Co-Text and Implicature in Bi. Msafwari's Topical Discussions

Eunice N. Neyole[1]
Frida A. Miruka[2]
Deborah N. Amukowa[3]

[1]eunicewalela@yahoo.com
[2]fmiruka@mmust.ac.ke
[3]dnanyama@yahoo.com

[1,2]Department of Languages & Literature Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science & Technology, Kenya
[3]Department of Kiswahili and African Languages, Maseno University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Decoding meaning in communication depends on semantic properties assigned by grammar and the speaker's intended meaning. Therefore, it is necessary to infer the intended meaning from the cues the speaker provides in the utterance. In such a case, context bridges the explanatory gap between sentence meaning and the speaker's meaning. Context is fundamental for language comprehension because meaning is dependent on it. This implies that context makes clear the intended meaning of any communicative act. This study sought to demonstrate the role of co-text in adding additional meaning. The study focused on Bi. Msafwari's topical discussions. Data was collected through content analysis. It was analyzed through the interpretive method. The findings reveal that grammatical linguistic levels can be used to communicate indirectly through a shift in the motive of the sentence. The findings highlight the use of co-text in communicating indirectly. The study will also contribute literature to the critical discourse analysis of African languages.

Keywords: Co-text, Implicatures, Context, Topical Discussions

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I. INTRODUCTION

Co-text, also referred to as a linguistic situation, is the context within the discourse (Song, 2010). It is the relationship between the words, phrases, sentences, and even paragraphs. Co-text takes into consideration the verbal or linguistic context. The co-text of an item helps determine its form and meaning. Giovanni *et al.* (2011) Co-text in nature limits our range of possible interpretations that can be made for a word. It would be interesting to discover the pragmatic category of co-text through the use of conversational implicatures. This is due to the fact that the meaning obtained through inference depends on the individual addressee.

The term conversational implicature was used by Grice (1989) to account for what a speaker can imply, suggest, or mean as distinct from what the speaker literally says. Meaning is deduced by the addressee on the basis of the conversational meaning of words and the context. Implicatures point not to the literal meaning of an utterance but to an additional meaning inferred. Once the analysis of intended meaning goes beyond the literal meaning of an utterance, a vast number of issues have to be considered. Among them is dependence on co-text. Grice (1989) states that conversational implicature changes as the context changes. A deduction can therefore be made that implicatures go hand in hand with context.

Kiswahili is a Bantu language, spoken along the East African coastal strip, whose origin is the mouth of the river Sabaki (Nurse & Spear, 1985). Despite having its origins along the coastal strip, the Kiswahili language is spoken in many parts of the African continent and the rest of the world. Omwenga (2022) observes that Kiswahili is the official language of the East African Community (EAC) and the only official African language of the African Union (AU). Moreover, he indicates that it is the first language for the Swahili people, yet it is spoken as a lingua franca by over 150 million people in African countries such as Burundi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Mozambique. It is a national and official language in Kenya.

Bi. Msafwari is a family counselor who advises mainly on marital issues on the Kenyan Citizen TV channel. She joined Citizen TV in 2012 and, since then, has been given counsel in the program *Mawaidha na Bi. Msafwari,* which occurs every Saturday at 7.30 p.m. She employs a unique style of communication through the use of the Kiswahili language. Her works have been analyzed in this study for purposes of identifying how co-text communicates indirectly through implicatures.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Contextualization theory advanced by Levinson (1997). The theory holds the view that meaning is well understood in reference to contextual cues. Contextual cues are signaling mechanisms used by speakers to indicate how they mean what they say. In seeking for meaning the addressee can exploring what the utterance presupposes about the nature of context or the role of an utterance. The cues allow the interlocuters to better understand the interaction presented.

The basis of the theory is to bridge the gap between the said and the unsaid. This indicates that besides the lexical meaning, there is an additional meaning that is inferred from context. Context then is viewed as a set of propositions. This is obtained from the view that; utterances can create their own contexts. Context is then construed as the antecedent set of assumptions against which a message is construed. However, as Gordon (2014) pointed out, people's and cultures' backgrounds have a significant impact on how people use and interpret contextualization cues, which can include linguistic features like linguistic structure in words and syntax and paralinguistic features that are ubiquitous in interaction.

2.2 Empirical Review

Context plays a big role in the construction of meaning. As Dolores (2007) posits, context affects or directs the construction of meaning. He observes that context always comes first. This is to say, before the linguistic unit can be interpreted, This means that there is a large amount of information available to interlocutors that directs the process of meaning construction to determine which sense, from all possible ones, is to be selected. There are therefore many interpretations inferred from the contextual cues presented by the speaker. Context thus plays an essential role in the process of obtaining meaning.

