which are of current interest in Philosophy.' In Anthropology, Margaret Mead had laid a foundation for the form of ethical relativism called 'Cultural Ethical Relativism', which is not in the field of Philosophy but Anthropology (Doyle, 2007, p. 9). The basic idea of this form of ethical relativism is that cultural values need not make appeal to any absolute standard, and are free to adopt any standards they may choose (Doyle, 2007, pp. 9-10).

Psychology also concerns itself with questions of contexts. Beyond using context to refer to physical surroundings in psychology, it is also used to refer to unconscious representations (Baars, 1988). Psychologists talk about and analyse context in terms of conceptual and perceptual contexts (Baars, 1988). Context in psychological discourse also reflects what context means to experts in AI and the analysis they do with context (Doyle, 2007, p. 10). Decisions regarding context are made in the field of Literary Theory about a text, the author, the reader, and how a text is best interpreted. These involve the context (setting) in which the author wrote a text, the setting (context) where the work took (or takes) place and the context within which the reader interprets the artwork (Eagleton, 1983, p. 86). Context also plays a role in determining and discussing the predominant themes (e.g. race, sex/gender, economic power relations, conflict, etc.) in a text (Eagleton, 1983, p. 86; Doyle, 2007, pp. 11-12). Doyle (2007, p. 12) points out that the major concern of Literary Theory in discussing context is to examine the 'nature and role of contexts in creating and evaluating meaning and understanding.' Context is of interest to Linguistics as regards where it belongs and what meaning entails (Chomsky, 1959; Stalnaker, 1973; Doyle, 2007).

Furthermore, in constructing and interpreting utterances (linguistic units), a language user has to continuously make choice in selecting possible senses. In doing so, context plays a major role. This organisation in prototypical categories allows new senses for a linguistic unit to be produced and acquired without substantially altering the whole category, by simply establishing new links to any of the already existing senses in the category (Langacker, 1999 & 1991; Geeraerts, 1997; Taylor 1995; Geeraerts, Grondelaers & Bakena, 1994). Context is what helps us to know, determine, locate and use pronouns (he, she, it, they, this, that, etc.) to replace nouns; auxiliary verbs (is, are, do, be, shall, will, etc.) to replace or support lexical verbs and verb phrases; and lexical adverbs (e.g. there, then, because, etc.) to stand in for adverbial phrases. Thus, context plays the role of indicating referents. It should be noted that there are implied meanings of words, sentences and other structures made by a speaker, which are other than their ordinary or lexical/grammatical meanings. The implied meanings are deduced from the context of what is said by the speaker. That is, a speaker could imply or mean something else, other than what they said. The deduced meaning of a linguistic construction or conversation is contextual. As such context detects the implication of a conversation or construction. This is regarded as conversational *implicature* (Grice, 197; Song, 2010; Requejo, 2007).

Implicature covers a number of ways in which literally unsaid information can be conveyed (Grice, 1975). Ideally, conversation ought to be guided by the four co-operative principles and maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner (Song, 2010). In a sentential linguistic construction, where words occur or appear in series, (situational) context is one of the factors that determine not just the meaning of words in the given sentence(s), but also the meaning of the entire sentence. It should be noted here that context resolves around the situation and setting of the communication. Some other factors include the type of text, the images accompanying the sentence, the speaker's and the hearers' perception,

knowledge, competence, idiolect, mood, tone and several other linguistic and paralinguistic features. More so, context is as an essential factor for the interpretation of linguistic expressions (constructions). Benjamins (2003) says that context enables people to predict the meaning of utterances. This assertion rests on Halliday's (1985) insistence on making the analysis of meaning beyond linguistic system; taking social system in which it occurs into consideration too. That is, both text and context must be considered. While it is true that in constructing or knowing the meaning of a linguistic unit, the interpretation of syntactic and morphological elements of the text (Werth, 1999; Chomsky, 1957) are required, doing so also requires considering the context.

