Lexical Relations as Communicative Strategies for Language Teachers in Nigeria

Idowu,Olubunmi A.
Department of Languages and Literary StudiesBabcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The ultimate goal of every teacher as of any other communicator is to be communicatively efficient. A teacher wishes to be understood as clearly as possible on any subject matter taught. However for the language teachers, their efforts are usually met with challenges that are beyond their control such as inequity among students socioeconomically, as wellas closing the proficiency and achievement gaps between students of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, this paper explores the possibility of employing lexical relations as a tool for harmonizing the text and its context, using the homiletics style of second language situation. Situated within the Systemic Functional Grammatical theory which is based on linguistic choices depending on the context, the homiletic style can be applied to any other context such as the classroom. The cohesive properties of the text in terms of reiteration and collocation, can be employed by a language teacher to boost his communicative dynamism and efficacy, in spite of the heterogeneous nature of his audience. Realizing the inseparable nature of language and culture, this study is expected to help teachers create a conducive environment for teaching the standards of the English language and improving the proficiency level of learner as much as possible. Therefore, teachers can be seen as excited participants of highly interactive classroom sessions rather than preachers of textbooks.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Lexical relations are complementary cohesive tools to grammatical relations in the creation of texts. The creation of texts is a linguistic process of harmonizing thoughts with the message and the context of language use. Incidentally, the interconnection between thought, message and context is the emphasis of the Systemic Functional Grammatical (SFG) theory, onwhich this study is based. The SFG consideration of language is quite appropriate for this study because as the commonest social behaviour, the teaching of English as a second language will be more rewarding for both the teachers and students when done with respect to the different possible contexts and aspects of language use. Thus, the study of lexical

relations using the SFG, a highly communicative approach to language learning, is expected to improve the communicative strategies and competence of teachers, as well as equip learners with a wide range of properly-contextualized vocabulary for communicative competence (spoken or written) and enable appropriateapplication of acquired language skills stylistically, syntactically, and discourse analytically.

Teaching generally now takes place in a more pragmatic circumstance than it used to be. In the present highly technologically-advanced society, the teaching of English especially in a second- language context has become more productive and interesting, in the present very dramatic and controversial times that we live in. As opposed to the rigid and restricting study of grammatical rules   and historical literature of Aristotle and Plato, the study of language now includes the other aspects such as the various possible contexts of language use as determined by the purposes (media ICT, Scientific experiment, speech writing, politics, or, medicine); status of the speakers (in terms of their occupation, religious beliefs, age range, sex); and other more realistic sociolinguistic factors. The various sociolinguistic factors have enriched as well as enhanced linguistic appropriateness or communicative efficiency of both the teachers and the learners. Consequently, the teacher can be more pragmatic, creative and diversified in his approaches as he teaches in a lively and exciting environment.

Moreover, it has been discovered that only ten per cent of lectures are retained by students. Therefore, there will be a greater level of internalization and application of learners' linguistic knowledge of the second language, if teachers provide them with everyday language structure of events that can boost learners' confidence and competence level in their use of English and widen their vocabulary and disciplinary knowledge. Thus, this paper is proposing that the teaching of lexical relations should be adapted to impact linguistic knowledge as communicative competently as possible, as well as improve learners' strategic

competence (the ability to apply one's linguistic knowledge in communicative events) maximally.

Lexical relations in texts are responsible for most instances of cohesive ties or networkthat occur in text to createcohesion. As a semantic concept, cohesion generally enhances meaning and comprehension of texts (spoken or written). Therefore in this work, some sample texts from various disciplines will be used to explicate the various types of lexical relations and how knowledge of this nature can affect language teaching in Nigeria to impact an accurate knowledge of English syntactically, stylistically and discourse analytically.