As referred to in cognitive linguistics, words do not contain meaning. Instead, we use words as instructions to construct the meaning of linguistic expressions. Dolores adds that most words are polysemous, and their possible uses in different contexts are organized in radial prototypical categories. Consequently, both in the production and interpretation of utterances, there is a continuous process of selection among the possible senses where context plays a major role. As such, the meaning of a word goes far beyond the meaning of its parts.

Language has a magical property: when we speak or write, we craft what we have to say to *fit* the situation or context in which we are communicating (Gee, 1999). But, at the same time, how we speak or write *creates* that very situation or context. It seems, then, that we fit our language to a situation or context that our language, in turn, helped to create in the first place. Though it is not the intent of this study, Gee's remarks lead us to the "egg" and "chicken" question: which precedes the other? This serves to show how important context is in all situations of communication.

Interpreting communicative situations in terms of context models, according to van Dijk (2005), has many advantages. They account for the fact that the different participants may have different interpretations and hence different models of the current situation, and these different context models will also have different effects on what they say or write or on what they understand, possibly also leading to misunderstanding and conflict. Thus, context models may be seen as the crucial interface between actual discourse and the surrounding communicative situation, including the way participants represent themselves and others as speakers and hearers.

In addition, Yang & Hu (2022) observe that language communication does not take place in a vacuum but in a specific language environment. The specific environment in this case refers to context. He defines context as the environment that forms discourse and the key factor influencing comprehension. He points out that context is key in decoding meaning. Yang's study analyzed the disadvantages of the traditional way of analyzing discourse without considering the context. His study concluded that each type of context had a function in discourse analysis. For instance, the linguistic context's role is to eliminate ambiguities by indicating the reference of endophora, predicting ensuing content, helping to guess word meaning, and supplementing omitted information in discourse analysis. Linguistic context function in supplementing omitted information cannot be overlooked.

Related studies were done on Bi. Msafwari concerning the aspect of politeness. For instance, Raitania (2014) examined politeness strategies employed by Bi. Msafwari in her discussions. The study sought to establish politeness strategies employed in the discussions using a multiple theory approach. Further, the study sought to identify reasons as to why counsel went on without breaking up, despite talking about face-threatening matters openly. The findings revealed that Bi. Msafwari used both positive and negative politeness strategies to maintain her conversation with the participants. In this work, we attempt to demonstrate the role of co-text in the construction of meaning in Bi. Msafwari's topical discussions. That is, co-text has the power to constrain interpretation.

III. METHODOLOGY

The data used in this paper was obtained through content analysis. Downloaded YouTube audio-visual files of topical discussions by Bi. Msafwari were listened to, transcribed, and analyzed through discourse analysis methods. Lexical and syntactic items were analyzed based on contextualization theory by Levinson (1997).

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this section we cite examples of co-text (in lexical and syntactic categories of utterances) and demonstrate how they are an indirect communication. We begin with the morphological category. Bi. Msafwari makes the following utterance:

> Na kuna wale wako na watoto wanavika *katoto kinguo kibaya akisema* kuwa ni mtoto hana neno.
> [There are those who have children and they cloth the child (diminutive) a scanty cloth (diminutive) claiming that there is no problem because this is a child (researcher's translation)

In the above statement Bi. Msafwari gives her opinion on the way parents dress their children. She is bothered by the way parents scantily dress their children, claiming that there is no problem because they are children. The lexicon that Bi. Msafwari uses do not communicate this message directly but the relation of the word used communicate this message. In the excerpt there is a shift from regular words to words in a diminutive state:

> Na kuna wale wako na katoto na wanavika. [There are those who have little children and they cloth] regular/normal
> Katoto [child] diminutive
> Kinguo [a dress] diminutive
> Kibaya [a bad dress] diminutive

The arrangement of the words brings out a diminutive mood. This is the cue that brings out the implicature that Bi. Msafwari does not like that style of dressing. She does not mention this directly but the shift in the mood of the words makes her assertion firm; the style of dressing is not admirable. A study done by Schneider (2011) shows that, diminutive forms of expression in communication play different roles. For instance, the words referred to above activate a negative attitude toward the style of dressing. The negative attitude label contributes to the intended meaning that Bi. Msafwari is giving. In another excerpt Bi. Msafwari makes the following statement:

> Ajabu ni kama hivi leo ulivyo*nena* leo mwanangu. Kwanza uli*nena* mpaka uka*nena* na nashangaa kama huyu ni yeye au Kanze mwingine.

