An Inextricable Interaction and Interrelationship between Applied Linguistics and Philosophical-linguistics

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Abstract

There is a close and narrow relationship between linguistics and philosophy. Throughout the history, they have had tremendous influences upon each other. Linguistics has always tried to look and analyze meaning from different angles. By the same token, philosophers have always tried to use and apply words and their meanings in different physical and linguistic contexts. Philosophers select and use words and phrases very carefully. It is because words and phrases are their only tools and means of transferring their thoughts and ideas. In this way, linguists try to analyze these words and phrases from different points of view, whether morphology, semantics, or pragmatics. In this article, we try to study words and their meanings from semantic and pragmatic perspective. In this regard, the key concepts that play a role in philosophy are scrutinized which include denotation (core meaning) and connotation (additional, emotional, and attitudinal meaning). Meanwhile, some other important ways of analyzing philosophical texts are considered based on presupposition, cohesion, and coherence. It is hoped that this article to be useful and helpful to both linguists and philosophers.

Keywords: pragmatics, semantics, philosophy, linguistics

Introduction

Generally, philosophical-linguistics has a long history. It can be stated that linguistics is the scientific study of language. It has the means and tools of analyzing language. Therefore, linguists can dismantle and scrutinize the language that is produced by the philosophers. On the other hand, it can be argued that what makes philosophy more fascinating and attractive is the type of language that is used by the philosophers. The philosophers opt for the words and phrases very meticulously in order to transfer their thoughts and cognitions. It can be safely and cautiously claimed that philosophers play with the words and phrases. That is, words and phrases are the tools, means, and instruments of the philosophers. Therefore, the building blocks of effective and efficient philosophy consist of their special terms and jargons. It is this connotative (attitudinal, affective, emotional) side of meaning which makes their language more impressive and interesting. The philosophers use not only the core meaning (denotative meaning) of the words but also they use the additional meaning of the words. In this way, they can tactically and strategically convince and persuade as well as attract their audiences (readers and hearers). It is important to mention that sometimes one key word can provoke lots of thoughts and ideas. Socrates used to spend his days in Athens's marketplace and pose different and difficult questions. For instance, he asked, what is justice? What is courage? What is wisdom? What is temperance? What is friendship? What is virtue? What is knowledge? Therefore, any key words like the above-mentioned ones instigated people to gather around him to think deeply and hard and discuss about them. Therefore, words sometimes become the means and ways of thinking and acting. It is the words that move us beyond our current knowledge and make us to discover ideas and concepts more profoundly. In this universe we always try to seek, learn, and understand everything. As Plato contends, "Education isn't what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes … the power to learn is present in every soul …" (Cooper, Republic, 518b-c).

Pragmatics

Word of "Pragmatics" in philosophy deals with *utterances*, by which we will mean specific events, the intentional acts of speakers at times and places, typically involving language. Logic and semantics traditionally deal with properties of *types* of expressions, and not with properties that differ from token to token, or use to use, or, as we shall say, from utterance to utterance, and vary with the particular properties that differentiate them. Pragmatics is sometimes characterized as dealing with the effects of *context*. This is equivalent to saying it deals with utterances, if one collectively refers to all the facts that can vary from utterance to utterance as 'context.' One must be careful, however, for the term is often used with more limited meanings.[1]

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1. For more informations about philosophical meaning of pragmatics see this link: Pragmatic in https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pragmatics/ First published Tue Nov 28, 2006; substantive revision Wed Aug 21, 2019

Pragmatics can be simply defined as the practical use of language in different contexts and situations. Richards, et al. believe that in order to interpret and understand a sentence, we need "knowledge of the real world" (1992, p. 284). In this process, language structures also play a role, i.e. writers and readers need to have knowledge of the structure of the phrases and sentences. More importantly, the way in which words, phrases, and sentences are arranged and ordered affects the interpretation of what is communicated. At the one end of the continuum, there are words, and at the other end, there is the writer and his/her intention of writing. The words that are used are studied through semantics and the intentions behind the words are studied through pragmatics.