II.   STATUS OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

The English language is about the most important legacy of the British Colonial government left for Nigerians. It is an important means of communication for most Nigerians of diverse cultures who speak multiple mutually unintelligible languages of about 400 (Bamgbose, 1971). As a neutral language, English serves as the lingua franca (Ogu, 1992) that unites the heterogeneous multiplicity of languages and cultures in Nigeria. In addition, the importance of English language to Nigeria can further be substantiated by its international role of connecting Nigeria to other countries around the world that have different other languages. Also, English has been a reliable means of preserving history and transmitting the cultural values of Nigeria to future generations and other nations especially, through several historical and literary texts. Within Nigeria, English is the main official language used for conducting all transactions (oral or written) in education,commerce, administration of justice, the Civil Service and other official matters. Thus, English occupies the enviable position of a second language in Nigeria, which most people wish to learn and use appropriately because it has gradually become a status symbol.

III.   TEACHING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

Teaching generally speaking can be complex. As a second language in a linguistically complex context such as Nigeria, the teaching of the English language is not an easy venture. However, it can be quite an exciting task if the teacher is adequately prepared for it. The teacher's preparationhereby goes beyond having the knowledge of the various teaching methodologies and testing techniques, to also providing conducive, positive and stimulating learning atmosphere. Bearing in mind the possible interference of the various already-acquired first language (Hausa, Igbo, Efik and Yoruba tomention a few) on the new second language (English), an efficient teacher will need to intelligently choose the teaching and testing approaches that will be highly communicative. Consequently, both the learners and the teachers can have very rewarding experiences.

Any form of good communication (spoken or oral) should create a unified impression on the mind of the reader or hearer. In order to achieve this, the speaker or writer should have a clearly defined theme through which his subject matter will be made meaningful and relevant (Gbenedio, 1996). Therefore, this paper will consider the teaching of lexical relations, an important aspect of cohesion, to exemplify how to create a stimulating learning environment which will in turn enhance the communicative strategies of language teachers in Nigeria, and in most other English-as- a- second- language contexts.

3.1 The Utilizations of lexical Relations in TeachingEnglish Language

Lexical relations are semantic concepts that refer to the different meaning relationships of words within a text, to render the text easy to understand. In addition, a unified lasting impression thus created will be exciting and stimulating for both the teachers and the learners in a teaching process. Consequently, this paper will consider the different lexical relations namely, Synonymy Antonymy, Polysemy, Hyponymy and Collocation,

within short passages of various themes such as relationships, homily, education and IT (information Technology). A linguist observes that it has been a common practice among teachers to 'always pull the break' at those interactive points of the lesson when learners should discover the 'individual and social meanings'. Therefore, he suggests that teachers should expand and deepen the contextual parameters of 'classroom dialogue' (Kramsch, 2001).

In the following excerpt, assuming that a lecturer wishes to teach the use of lexical relations using this paragraph on relationships,

You cannot be <u>submissive</u> in this situation. Don't <u>surrender</u> toher <u>unhappiness</u>! You must <u>exemplify</u> this type of person you want your <u>roommate</u> to be. Show her how to be <u>cheerful</u> by being <u>cheerful</u> yourself. When she makes a <u>depressing</u> comment, respond with a <u>positive</u> view. Most people prefer to be around <u>amiable</u> people, and your <u>roommate</u> need to see that. Takeher out of the town and let her see how people respond to a <u>warm</u>greeting and <u>friendly</u> face. If this plan doesn't work, start looking for anew <u>roommate</u>. (Olsen. 2005)

The teacher can ask students to take each of the underlined words and match it with any other underlined word(s) in the text above with the purpose of discovering the semantic relationships between them, as well as the contextual implications which will enhance the accurate comprehension levels of the learners. In addition to the very obvious repetitions of'roommate' and 'cheerful' twice and once respectively, the following relationships are evident between the words of the text;

Synonyms:'submissive' and 'surrender'
'Unhappiness' and 'depressing'
        'Amiable'' 'warm' and 'friendly'
        'cheerful' and 'positive'

Antonyms: - 'positive' and 'depressing'
'Cheerful' and 'unhappiness'

The various synonymous and antonymous relationships discovered are sources of new vocabulary to enhance; learners' understanding of the excerpt's message on how to deal with

relationships generally by being 'cheerful' and 'positive', and not 'submitting' or 'surrendering' to 'unhappiness' and 'depressing comments'. Also specifically, the repetitions of 'roommate' and 'cheerful' project the focus (coping with roommate) of the general theme (Dealing with informal relationships). Lastly, the mere repetitions and reiteration of ideas as synonyms or antonyms create such a lasting impression on the listeners of such a text (if spoken by the teacher) or, readers (if written).   Similarly in the following homily excerpt,