It should be noted that there is usually a kind of connectivity in the grammatical function of each of the words in a sentence, which produces the overall meaning of the sentence, as a result or product of the connectivity. Just as Chomsky (1957) talks about a match in syntax, grammar and semantics in order to have a correct and acceptable linguistic construction, this study avers that beyond the interaction of the aforementioned levels of linguistic analysis is the infusion of pragmatics into the interaction chain, in order to make symbolic and associative meaning or sense of the semantic impulses that make the utterances semantically correct and acceptable. Chomsky (1957) exemplifies with: 'The colorless green ideas sleep furiously.' This sentence is semantically meaningless, but syntactically meaningful. It is syntactically meaningful because there is a subject –noun phrases (The colorless green ideas), a verb– predicate (sleep), and adverb– adjunct (furiously). Literarily, the sentence is meaningful and acceptable in that 'ideas' are personified– given human or animate quality and function. Thus, contextually (pragmatically), the sentence is meaningful, while semantically (literally), it is not meaningful. Also, in her analogy of the word 'black' in its different senses, Requejo (2007, p. 175) mentions and demonstrates graphically and descriptively that black means 'blindness, unconsciousness, death, evil, mourning, elegance, darkness, hidden and excellence'. That is, these nine words imply or mean black or they are associated with black. These meanings, no doubt, are contextual. Of course, the next problem is that of the real and other meanings of these nine words. We leave out the problem here. It does not fall within the thrust of this paper.

Furthermore, the role of context has affirmed by Nagy (1995), who reiterates and analyses the importance of context in vocabulary learning. He notes that from common sense, two observations are obtained about the importance (i.e., role) of context. First, the meaning of a word often depends on the context in which it is used. Second, apart from explicit instruction, people pick up much of their vocabulary knowledge from context. He adds that research proves significant limitations of 'guessing meanings from context' as a means of learning words. This assertion undoubtedly offers a hint on how misinterpretation of meaning arises from guessing meanings from context. Thus, Nagy (1995) insists that effective use of context to construct or decode meaning is imperative. He informs that by using context effectively, one can disambiguate words or infer meanings of unfamiliar words, and disambiguating words depends on a variety of knowledge types. These are

world knowledge, linguistic knowledge and strategic knowledge (Nagy, 1995). Nagy (1995, p. 1) emphasises that 'to some extent, world knowledge and strategic knowledge can help compensate for limitations in second-language learners' linguistic knowledge.' On the whole, despite the appreciable role of context, it has the 'problems of holism, relativism, and the very intelligibility of certain construals of context' (Doyle, 2007, p. 13; Fodor and LePore, 1992; Böhler, 1986; Davidson, 1973; among others). This present study leaves out the aforementioned problems, as they are outside its scope.

Between Semantics and Pragmatics on Context and Meaning

The relationship between semantics and pragmatics is such that they seem inseparable (Requejo, 2007), though there still exist obvious dissimilarities between them amidst their similarities (Nwala, 2008). Pragmatics continues from where semantics stops in meaning construction. It goes beyond semantics in meaning relations. It engages in meaning analysis, much more than semantics does. Those aspects of meaning undermined or left unattended to by semantics are taken up and put into consideration by pragmatics. This is what obtains in the discourse of context, which semantics neglects or leaves out to remain unattended to. Horn & Ward (2002) agree to our assertion, as they note that pragmatics studies the relations between words and their designate, without interfering with semantics or the meanings and relations between words and their designate given by semantics. The implication is that words have other meanings that are outside their independent literal meanings. For example, in a sentence, the word 'chair' derives one of its literal meanings from the context of the sentence in which it occurs or is used. For example, context determines the particular meaning of 'chair' in these sentences: She is sitting on my chair; Professor Nonye has accepted the University Chair; The Nnewi Local Government Chair or Chairperson is here; The electric chair is bad. This is a clear case of meaning between semantics and pragmatics. Here, the meaning of chair moves from semantics to pragmatics in order for one to understand the particular semantic (literal) meaning of the word 'chair', upon which its pragmatic (contextual) meanings are realised.

