

Semiotics: An Approach to Multidisciplinary Research

Abstract

The term Semiotics stands as the theory of interpreting meaning. The fundamental principle of this theory and study reflects that meaning should be expressed by the placements of acts and objects which function as "signs". In general terms it is the "theory of signs". Basically Semiotics is the science of communication and sign-systems. Its theories are based on "semiosis," the relationship between a sign, an object, and a meaning. In other words this research area shows how people interpret meaning by verbal and non verbal ways. Sign systems of Semiotics primarily include words, images, numbers, and objects. General semiotics permits us to describe any system of signs: texts, images, performances, multimedia productions, traffic signals, fashion, daily life, etc. There are specific semiotic systems (for text, images, musical symbols, multimedia, and so on) also that take into account the specifics of each system of signs. This research paper is focused on the introductory account of Semiotics and its branches opening ways to various research fields.

Keywords: Sign, System, Communication, Meaning, Interpretation.

Introduction

Semiotics is known as the study of meaning-making, sign processes and meaningful communication in other words the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation. The term Semiotics derives from the Greek term *sēmeiōtikos*, which means "observant of signs", It is the study of how meaning is created, This study focuses coherently with signs, sign processes (semiosis), indication, designation, likeness, analogy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication. Study of Semiotics is also associated with linguistics considering and exploring the structure and meaning of language and at the same time also studies non-linguistic sign systems.

Branches of Semiotics

Semiotics is divided into three branches:

Semantics

It focuses upon relation between signs and the referred things; their signified denotata, or meaning

Syntactics

It denotes relations among or between signs in formal structures

Pragmatics

It announces relation between signs and sign-using agents or interpreters.

Here is given a brief account how do these three streams of semiotics work.

Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning. The term is derived from Ancient Greek *sēmantikós*, meaning "significant". In linguistics, it makes connection with word form or signifiers which put forth the phonological or orthographic sound or appearance of a word that can be used to describe or identify something. Therefore Semantics stresses upon words, phrases, signs, and symbols, and how and what they stand for; their reference. Linguistic semantics is the study of meaning that is used for understanding human expression through language. In international scientific vocabulary semantics is also called semasiology.

The word semantics itself indicates the popular to the highly technical range of ideas. On the other hand it is often used in ordinary language for indicating a problem of understanding that appears to word selection or connotation. This problem of interpreting has been the aim of many formal enquiries especially in the field of formal semantics. In linguistics, it is the study of the interpretation of signs or symbols used in agents or communities within particular circumstances and contexts. Within

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this view, sounds, facial expressions, body language, and proxemics have semantic (meaningful) content, and each comprises several branches of study. In written language, things like paragraph structure and punctuation bear semantic content; other forms of language bear other semantic content.¹

The formal study of semantics intersects with many other fields of inquiry, including lexicology, syntax, pragmatics, etymology and others. Independently, semantics is also a well-defined field in its own right, often with synthetic properties.² In the philosophy of language, semantics and reference are closely connected. Further related fields include philology, communication, and semiotics. The formal study of semantics can therefore be manifold and complex.

Semantics contrasts with syntax, the study of the combinatorics of units of a language (without reference to their meaning), and pragmatics is the study of the relationships between the symbols of a language, their meaning, and the users of the language.³ Semantics as a field of study also has significant ties to various representational theories of meaning including truth theories of meaning, coherence theories of meaning, and correspondence theories of meaning. Each of these is related to the general philosophical study of reality and the representation of meaning.

Theories in semantics

Model Theoretic Semantics

It is a highly formalized theory of natural language semantics in which expressions are specified with denotations (meanings) such as individuals, truth values, or functions from one of these to another. The truth of a sentence and its logical relation to other sentences is evaluated relatively with the model.

Formal (or Truth-Conditional) Semantics

It aims to associate each natural language sentence with a meta-language description of the conditions under which it is true, for example: 'Sky is blue' is true if and only if sky is blue. The challenge is to arrive at the truth conditions for any sentences from fixed meanings assigned to the individual words and fixed rules for how to combine them. In practice, truth-conditional semantics is similar to model-theoretic semantics; conceptually, however, they differ in that truth-conditional semantics seeks to connect language with statements about the real world (in the form of meta-language statements), rather than with abstract models.

Lexical and Conceptual Semantics

This theory is an effort to explain properties of argument structure. The supposition behind this theory is that syntactic properties of phrases reflect the meanings of the words that head them⁴. With this theory, the stream of linguists can better deal with the fact that subtle differences in word meaning correlate with other differences in the syntactic structure that the word appears in. The way this is gone about is by looking at the internal structure of words. These small parts that make up the internal structure of words are termed semantic primitives.

Lexical Semantics

A linguistic theory that investigates word meaning. This theory understands that the meaning of a word is fully reflected by its context. So, the meaning of a word is constituted by its contextual relations.⁵ Therefore, a distinction between degrees of participation as well as modes of participation are made. In order to accomplish this distinction any part of a sentence that bears a meaning and combines with the meanings of other constituents is labeled as a semantic constituent. Semantic constituents that cannot be broken down into more elementary constituents are labeled minimal semantic constituents.