Several people have different definitions for greatness but, they allagree on one thing and that is, 'to be <u>great</u> is to beoutstanding'; to be head and not tail; to be above and not beneath. So, to be great means to be outstanding, And Idecree to you now, beginning from today, in every area of your life, you will be outstanding in joy .u will be outstanding in success, you will be outstanding in <u>victory,</u> you will be <u>above</u>you will never be <u>beneath.</u> (Idowu, 2007).

The synonyms in the text above include:

'Great' and 'outstanding',
 'head' and 'above';
'Success', 'joy' and 'victory'
 While the antonyms are:
   'Head' and ' tail
   'Above': and 'beneath'

In addition to studying the words that are similar and opposite in meaning to acquire a wide range of vocabulary in this text for explicit understanding of the text, the teacher's simple repetition of 'greatness' and 'outstanding' clarifiestheseveral implications of the words in the homiletic style, as well as emphasizes the specific theme of the text, which is 'Destined For Greatness' to the learners. Although in a different context such as describing a lizard, 'head ' and 'tail 'may refer to specific parts of an animal, or the 'beginning 'and 'end 'of a story

or incident in narrating context; in the above text, they refer to leadership or superior versus followership or subordinate.   '

Moreover, in the following excerpt on Education,

Readingis one of the essential skills in this world, and
parentsand other adults can nurture that skill in children.
The easiest way to facilitate readingdevelopment in children
is to read to them aloud. When parents, grandparents,
aunts,uncles, or neighbours take the time to readto
children, childrenbecome interested in the reading
process.... Most expertsrecommendthat parents adhere to
at least a half hour a day ofreading to a child to develop an
interest in reading (Qlsen, 2005).

The text is highly focused and explicit as exemplified by the copious instances of repetition of reading' (seven times), 'skill' (twice), 'children' (five times), and 'develop' (once), apart from the anaphoric reference to nurture, earlier in the text. The different forms of repetition emphatically project the theme of 'creating readers', and the specific subject matter of 'developing reading skills in children'.

Other instances of lexical relations that can enhance communicative strategies of teachers and learners are Polysemy and Hyponymy. The text clearly illustrates a possible relation of polysemy with the hyponymous lexical relation involving a collocational set of 'parents', 'grandparents', 'aunts', 'uncles" or 'neighbours',and their anaphoric referent, 'adults'. The collocational set (which are co-hyponyms) clearly exemplifies the 'adult' (the shared superordinate word), that can "nurture the reading skills in children'. The hyponyms relationship thereby renders the text easy for comprehension, and gives room for another lexical relation of polysemy. The polysemic relation is made possible through the meaning inclusion capability of the super ordinate word, 'adult' that has several implications expressed through the collocational set.The last lexical relation to be considered as a means of improving the strategiccompetence of language learners in second language situations is the use of collocation.

Collocation is another form of lexical cohesion which makes use of vocabulary to createtexture. However, it is not simply a matter of association of ideas through words but alsoconstitutes a part of the meaning of a word through the company of other words that it keeps based on the context of situation and the levels of linguistic analysis (Palmer, 2002).Although collocation is largely determined by meaning, it is sometimes fairly idiosyncratic and cannot be easily predicted in terms of the meaning of the associatedwords. Such a co-occurrence of words can be defined as the tendency of two lexicalitems to appear in similar contexts for the purpose, of creating texture (See Halliday andHasan, 1984). For instance, 'folk tales of princes' is expected to collocate with 'princess'

'kings', or 'queens' ;, 'soldiers' with 'wars' or 'weapons' ; 'schools' with 'students',teachers' , 'tables', 'chairs', and 'classrooms' ; to mention a few. However, it important to note the fact that the collocation of words differs from one register to theregister. For instance, 'examination' in the educational field with respect to 'students', will collocate withinvigilation', 'answer sheets, 'question   papers' etc., while in the   medical field, 'examination' with respect to 'patients' will collocate with 'research', 'laboratory', 'tests', 'specimen', etc. Thus,collocations constitute an indispensable part of the English used in a second languagesituation. ;