As Lyons (1981) has averred, sentence meaning is to semantics, while utterance meaning is to pragmatics. This assertion is given credence by Griffiths (2006), who describes semantics as the study of sentence meaning and word meaning. Sentence meaning is that which directly relates to the grammatical and lexical features of a sentence. On the other hand, utterance meaning concerns all secondary aspects of meaning, particularly those related to context, and the use of sentence by the speaker. It is in seeing to the speaker's use of sentence that pragmatics demonstrates that use does not affect means, but rather determines another form of meaning that belongs to pragmatics rather than semantics. That is, what the speaker means when s/he says what s/he says in the context at hand. Griffiths (2006) maintains that semantics and pragmatics are the two main branches of linguistics that concern themselves with the study of meaning. According to Griffiths (2006), semantics is the study of the 'toolkit' for meaning, which revolves around the

knowledge encoded in the vocabulary of the language and in its patterns for building more elaborate meanings, up to the level of sentence meanings. For him, Pragmatics concerns the use of these tools in meaningful communication, and the interaction of semantic knowledge with our knowledge of the world, taking into account contexts of use (Griffiths, 2006).

Similarly, to Melrose (1995, p. 26), semantics is 'one of the ways of realising both the behaviour potential of the speaker and the grammatical system.' This definition relates semantics to pragmatics in that it talks about speaker's behaviour in relation to grammatical system, which implies sentence meaning. Again, by 'behaviour potential', the definition points to the cognitive elements of the speaker that come to bear in conversations. Palmer (1996) is of the view that the difference between semantics and pragmatics is a matter of meaning versus use. This observation is right. Both semantics and pragmatics deal with meaning. But it is only pragmatics that deals with meaning in use. Semantics limits itself to meaning within meaning, but pragmatics stretches from looking at meaning within meaning to looking at meaning outside meaning in the context of usage. It is following the reality that pragmatics takes meaning beyond the confine of linguistics to sociology, psychology, philosophy and so on that Yule (2006, p. 127) describes pragmatics as 'the study of invisible meaning, or how we recognise what is meant even when it is not actually said or written.' That is, going by this quote, Yule (2006) agrees that pragmatics starts dealing with meaning right from where semantics stops and broadens the concerns and analysis of meaning beyond what semantics could do or simply left unattended to.

In what justifies the nexus between semantics and pragmatics, Doyle (2007, p. 71) says that 'pragmatic approach to understanding context recognises the shortcomings of attempting to find some set of necessary and sufficient factors which would then constitute the context.' This implies that pragmatics goes beyond semantics in all that concerns context and meaning. Unlike semantics, pragmatics offers language users valuable explanation about context and meaning so that they 'recognise the shortcomings of attempting to find some set of necessary and sufficient factors' constituting context (Doyle, 2007, p. 71). Pragmatics is seen as concerned with 'defining interesting types of speech acts and speech products' and 'characterising the features of the speech context which help determine which proposition is expressed by a given sentence' (Stalnaker, 1973, p. 392). Pragmatic approach places emphasis on the role of context and how to recognise all about context and the extent to which it goes in practice (Doyle, 2007). The approach considers context as part of the essentials of meaning and understanding in communication process.

As Doyle (2007, p. 72) notes, Stalnaker represents much of what is probably 'the dominant viewpoint in contextual research today.' Yet, Stalnaker fails to define context but says, 'where rules determining the denotation of the singular term are considered as part of the context, what is relevant is not what is true, but what is presupposed' (Stalnaker, 1973 p. 403). Rather, only semantics, syntax and pragmatics are defined by Stalnaker. Accordingly, 'syntax studies sentences; semantics studies propositions; pragmatics is the study of

linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed' (Stalnaker, 1973, p. 392). Against the foregoing restrictive conception and disposition, Copi (1982, p. 79) argues that there is no mechanical method of distinguishing informative and argumentative language 'from language that serves other functions.' This study agrees with Copi (1982) and goes further to stress that functionality takes centre stage, as in context that demonstrates other vast functions of language. To recognise the different functions served in a given context, careful thought and sensitivity to the flexibility of language and the multiplicity of its uses are required (Copi, 1982). Also, it is quite obvious that there is no mechanical technique for recognising an argument (Copi, 1982). This applies to the subject matter of this study—context and meaning or context in meaning construction.

