

A Review of the Linguistic Description of Language of Dialogue

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Abstract

Dialogue has always been considered as the most effective and efficient method of conflict resolution in homes, organizations and among national and international communities. Thus Language which is the greatest instrument used in dialogue is very vital. It can either enhance in peace making or add salt to the injury. This paper attempts to describe how the effective use of language of dialogue can lead to peaceful coexistence among people generally. Finally, it suggests how the elements in the language of dialogue can be employed in peace talks.

Keywords: Linguistic Description, Language of Dialogue, efficient method, conflict resolution.

Introduction

Language is said to be a dress of thought and figures of speech its ornaments. Whatever one wants to say in whatever context has to be well dressed in language for the perlocutionary effect it may have. People often suggest dialogue rather than force for resolving crisis. And in most cases it has proved effective. Nonetheless, it is not just the matter of bringing two or more warring parties together to make peace through dialogue but the language of the peacemaker and the warring parties is essential. Another essential thing is the ability to maintain conversational principles between the conflicting groups. If a discussion is intended to achieve peace, then some conversational elements must be put into consideration by the peacemaker and the warring parties. Sometimes, a break in communication resulting from faulting the conversational principles may make or mar peace. The linguistic elements in the effective language of dialogue involve turn-taking, politeness principle, topic maintenance, cooperative principles, communication principle and effective use of euphemism. The observation of these elements in dialogue will certainly yield a successful result.

Turn-taking

Turn-taking is a linguistic etiquette that is necessary in any dialogue to ensure orderly communication where two or more participants are involved. Adeyanju (1989) defines turn taking as "any speaker's sequence of utterances bounded by another speaker's speech." In a formal meeting like dialogue this etiquette has to be observed. In the first place, only the chairman has the right to direct the discourse speaking whenever he feels it is right to speak, allocating the right to speak to the participant, interrupting other speakers to comment on the relevance of their contribution to the topic in discussion, deciding when sufficient discussion has taken place and so on.

On the side of the participant, it is necessary that the speakers are taught or informed that no any speaker should self-select himself. An ample time must be given to each group to

make a contribution in the dialogue. No self-selecting, or intending speaker has right to interrupt another speaker until he has finished, and as Holmes (1974) observes, it is only the chairman that nominates the next speaker. If the intending speaker is not nominated, he exercises patience until his turn comes. The writer explains that complex and subtle signals for taking turns at speaking are used by adults. However, raising hands up is more popular. This implies that an intending speaker among the participants must use a signal to draw the attention of the person presiding over the dialogue. And if possible a conversational method should be properly and frequently used. Failure to observe this rule may lead to a serious chaos and render the dialogue fruitless. Therefore, turn taking is an element that must be observed and the person presiding over the dialogue must be conversant with it.

Topic Maintenance

During a conversation or dialogue individuals take turns sharing their thoughts and opinions about a topic. It is important to stay on topic so that everyone can follow along and participate, because if the topic of conversation changes too many times or too quickly, the conversation becomes difficult to follow.

For every dialogue, there must be a specific cause. The cause may be referred to as the topic of discussion. In this sense, the purpose of the dialogue must be maintained from the beginning of the dialogue to the end. Topic maintenance according to Leech and Short (1985) "is the ability to maintain the topic of discussion to its logical conclusion". During a conversation or dialogue individuals take turns sharing their thoughts and opinions about a topic.

However, this does not mean that there will not be digression from the topic from time to time. However, it is the duty of the presiding officer to painstakingly draw the attention of the participants to the main topic of discussion. Swain (1985) suggests that a little digression may be made to cool down the temper of the exasperated participants or when an irritating issue is brought. Since the essence of the dialogue is peace-making, then it is necessary to realize that any deviation from the actual topic of discussion may give birth to an unpleasant situation. In this regard, the presiding figure must be alert to cleverly reject any uncalled intrusion.

Cooperative Principle

When conflicting people enter into negotiation to resolve their differences, they usually bring certain orientations to the table in their effort to settle the conflict. The two most basic orientations people adhere to when entering into negotiations are *cooperative or competitive*. This paper is concerned with the cooperative approach because the competitive approach to conflict tends to increase animosity and distrust between parties and is generally considered destructive. Spangler (2003) argues that a cooperative approach aligns with the process of "interest-based or integrative bargaining", which leads conflicting parties to seek "win-win solutions". Disputants that work cooperatively to negotiate a solution are more likely to develop a relationship of trust and come up with mutually beneficial options for settlement. The mutual gains approach is considered a constructive resolution process. Deutsch (2000) states and explains the characteristics of cooperative styles thus:

1. "Effective communication" where ideas are verbalized, group members pay attention to one another and accept their ideas and are influenced by them. These groups have less problems communicating with and understanding others.