Using an excerpt on An Online Course, the simple co-occurrence of technical computer terms is defining and veryeducative on the IT register. Here is the sample text toexemplify this;

 All Online University courses   require access to a <u>computer</u>
thatisequipped with a browser such as <u>Netscape Navigator</u>
or Microsoft<u>Internet Explorer</u> and the capability to
<u>download</u>materials from designated sites. IT 100 is not a
course for the novice.The student, must already have some
familiarity navigating the WorldWide Web using e-mail, and
locating information with <u>search engines.</u>You should also be

familiar with <u>word processing</u> software, since youwill be
required to submit homework assignment and quizzes in the
form of attachments to your <u>e-mail</u> program (Olsen, 2005).

The underlined lexical items above are typical of the IT (Information Technology) register. While 'Online'/ Browser", "Netscape Navigator', ' Microsoft', 'Internet Explorer', 'download', 'e-mail', 'word processing' and' 'software' are solely used in IT contexts, 'web' 'search engines', and 'attachment' can be used in other contexts. This kind of co-occurrence of lexical items contributes to the professional comprehension of a text and emphasizes accuracy in the use of words because the main purpose of learning a language is to communicate with it. The language teacher should therefore aim at improving learners' communicative competence in the language, especially the appropriate use of the language in the various possible contexts of communication. Consequently, the learners' strategic competence which is an essential part of communicative competence will be enhanced.

In a multilingual and consequently a multicultural second language context of English like Nigeria, English language teachers should strive to encourage excellence in their classes, in spite of the challenge to close the achievement gaps of students from different cultural and socio economic backgrounds. Although the Nigerian language teachers are actually faced with challenges that they cannot control, such as increasing class sizes; students from varied socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds who often use the Nigerian Pidgin , Slangs and the non- standard English forms ; lack of adequate facilities;and unfriendly language environment, to mention a few; they need to insist on excellence. An ideal language classroom should emphasize accuracy and meaning in order toovercome the use of some common non-standard English forms such as;

(a) I need to pay the money for my school fees.
(b) They want to off my dress.
(c) Why are you <u>offing</u> your shoes in the classroom?
(d) Don't I off the light.

(e) They (mummy) are calling you.

A sound knowledge of English synonyms would have clearly indicated that the use of 'off and 'offing in (b-d) above, are incorrect for expressing the acts of removing' in (b) and (c), and 'switching off in (d). The same level of lexical knowledge would have signaled that, the use of'money' and 'school fees' as in (a) is an unnecessary repetition or mere tautology. Finally' in (e), the insistence on the excellent use of personal pronounswould have corrected the use of the plural pronoun, 'they' (culturally used for respect as an honorific pronoun), to 'she' for 'mummy'.

As exhibited above, the potentials of lexical relations employed within various contexts of language use to stimulate and enhance the strategic competence of English language learners as maximally as possible, are enormous and significant. The different instances of synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms emphasize the keywords and sub-themes of the various illustrating excerpts by highlighting and clarifying the key concepts that can aid the learner's memory and their focus on the theme. Similarly, the distinctive collocation sets educate learners as they clarify meanings, demystify misconceptions of Keywords and define the various registers of occurrence. Consequently, the teaching of lexical relations by language teachers in Nigeria or any other second language situation will not only contribute to the communicative level of language teachers, but also amplify the level of comprehension of learners and their strategic competence (learners' appropriate application of the linguistic knowledge in communicative events).

Finally, in Nigeria where English occupies an enviable position of a second language, and language teachers face several socioeconomic and cultural challenges, the sociolinguistic approach to language teaching and teaming is more rewarding for both teachers and learners because it is communicative. Although language teachers make a lot of efforts to teach English for grammatical eloquence since grammar is rule-governed, language learners should

not be educated merely for tests, or 'bookish English', (Gbenedio, 1996), but for

communicative competence syntactically, stylistically and discourse analytically too.

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