Therefore, understanding a sentence or a text depends on context and the intentions of writers. We need to know the individual meanings of the words and what the writers mean by using those words. Yule emphasizes that pragmatics is the study of "invisible meaning, or how we recognize what is meant even when it isn't actually said or written" (2006, p. 112). For this reason, writers and readers need to rely on shared expectations and assumptions. It means that the more they have in common, the better they can understand each other. However, if their background assumptions differ, then the gap becomes deeper and understanding consequently suffers a lot. The shared and mutual expectations help to transfer more information than is written down. For instance, consider the word 'faculty' which has four main meanings based on the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*:

1- any of the physical or mental abilities: e.g., the faculty of sight.
2- a particular ability for doing something: e.g., the faculty of understanding complex issues.
3- a group of departments in a university: e.g., The Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages.
4- all the teachers in a faculty of a university: e.g., faculty members (2004, p. 450).

It is clear that we can make sense of the word 'faculty' by relying on the context in which it is used. Otherwise, it is difficult to know which one of them the writer wants to imply and impart. Then, we activate our schemata on the word 'faculty' and focus on the different meanings of the word. After that, we narrow down the particular and intended meaning. We study the context in which the word 'faculty' appears and occurs. Finally, we activate our pre-existing knowledge to recognize and arrive at the actual meaning which is intended by the producer of the sentence. These processes or stages of interpretation and comprehension of meaning happens so fast and in a matter of milliseconds. In this way, we actively focus on creating an understanding and interpreting of what we read and hear.

In fact, it is the context that determines the specific and intended meaning. As it has become clear up to now, we can identify several types of context. One of them is called 'linguistic context' or 'co-text'. The linguistic context or co-text comprises the set of words that appear before or after the specific word in the phrase or sentence. Therefore, in order to specify and locate the specific meaning of a word, we heavily rely on the surrounding co-text. For example, take the word 'student'. The word 'student' can refer to a primary school, high school, or university student.

It is, of course, the linguistic context that determines which sense of the word 'student' is intended by the writer. We can also consider an abstract word like 'means'. Let us see the different senses of this word by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*:

1- An action, an object, or a system by which a result is achieved; a way of achieving or doing something: e.g., philosophy is a means of studying the human being and the world.

2- The money that a person has: e.g., He doesn't have the means to pay his university tuition fees (2004, p. 194).

The first sense of the word 'means' refers to the ways of doing something in which philosophy acts as an instrument of penetrating into human nature and our physical world and the beyond. In this way, the physical context can reveal the writer's intentions.

Meanwhile, there are some words that their meaning heavily depends on the surrounding context. These words are as follows:

You, he, them, it, now and then, today,
Yesterday, this, that, here, there, etc.

For example, consider the following sentence:

Since the holidays begin this week, I will not be here, till next month. Bring it after I give you a message.

We really do not know, or it is difficult to guess, who is talking to whom, when, where, and why. However, this text is about a university professor who is talking to one of his students and asks him to bring his finished thesis after the summer holidays. Therefore, the individual meanings of these words are made clear within a specific context. These words (e.g., you, he, them, it …) are called deixis or deictic expressions. The field of philosophy is abundant with these words. Therefore, the context or physical text can bring to light their specific meaning.

In philosophy 'reference' plays a key role. That is, it may refer to places, times, or people. It is the people that make the act of reference rather than the words. By making reference, the writers make it possible for the readers to pinpoint a person or a thing. The writers carry out the act of reference by using pronouns (we, she, they), proper nouns (Plato, Aristotle, Magee), or nouns within phrases (a philosopher, a logician, his article). It is difficult or hard to assume that these words identify a specific person or thing. It can be revealed that for each word or phrase, we can identify a range of references. Therefore, the words such as 'Magee', 'they', or 'logician' can refer to many entities in the universe of discourse. For example, the word 'philosopher' may refer to different types of people in the world. It depends who is using it, to whom, in what context, etc. Therefore, the word 'philosopher' in one context may refer to 'Aristotle' and in another context to 'Avicenna' and so on. Also, 'reference' may refer to different types of places. For instance, the word 'academy' in the following sentence refers to a place in Athens, which was founded by Plato around 387 B.C.:

The Academy was founded by Plato where he taught there as far as 347 B.C.