2. "Friendliness, helpfulness, and less obstructiveness" is expressed in conversations. Members tend to be generally more satisfied with the group and its solutions as well as being impressed by the contributions of other group members.
3. "Coordination of effort, division of labor, orientation to task achievement, orderliness in discussion, and high productivity" tend to exist in cooperative groups.
4. "Feeling of agreement with the ideas of others and a sense of basic similarity in beliefs and values, as well as confidence in one's own ideas and in the value that other members attach to those ideas, are obtained in cooperative groups."
5. "Willingness to enhance the other's power" to achieve the other's goals increases. As other's capabilities are strengthened in a cooperative relationship, you are strengthened and vice versa.
6. "Defining conflicting interests as a mutual problem to be solved by collaborative effort facilitates recognizing the legitimacy of each other's interests and the necessity to search for a solution responsive to the needs of all." This tends to limit the scope of conflicting interests and keep attempts to influence each other to decent forms of persuasion.

As such, a speaker at the table of negotiation should observe the maxim of quality. The maxim of quality demands that the speaker should give as much information as is needed. Half-baked information seriously affects discussion to a large extent. This is because the listener is limited by insufficient information when he takes his own turn. Such incomplete information distorts the trend of thought of the intending speaker before being selected to speak. If he is not sure of how much he should say, the speaker will limit his contribution. Explaining the maxim of quality, Crystal (1997) states that "speakers' contribution to a conversation ought to be true. They should neither say what they believe to be false nor should they say anything for which they lack adequate evidence." This is to say that any participant in the dialogue must be cautioned to present the actual fact. Hearsay should not be considered. In this sense, the speaker should present enough evidence to back up his argument. This will go a long way in convincing the audience. Furthermore, a contribution to a peaceful dialogue should be backed up with evidence for it to be convincing.

The maxim of relevance states that contribution should clearly relate to the purpose of the exchange. This means that whatever a participant in the dialogue wishes to say must tally with the topic of discussion. So digression from the topic is breaking the maxim of relevance. The contribution of any participant must revolve around the topic. The maxim of manner states that the contribution should be perspicuous in particular. In other words, it should be orderly and brief, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity. It also involves the prudent way of presenting one's argument in an amicable manner to avoid causing emotional reactions. Lack of consideration of the cooperative principle can easily hamper peace talks. Also, although non-linguistic behaviours cannot be avoided, some of them cause misunderstanding in a dialogue. For instance, a common source of misunderstanding is the way both parties in dialogue use head nods and 'mhm' noise while the other is speaking. Some analysts have suggested that such nods and noises may mean different things to different people. For instance, when a woman does it, she may simply imply that she is listening and encouraging the speaker to continue, but for a man, it may mean that he agrees with everything that the speaker is saying. In contrast, when a man does it, he is signalling that he does not necessarily agree, whereas the woman interprets it to mean that she is not always listening.

Speech Act

Speech act theory attempts to understand the ways in which meaning is created in context. In other words, speech act is concerned with the message of the speaker and how it affects the listener. Therefore, the term “speech act” refers not only to an utterance that is made, but the total situation surrounding it. In order to understand how different speech acts work, Austin (1962) and Crystal (1997) suggest classifying them using the following three-part framework:

- *Locution* – the precise words that a speaker actually speaks.
- *Illocution* – the actual meaning, or intention, of the utterance.
- *Perlocution* – the effect that the words spoken have on the hearer.

Thus, in communication, first, we recognize the bare fact that a communicative act takes place (the locutionary act); then we see the act that is performed as a result of the speaker's utterance, which may take the form of betting, promising, welcoming and warning (the illocutionary act); and finally, we look at the particular effect the speaker's utterance has on the listener, who may feel amused, persuaded, warned, etc. (perlocutionary act).

This is to say that, in dialogue, the speaker must know the effect of what he says, whether it will be positive or negative. However, since the essence of the dialogue is to make peace between conflicting groups, the locutionary act must therefore be aimed at a positive result. In this case the illocutionary act must carry a convincing message to the listener. The appeal of the illocutionary act presents a reaction from the listener. Consequently, the speaker must observe carefully the kind of reaction his speech will generate. The perlocutionary act is what is referred to in the language of dialogue as the reaction of the listener. It is the effect of the illocutionary act on the listener. As a matter of fact, as Krauss and Morsella (2011) argue, when speaking, the speaker has to take the perspective of his listener. The “Humpty-Dumpty” approach to communication (“When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less”) is a formula for disaster. Because the potential for misunderstanding is high and misunderstanding is likely to err in a negative direction, it is especially important that speakers constrain the meanings that listeners can impute to their messages. One way of accomplishing this is to do precisely the opposite of what the Humpty-Dumpty's maxim dictates: when formulating a message, consider what the listener will take your words to mean.

The issue, then, is not “What do I mean by this?” but rather “What is my counterpart likely to understand this to mean?” Often, it will be necessary for a speaker to inform (or remind) the listener of the presuppositions that form the utterance's interpretive context.

But sometimes, the illocutionary force of a speech act does not match up with the locution. Yet we invariably manage to understand such speech acts. Searle (1969) attempts to explain how we manage this with his suggestion of the conditions which we bear in mind when working out what someone means by what he says:

- *Propositional act* – what act is it that the speaker is proposing?
- *Preparatory condition* – is the act being proposed something that is beneficial to the hearer?