The above statement is made by Bi. Msafwari as a praise remark for Kanze. Kanze had made a statement that although she held a contemporary view that house chores were to be shared, the feeling that women performing household duties was equal to being turned in to house maids did not hold water. Kanze was interrogating the shift in thought; that in courtship woman performed the same duties without complaining and yet the same women felt that performing the same in marriage was being turned in to house maids. This communication is what prompted Bi. Msafwari to praise her. In doing this Bi. Msafwari uses the verb *nena* three times building some implicature.

> Ajabu ni kama hivi leo ulivyo*nena* leo mwanangu.[I am surprised by the way you have spoken my child] present perfect tense
> Kwanza uli*nena* [first you spoke] simple past
> mpaka uka*nena* na nashangaa kama huyu ni yeye au Kanze mwingine. [until you spoke] past
> [And I am surprised if this is the same Kanze or another]

In the above communication the verb *nena* (speak) takes different tense forms; from simple past, to past tense. In the last verb use (until you spoke) the word (until) is often used with present verb forms to refer to the future. In this case the word until is used with a verb in the past form (spoke). This has been used intentionally by Bi. Msafwari to affirm the line of thought that Kanze had adopted in this discussion as opposed to the line of thought held before. The indirect communication Bi. Msafwari is making is that she does not approve the line of thought displayed in Kanze's initial statements. However, had she told her so, the speech would be face threatening. The same communication is inferred through the shift of tense as in the example above.

The examples mentioned above show that the use of diminutive forms and a shift of tense in word forms present implicatures which are cues to be inferred for proper interpretation of the intended meaning.

The syntactic category refers to the context where the sequence of sentences creates the implicature of the intended message. The arrangement is a cue given intentionally by the speaker for the listener's inference. In explaining this, Dash (2008) mentions that, considering the context of the sentence, the syntactic arrangement will lead to understanding the meaningful relationships between words in different sentences. This fact contributes to the understanding of the various interpretations resulting from the arrangement in the sentence. This means that the order of the sentence creates a cue for inference towards interpreting the intended meaning. Using the example below Bi. Msafwari says:

> Bi. Msafwari: Yani kila saa yeye ataka kupandishapandisha suruali. Halafu wewe mwanamume wakati wote wataka makalio yako yatangazie watu? Kwa nini? Kwa nini wewe mwanamume mzima wataka kuangaliwa makalio yako yametokezea juu ya suruali.
> Kashati alikokavaa pia kamemshika kila pembe ili aonekane ana kidari
> Yani kila saa yeye ataka kupandishapandisha suruali.
> [Every moment/time he wants to keep pulling up his pants.] regular and affirmative
> Halafu wewe mwanamume wakati wote wataka makalio yako yatangazie watu!
> [Then you (singular male) all the time you want you buttocks to announce to people.] regular and sarcastic
> Kwa nini? [why] interrogative.
> Kwa nini wewe mwanamume mzima wataka kuangaliwa makalio yako yametokezea juu ya suruali?
> [Why do you (fully grown male) want your buttocks to be viewed protruding above your pants.] interrogative and sarcastic.
> Kashati alikokavaa pia kamemshika kila pembe ili aonekane ana kidari.
> [The shirt (diminutive) he has worn has tightly fitted him every side so that it may be obviously seen that he has a breast]. sarcastic

The first statement is normative and affirmative. The second sentence is normative but shifts to sarcastic. This brings about a cue that the speaker is not in favor of such kind of dressing. The third sentence is interrogative and sarcastic. Here, the speaker demands for an answer as to why the man decides to dress the way he does. This gives an implicature that the said kind of dressing is unexpected. She interrogates his action by asking why? The last sentence is diminutive and sarcastic. Sarcasm in this case has been used as an indirect form conveying implicit criticism targeting the man who is inappropriately dressed. On the other hand, the diminutive forms are evaluative. The speaker (Bi. Msafwari) gives the expressions as to offend the person in question. For example, when she says: why do you (a fully grown man) want your buttocks to be seen protruding above your pants.] The statement is calling upon the subject to evaluate his way of dressing. All this builds up the message that the said style of dressing is not appropriate. This meaning is inferred from the syntactic arrangement. In another context Bi. Msafwari makes the following statement:

> **Bi. Msafwari**: Peleka kwa wajomba zako vivyo hivyo. Ataendaje? Na huko nje anakutana na wajomba wangapi?