However, the word 'academy' is not limited to this specific place. In recent times, many educational institutes call and name their places as 'academy'. Therefore, it is the context that determines the specific reference and meaning. In this regard John Dewey writes, "Neglect of context is the besetting fallacy of philosophical thought" (Press, 2010, p. 23).

In general, a reader of a philosophical text combines his/her dictionary knowledge with the shared background information in order to make sense of the content. For instance, if two persons talking to each other, which happens that both of them are philosophers and one of them produces the following utterance:

A: Can I have a look at your Republic?
And the other one answers back:
B: Yes, of course, it's on the table over there.

This example illustrates that we can use abstract or concrete nouns to refer to specific things or people. In the above-mentioned example, the speaker refers to a specific book called 'The Republic' which was written by Plato. What happened in the aforementioned instance is a process which is called 'inference'. Therefore, since these two people have lots of shared information about the field of philosophy, they can make appropriate connection between what is said and what is meant. Creating inferences by the readers and hearers makes it possible for them to understand one another. It is clear that when lay or ordinary people read a text on dialectics, phenomenology, existentialism, etc. which are very complicated subjects and topics in philosophy and logic, they can barely make any effective and appropriate inferences.

In philosophical texts writers usually introduce new referents (e.g., book) and refer back to them (e.g., the book, it). For example, consider the following sentence (an online source):

A young Macedonian prince by the name of Alexander was taught for four years by his teacher, Aristotle.

In the above example, at first, the indefinite article 'a' (A young Macedonian prince) is used. It is because 'Alexander the great' is first mentioned and might be unknown to the readers. Then, after identifying whom the writer is talking about, Alexander is determined by the definite article 'the' (the name of Alexander). Also, there is another referring expression (his teacher) which refer forward to Aristotle. In philosophical texts reference and referring expressions play a key role. Sometimes, writers use pronouns (he, she, they, I), in other times they use synonyms (developed = advanced), or another noun (a teacher, mentor, instructor) or even an antonym in order to make a text more appealing. However, if writers merely repeat the same name or noun, the text becomes monotonous and loses its attraction to the

readers. For instance, in the following text the name of Aristotle is mentioned and then in order to avoid being repetitious the pronoun 'he' is used (an online source):

Aristotle is famous for writing about all aspects of the world. He wrote about poetry, ethics (standards of behavior), logic, rhetoric (the art of using language), weather, and more. In fact, he studied and wrote about every part of science that was then known and he is still considered one of the greatest thinkers of all time.

Therefore, by using the pronoun 'he', the writer refers back to Aristotle. In this way, there is a connection and neatness about the text which means that the text has 'cohesion' (Halliday & Hasan 1976). Cohesion is concerned with the grammaticality of a text that results in the meaningfulness of it which is called 'coherence'. Also, by using different types of connectors or discourse markers (e.g., in the above text: and, in fact), the writers tie words, phrases and sentences together and create a meaningful network. As a result, by using cohesive ties, such as pronouns or discourse markers, a text assumes its correct structure and becomes grammatically appropriate, i.e. cohesion is formed and created. Meanwhile, cohesion by and in itself alone does barely make a text meaningful. Therefore, we need coherence in order for a text to be sensible, logical, and acceptable by the readers.

An important point about comprehending a text is the concept of 'presupposition'. When a referring expression such as 'they, she, this, or Spinoza' is used, it is automatically assumed that the readers can easily recognize which referent is intended by the writer. In fact, the writers produce their written materials based on shared assumptions with their readers. Therefore, what a writer assumes that is already known or accepted by a reader can be called a 'presupposition'. For instance, look at the following passage (an online source):

Plato's books are called dialogues. These were written in the form of conversations that students would have to study and discuss in order to uncover the true meaning of the world. In them he wrote about dance, music, drama, architecture, religion, politics, mathematics, and more.