- *Sincerity condition* – is the act something that the speaker genuinely believes can be achieved?
- *Essential condition* – what is the actual nature of the act being proposed?

These conditions are known as 'felicity' conditions: speech acts cannot be 'true' or 'false', but they can be felicitous or infelicitous. For example, if a teacher tells a pupil that they must stay behind after class for a detention, then we (although perhaps not the pupil!) might deem this felicitous – the teacher is in a position of power that enables them to perform this action. However, if the same individual went up to someone in the street and said 'You must stay after class!', then we would probably judge this as infelicitous – the speech act of detaining cannot ordinarily be performed by an individual to a passerby.

The importance of the perlocutionary act is to allow the speaker to realize the scope of the comprehension of the listener. In this case, the speaker may wish to reframe his language for clear comprehension of the listener. In view of this, Crystal (1997) suggests some expressions called 'ongoing checks' that a speaker may use for clarification. They include: "let me put it another way", "Don't get me wrong", "what I am trying to say is . . .", etc. On the listener's side, he suggests the following expressions: "you mean . . .", "Have I got you right", "mhm", "I don't get you" and "let's get that right".

Once a speaker gets the above mentioned expression from the listener in a dialogue he should get prepared to expatiate what he has said initially. Likewise the speaker in a dialogue should from time to time use the ongoing checks to ensure that his listeners are following him. So when listening, the listener should try to understand the intended meaning of what his counterpart is saying. Just as the speaker must take pains to be aware of the possible constructions listeners may place on an utterance, listener's needs to be sensitive to the alternative constructions an utterance might yield. Although we habitually respond to what others say as though it could mean one and only one thing, that seldom is the case. This insinuates that the listener has to be active. An encoding-decoding approach to communication puts the listener in the role of a passive recipient whose task is to process the meaning of the transmitted message, but a participant in a communicative interchange is not limited to this role. Active listeners raise questions, clarify ambiguous declaration, and take great pains to ensure that they and their counterpart have the same understanding of what has been said. And should any sign of confusion or misunderstanding be noticed, the speaker ought to respond promptly.

The above exposition thus shows that it is necessary to realize the implications of the speech act in dialogue and utilize the act effectively for a successful deliberation.

Mildness in Dialogue Language

The language of dialogue must possess the element of mildness. The best way to present language in a mild way is to use euphemism. Kenworthy (1994) defines euphemism as "a linguistic device which recognizes the convention and attitude of society". Mukenzi (1992) commenting on the disguising capability of euphemism says, "euphemism has strange effect on people's mind because although what the euphemism actually means is known or can be deduced generally seems to find the news far less shocking than if it had been told bluntly or directly."

This is then to say that the language of dialogue will be more effective for achieving intent if hurting expression is said in a mild way through the use of euphemism. A speaker

does not make an open attack of his opponent; rather, he, in a polite manner responds. Very often, a superficial view is taken of politeness in spoken language. It is associated with being superficially 'nice', and with formal mechanical extras such as the word 'please' and 'thank you' and use of special constructions such as 'would you mind ...' or 'could you ...' or 'I wonder if you could ...' Brown and Levinson (1987), for instance, emphasize the way in which speech acts threaten a recipient's sense of face and how politeness strategies are used to mitigate this threat. For example, the way we minimize the imposition of asking someone to take out the rubbish by saying things like "It would be very kind of you to take out the bin", or "I know it's a pain, but would you be so kind as to take out the rubbish?" It is clear from the above discussion on euphemism that, appropriate use of it in dialogue help to avoid triggering the listener either to break conversational rule in process or to attempt making a wrong assumption about the speaker. Many things that might be considered as abuse, insult or ridicule may not irritate the listener when said as euphemism.

Suggestions

It is necessary that the language of dialogue possesses all the elements discussed above. A successful dialogue has to be conducted in a language that is not offensive to both warring factions. It is vital before the commencement of any dialogue meant to resolve a conflict to intimate the two conflicting parties with the nature of the language of dialogue with particular reference to the conversational rules like turn-taking and topic maintenance. It is also of great importance for the mediator to be conversant with these linguistic devices to bring erring factions to order when they use inappropriate language. Using appropriate language will prevent insinuation.

It is equally important to include the study of dialogue or conversational principles in the school syllabus. This will help students to learn and be able to use it appropriately.

Conclusion

The paper is a review of linguistic pattern of the language of dialogue. The need for a proper understanding of the language of dialogue is not in doubt. The country at present desperately needs to have dialogue as a means of making peace. This is informed by the fact that, currently, the nation is facing political and other kinds of crises such as religious, tribal, sectional, and inter and intra community crises. The only solution to these crises is to invite all the parties involved to have dialogue in a very meaningful way. In fact, with dialogue there will be peaceful coexistence and this will no doubt lead to national development and enhance a bright future to Nigeria.

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