It is imperative to note that the assertion that meaning moves from semantics to pragmatics is a well affirmed linguistic reality, regardless of possible sweeping arguments from some other persons out there. Evans & Green's (2006, p. 216) words on pragmatic meaning lends credence to this assertion, as they note that "pragmatic meaning, rather than coded meaning, is 'real' meaning." Coded meaning is the denotative or literal meaning of a word, as found in dictionaries (Evans & Green, 2006). Yet, context had played a significant role in the etymological construction of the meaning of each of the words in the dictionary. It is in view of the foregoing that Requejo (2007) says we need to submit that context is what leads the process of meaning construction, given the lead-role it plays in meaning construction. That is to say context plays a lead-role in meaning construction of linguistic units. Given the foregoing, it becomes imperative for this study to conceptualise pragmatics and semantics. Accordingly, this study describes pragmatics as that branch of linguistics that indicates a wide range of alternative meanings from which a speaker selects and uses during conversation in social contexts, without necessarily relying on or being exclusively confined to the limited meanings available to users in semantic province.

Our given definition acknowledges the fact that semantics and pragmatics interact and work together to have full description and analysis of meaning. It implicitly states that pragmatics does not always rely on semantics in order to take and look at meaning in use and context along with the constituents of context and other linguistic and non-linguistic factors that work together in meaning construction. It also points out that even when pragmatics has to rely on semantics, it does not make its reliance an exclusive one. Rather, it relies on semantics moderately. Another point of emphasis by our study is that pragmatics deals with meaning in various ways beyond what semantics does, using a more advanced approach. In view of the foregoing, this study holds that meaning rotates between semantics and pragmatics, moving from semantics to pragmatics; back to semantics for certain verifications, background and previous knowledge; and finally back to pragmatics again for advancement to context and other linguistic and non-linguistic processes of construction, explication, understanding, interpretation and analysis.

For this study, semantics is that level of linguistic (language) analysis concerned with the meanings of words, phrases, clauses, sentences and any other linguistic units on the basis

of lexicography, etymology and phenomenology, solely within the confine of (micro-) linguistics and given by certain linguistically learned, elitist and oligarchic language users, whose created words had (and would) become conventionalised and institutionalised by them and other users of given languages. On the whole, it is the contention of this study that while semantics studies conventional meanings and meaning relations within the confine of micro-linguistics, pragmatics studies meanings of words, other linguistic units and utterances on the basis of their contexts. That is to say while semantics deals with meaning within the province of micro-linguistics, pragmatics deals much more with meaning within the province of macro-linguistics, with apt reflections on, and recourse to semantics in micro-linguistics. Therefore, semantics and pragmatics tally extensively and at the same time differ considerably.

Conclusion

Given the analysis done so far, this study submits that the pre-determination of meaning by context shows that there is a convergence between pragmatics and semantics. The study demonstrates that semantics and pragmatics are related and yet differ in their preoccupations. Although they both deal with meaning, the limit of each in doing so is what makes the whole difference. Where semantics stops is where pragmatics begins in their preoccupation with meaning. Meaning is their thrust. Pragmatics takes meaning beyond linguistics to other fields like philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, artificial intelligence, etc. In the study of meaning, semantics takes to or remains in micro-linguistics. On the other hand, pragmatics stretches out to macro-linguistics and remains there, but only makes recourse to micro-linguistics when it needs to interact with semantics on meaning.

All in all, this study has demonstrated a fairly detailed treatment of context and meaning, highlighting theoretical, conceptual and empirical facts and bases for justifying the role of context in the construction of the meaning of linguistic units, which moves from semantics to pragmatics. In view of the identified research problems, for which this study rose, the following recommendations are made:

- More scholastic attention should be paid to context role in meaning construction, so as to increase the volume of literature on the subject matter of this work. The task lies with scholars in several concerned fields, not linguists alone. However, linguists and English teachers in particular should take the lead.
- Linguists should demonstrate the resourcefulness of linguistics in solving human problems by rising to the challenges arising from the negligence and the poor knowledge of this subject matter.
- A mastery of this knowledge requires familiarising students and other individuals in general as well as selves with the nitty-gritty of pragmatics of meaning.

- The phenomenal correlation between semantics and pragmatics should be taught emphatically by language teachers in particular, and learnt with utmost attention by students and other individuals in general.

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