By studying this passage, we normally assume and presume that

– Plato was a writer,
– he used to write books,
– he had some students,
– he was a teacher,
– they discussed the dialogues,
– and finally he wrote about varied and various subject matters.

The reason that the issue or concept of presupposition is important is because of the 'economy of writing'. The writers usually try to provide their readers with lots of information only with some limited type of their writings. However, if a writer tries to impart each and every detail about somebody or something, the texts become redundant, boring, verbose, and repetitious. Therefore, the writers take it for granted that their readers can deduce and presuppose the details for themselves.

Semantics

Semantics can be simply defined as the scientific study of meaning of the words. Meaning in a language can be studied from different approaches and perspectives. Generally, philosophers have concentrated on the relationship between the words, people and things to which they refer. That is, they have focused on 'reference' and 'signs' (Richards, et al. 1992). However, linguists have centered their focus on the way in which meaning is built. Also, linguists have attempted to differentiate between different types of meaning, i.e. denotation and connotation.

The important point that has been debated by philosophers for over 2000 years is that 'What is meaning?' There is barely any definite answer to this question. Lyons believes that the reason for the problematic nature of meaning lies in two types of presuppositions: "(a) what we refer to, in English, with the word 'meaning' has some kind of existence or reality (presupposition of existence); (b) that everything referred to as meaning is similar, if not identical, in nature (the presupposition of homogeneity)"(Lyons 1990, p. 136). However, Lyons (ibid.) believes that meaning cannot exist independently of any language, i.e. meaning depends mostly on a particular language. Meanwhile, meaning is not or cannot be homogenous in nature. That is, meaning is heterogeneous and sometimes untidy in its nature.

In fact, the ideas and concepts that individuals have about the events and people are the meanings and create meanings. These meanings can be transferred from the mind of one individual to the mind of another individual. The ideas might sometimes be realized by speech and sometimes in the written form. However, it is a little bit difficult to define concepts and ideas. It is because different people with different backgrounds have different concepts and ideas. It might be that concepts are assumed as visual or mental images that each person has. However, these images differ from one individual to another. For instance, we can consider the word 'university'. Sometimes it has a common conception for a particular community, and sometimes it is variable. Some people try to go to university to seek and pursue knowledge, but some people go to university in order to get a degree and find a job. So the cultures differ in their way of approaching and defining a word and its meaning. However, we assume that people use words somehow in the same way and with the same meaning. The mental or visual images that we retrieve to use in our daily life through the words of our language may not necessarily relate to the specific meaning that people use. It is because different people have different impressions about the words and their uses.

Lyons (1990, p. 137) suggests that instead of asking "what is meaning", we had better say "what is the meaning of meaning". It makes sense because in a field like philosophy meaning is shaped and materialized based on the philosophers' worldview and background knowledge. In the field of philosophy meaning gets its senses based on the shared views held by the community of philosophers. In fact, there is hardly any boundary for semantics. A particular word assumes different layers of meaning for different people. Therefore, the meaning of a specific word resides in the mind of an individual person, family, community, city, and the whole nation. For example, consider the following question:

What is the meaning of philosophy?

It is a very broad question. It may simply refer to the academic field of philosophy which is studied at universities around the globe. However, we can talk about 'the philosophy of life' which is very extensive in its sense. Also, we can talk about 'the philosophy of human beings very existence in the world' and/or in our planet earth. Therefore, the word meaning can mean different things in different contexts.

Lexical meaning and sentence meaning

We can generally distinguish between word meaning on the one hand, i.e. lexical meaning, and sentence meaning of the words on the other hand, i.e. sentence meaning. Words have their own core specific meaning in isolation. That is, words without context have very broad and general meaning. However, when the same word is used in a specific sentence, it gets a very narrow meaning. For instance, the word 'logical' has two meanings based on *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2004, p. 756-7):

1- (Of an action, event, etc.) seeming natural, reasonable or sensible.
2- Following or able to follow the rules of logic in which ideas or facts are based on other true ideas or facts.