Computational Semantics

Computational semantics is focused on the processing of linguistic meaning. In order to do this concrete algorithms and architectures are described. Within this framework the algorithms and architectures are also analyzed in terms of decidability, time/space complexity, data structures they require and communication protocols.

Semantics (Computer Science)

In computer science, the term semantics refers to the meaning of languages, as opposed to their form (syntax). According to Euzenat, semantics "provides the rules for interpreting the syntax which do not provide the meaning directly but constrains the possible interpretations of what is declared."⁶ In other words, semantics is about interpretation of an expression. Additionally, the term is applied to certain types of data structures specifically designed and used for representing information content.

Programming Languages

The semantics of programming languages and other languages is an important issue and area of study in computer science. Like the syntax of a language, its semantics can be defined exactly.

Theories in Syntactics

Syntactics is the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language. It is a branch of linguistics (also a set of rules for or an analysis of this arrangement). It deals with the formal relations between signs or expressions in abstraction from their signification and their interpreters.

Syntactics has Some Derivatives

Theoretical Syntactics

In linguistics this is "the study of the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages."⁷

Here are some definitions to define syntactically,

1. A set of rules that govern how words are combined to form phrases and sentences,
2. Computing the formal rules of formulating the statements of a computer language,
3. Linguistics is the study of the structure of phrases, sentences and language⁸.
4. Moreover here are some definitions to define syntactic,
5. The formal relations between signs or expressions in abstraction from their signification and their interpreters" is called syntactics.⁹

For syntactics, a validation of concept is a practical demonstration of the systematized words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language, and also a set of rules for or an analysis of this arrangement.

Grammars

Grammar exists as the branch of syntactics and interpretations of grammar are well known but below mentioned definition depict its meaning very clearly ----

"Grammar is the set of structural rules that governs the composition of clauses, phrases, and words in any given natural language."

Syntactic Analysis

Analysis of syntactics remains most important while speculating its vast dimensions. The process of analyzing a text, structured with a sequence of words or to determine its grammatical structure with respect to a given (more or less) formal grammar is called syntactic analysis. It can also be understood well through below mentioned definition --
*resolving a sentence into component parts of speech and describing them grammatically"

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a sub - branch of linguistics and semiotics that explores the ways in which context brings meaning. Pragmatics comprehends speech representing theory, conversational implicature, verbal interaction and other approaches to language usage in philosophy, sociology, linguistics and anthropology. In other words it is a branch of linguistics concerned with the use of language in social contexts and the ways in which people produce and comprehend meanings through language. This subfield of linguistics developed in the late 1970s. Basically though pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a concrete speech situation which is usually a conversation but it also distinguishes two intents or meanings in each utterance or communicative act of verbal communication. One is the informative intent or the sentence meaning, and the other the communicative intent or speaker meaning¹⁰. The ability to comprehend and produce a communicative act is referred to as pragmatic competence which often includes one's knowledge about the social distance, social status between the speakers involved, the cultural knowledge such as politeness, and the linguistic knowledge explicit and implicit.

Nexus and Areas

Some of the facets of language studied in pragmatics include:

Deixis

Meaning 'pointing to' something. In verbal communication however, deixis in its narrow sense refers to the contextual meaning of pronouns, and in its broad sense, what the speaker means by a particular utterance in a given speech context.

Presupposition

Referring to the logical meaning of a sentence or meanings logically associated with or entailed by a sentence.

Performative

Implying that by each utterance a speaker not only says something but also does certain things: giving information, stating a fact or hinting an attitude. The study of performatives led to the hypothesis of Speech Act Theory that holds that a speech event embodies three acts: a locutionary act, an illocutionary act and a perlocutionary act¹⁰

Implicature

Referring to an indirect or implicit meaning of an utterance derived from context that is not present from its conventional use.

Apart from above mentioned areas Pragmatics also works to involve three major communication skills –

Using language for different purposes, such as,

1. Greeting (hello!, goodbye !)
2. Informing (I am leaving for school)
3. Demanding (Give me some chocolates)
4. Promising (I am going to get you a cup of coffee)
5. Requesting (please, pass me plate of)
6. Changing language (according to the needs of a listener or situation, such as 'talking differently to a baby than to an adult)
7. Giving background information to an unfamiliar listener
8. Speaking differently in a classroom than on a playground
9. Following rules for conversations and storytelling.

The pragmatic principles people abide by in one language are often different in another. Thus there has been a growing interest in how people in different languages observe a certain pragmatic principle. Cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies reported what is considered polite in one language is sometimes not polite in another. Contrastive pragmatics, however, is not confined to the study of a certain pragmatic principles. Cultural breakdowns, pragmatic failure, among other things, are also components of cross-cultural pragmatics.

Another focus of research in pragmatics is learner language or interlanguage. This interest eventually evolved into interlanguage pragmatics, a branch of pragmatics which specifically discusses how non-native speakers comprehend and produce a speech act in a target language and how their pragmatic competence develops over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can easily be observed that Semiotics is the stream in which any branch of studies related with humanities, social sciences, behavioural sciences can well conducted.

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