The important point about the meaning of a word is the semiotic or communicative function that it plays. Wittgenstein (1961) proposes that the meaning of a word is realized and materialized with its use. The traditional views of language put the emphasis on the propositional or factual information. But it is known that meaning has many aspects and sides. Words can play different functions based on the context in which they appear and the language users' intentions.

In the field of philosophy the individual words get their meaning inside the phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and the whole texts. In fact, words in isolation or without context barely make any sense. Therefore, the line of thought that a philosopher tries to make depends on the chain of words that he/she orders through phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. A philosopher needs to choose his/her words very meticulously. It is because the point that a philosopher tries to make depends upon the words that he/she chooses. As Hyland points out the words that are opted for should be effective and impressive enough in order to convince and persuade the readers and hearers (Hyland , 2006).

Language and thought

One of the important pints in philosophy is the relationship between language and thought. When a philosopher proposes a theory or a proposition, we surmise how or in what ways he/she has come up with that idea. The writer of the present article suggests the following formula:

Knowledge (science of the subject matter) + experience + thinking =Theory and/or proposition

A philosopher gains knowledge or the subject matter through years of studying, whether academically or non-academically. Then, through the passage of time, he/she garners and accumulates enough experience of the subject matter and the world. The philosopher combines or mixes knowledge and experience through his/her cognitive processes. That is, he/she involves or engages in thinking and sleeping over it as the time passes.

Herder (1772) contends that our language affects our thoughts and in the mean time our thoughts impact our language. In other words, thought and language are a two-way street in which mutual interaction and transfer occurs. However, in linguistics there is a theory which is called 'linguistic relativity'. Its proponents (Sapir, 1947; Whorf, 1956) argue that the way we view the world is determined by our native language structure. Some scholars believe that our language partly influences our worldview but others surmise that it strongly affects the way in which we view the world. This hypothesis has been known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or very simply Whorfian hypothesis. Whorf (1956, p. 213-4) states that "we dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages … by the linguistic systems in our minds".

Chomsky (1968) adopts a rationalist and/or traditional view and surmises that our thought is served by our language. The French philosophers Condillac (1746) and Rousseau (1755) and the German scholar Herder (1772) challenged the view that language serves the thought. Herder (ibid.) took the view that language and thought evolve together. Yule (2006) strongly opposes the view that we form and shape our worldview through our language. He believes that our language is a means and way of imparting what we think rather than the creator of it. Crystal (1990) also questions this view that the vocabulary and grammar of our language determines the way we perceive the world. It seems odd and implausible that our minds and our understanding of our immediate environment is patterned by our native language. All the human beings around the globe, no matter of their race, gender, and religion, have more or less the ability to think and use their minds. In fact, our mind is the center that controls and manages our actions, behaviors, speech, and performances.

Therefore, linguistic relativity or determinism can barely hold any credit in recent and modern times. It is somehow questionable and doubtful and holds little attraction among philosophers and linguists. There are numerous and varied elements or factors that determine our worldview among which language is but one of them. It can be mentioned that the factors that influence our thoughts might be our home or family background, genetics, immediate environment, level of education, relationship with other people, societal factors, to name just a few. As Brown (2014) argues, our cognition or thinking processes are affected by the so-called 'nature or nurture' factors. Generally, 'nature' is the physical environment where we are raised and grow. The other factor is the 'nurture', i.e. the amount of education, attention, training, and care that we receive from the very beginning of the childhood till the adulthood.

If we focus on the issue and study the way what element is important in philosophy, (language versus thought), we realize that both of them are the keys and basics in this field. First of all, the reason that a person is attracted to the field of philosophy is his/her interest in the meaning of life and human beings. The pursuit of knowledge, truth, and facts, instigates the person to study philosophy and

become philosopher. The epistemological motivation leads that individual toward the seeking of correct paths in life. Therefore, a philosopher is a discoverer of details of the world and existence in our planet earth and even beyond it. In this way, it is the philosopher's mind and thinking processes that leads him/her rather than a particular language that he/she speaks and uses. So the language that he/she uses becomes a vehicle to carry his/her thoughts. A philosopher possesses a high intellectual reasoning ability to impart his/her ideas. Here the reasoning ability plays a crucial role. It is this potentiality that translates what happens in his/her mind into words. These words should be beautiful, efficient, and effective enough in order to attract academic and non-academic people. The language that a philosopher uses flows from his/her thought processes. These thought processes need to be strong, smart, and sophisticated enough to differentiate and distinguish a philosopher from lay and ordinary people. The philosopher has high thinking ability and reasoning power which ordinary people barely have this capacity. It can be seen that philosophers study other people's works and minds and think about them. They study the nature and think about it. They talk to people and think about it. Therefore, thinking is an important part of their academic and professional life and carrier. Then, they express their attitudes through a meticulously selected style of language.

Denotative and connotative meaning

Denotative meaning refers to the original or main meaning of a word. Richards et al. (1992, p. 101) define it "as the central meaning or core meaning of a lexical item." Crystal (1990, p. 88) calls the denotative meaning as the "dictionary definition" of vocabulary items. Also, Meyer (2009, p. 152) defines it as "the dictionary sense of a word." For example, the core or central meaning of the word 'paper' is defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2004, p. 917) as "the thin material that you write and draw on and that is also used for wrapping and packing things." So all of us have some images or conceptions of the main meanings of the words.

However, the connotative meaning is different. Richards et al. (1992, p. 78) define the connotative meaning as "the additional meanings that a word or phrase has beyond its central meaning." The connotative meaning illustrates or carries our emotions and attitudes over and beyond the central meaning. Crystal (1990, p. 66) also refers to "the emotional associations (personal or communal) which are suggested by, or the part of the meaning of a lexical item." Meyer (2009, p. 152) describes connotation as "the associations a word evokes." Therefore, a piece of paper in its denotation refers to a white material. However, by its connotation it is defined by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2004, p. 917) as "an academic article about a particular subject that is written by and for specialists." To this end, connotations are shared by the same community of people who have similar background and world knowledge.

A vivid example of denotative and connotative meaning is the word 'philosophy'. The central meaning of this word that people use in their daily-based life means 'attitude', e.g., consider the following sentence (an online dictionary):

I have a very simple philosophy (= attitude to life) – enjoy life.

However, the connotative meaning of the word 'philosophy' is a little specialized which is mostly shared by the community of philosophers. Its definition is as follows (an online dictionary):

The search for knowledge and truth, especially about the nature of man and his behavior and beliefs: e.g., moral philosophy.

Conclusion

The fields of linguistics and philosophy are inextricably bound together. However, the field of philosophy is an uncharted territory. It is a land of thoughts and clashes of thoughts. When one enters this field, he/she is faced with varied and various ideas and concepts about life, the human beings, values, causality, God, universe, knowledge, and so on. The thoughts, ideas, and theories of the philosophers flow in this land. It can be interestingly called the land, territory, or field of philosophy, i.e. pursuit of truth, fact, value, knowledge, etc. As Aristotle states, "It is right also that philosophy should be called knowledge of truth. For the end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is action. Now we do not know a truth without its cause" (Metaphysics, 993b20-24, Barnes, 1995). The point is that every layperson can use and apply language in an argumentative and descriptive way in order to talk about different ideas and ideals. The ordinary people may use ordinary, simple and core language. However, a philosopher also uses the same or similar ideas but with a sophisticated and delicate genre of language. This language is more colorful, tasty, interesting and appealing. Therefore, the words and phrases, which are utilized by philosophers, are one or more steps over and beyond the ordinary language used by non-philosophers. However, the more general point that Aristotle makes is that "All men by nature desire to know" (Metaphysics, 980a22, Barnes, 1995).

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