Bi. Msafwari in the excerpt raises a discussion about the dressing of young girls nowadays. She holds the view that their kind of dressing is inappropriate because the clothes are embarrassing. She is however perturbed that the inappropriately dressed women are always in the company of men who seemingly appreciate that type of dressing. Instead of addressing the girl, she decides to address the men who keep their company. She tells them:

> Peleka kwa wajomba zako vivyo hivyo.
> [Take them to your uncles just the way they are dressed. [Affirmative]]
> Ataendaje?
> [How will she go?] interrogative and sarcastic
> Na huko nje anakutana na wajomba wangapi?
> [And how many uncles does she meet on the way?] interrogative and sarcastic

In the sentences above, Bi. Msafwari challenges the men (who keep the company of girls that are not decently dressed) to take them to the uncles. From the common shared knowledge, Bi. Msafwari is aware that the same women would not accept to visit the boyfriend's uncles while scantily dressed. She therefore gives an interrogative statement, asking how the woman would go to see the man's uncles dressed as she is. The implicature here is that the woman cannot dare make a decision to visit the fiancé's uncles when improperly dressed.

The interrogative form gives Bi. Msafwari an opportunity to make her assertion firm; that the style of dressing is ashaming. She then concludes with an interrogative statement asking [And how many uncles does she meet on the way]. This question brings out an implicature that there are more respectable people she meets on the road than those in an arranged meeting for visitation at an agreed upon venue. This then implies that the girl(s) think that only a certain type of elders need to be respected, there are many more who require the same respect on the roads. These combinations of sentences communicate that the girl is indecently dressed and the situation is embarrassing. She is calling on the men to help their girlfriends dress properly in order to give other road users the respect they accord to their boyfriends/fiancés' uncles (read elders). An indirect message being put across is that, it is the men who encourage the young women to dress inappropriately. This message is not in the lexicon but is inferred.

Still on the subject of dressing Bi. Msafwari makes the following statement:

> Kama hivi suruali zaitwa sijui za mharo. Mpaka sasa suruali yaonekana kushikiliwa na hips isianguke chini basi. Sijui chupi ni tatu. Anatembea akipanua miguu ndio hiyo suruali isiteremke / isianguke.

Bi. Msafwari seems to be offended by some style of dressing displayed by many youths these days. She demonstrates this in the shifts in the sentences.

> Kama hivi suruali zaitwa sijui za mharo.
> [Now these pants I am not sure if they are used when one has diarrhea/ or called diarrhea pants] affirmative and sarcastic
> Mpaka sasa suruali yaonekana kushikiliwa na hips isianguke chini basi. [Now the pant seems to be held by the hips so that it doesn't fall down] affirmative and sarcastic
> Sijui chupi ni tatu.
> [Am not sure if the under wears are three] affirmative and overstatement
> Anatembea akipanua miguu ndio hiyo suruali isiteremke/isianguke.
> [(He)walks with feet apart so that the pant does not fall.] sarcastic

In this excerpt she vividly describes the appearance of men who dress in a way that is not appealing. In the first sentence the pants have been referred to as diarrhea pants. This builds a negative emotion about them. The sentences then show a shift from affirmative and sarcastic forms to affirmative and overstatement. The description of the hips being used to keep the pants afloat, then the use of three underpants in the already falling pant continues to emit a negative emotion. The cues built by the sentence exchanges is that the type of dressing referred to is not admirable. The following statement also came up in Bi. Msafwari's discussion:

> Sasa ningependa kukwambia kuwa yule aliyesimama hapa aliyevalia vazi la kwanza sisemi, kwamba ni baya kwa generation yenu lakini, nikaletewa mimi huyu mkaza mwana *ndani* ya nyumba nitakataa. *Mume wangu ataangalia wapi mkaza mwana ni huyu?*

In the excerpt above, Bi. Msafwari refers to the issue of inappropriate dressing by way of comparison. She compares two girls, one who seems properly dressed and the other, who is inappropriately dressed. She uses the one who seems to have dressed appropriately as a model to draw reference to by saying:

> Sasa ningependa kukwambia kuwa yule aliyesimama hapa aliyevalia vazi la kwanza sisemi kwamba ni baya kwa generation yenu.
> [Now I would like to tell you that, the one standing here, dressed in the dress initially referred to, I am not saying that the dress is bad for your generation.] Negation
> Lakini nikaletewa mimi huyu mkaza mwana *ndani* ya nyumba nitakataa.
> [But if brought to me as a daughter in law in my house I will refuse]
> Mume wangu ataangalia wapi mkaza mwana ni huyu?
> [Where will my husband face/look if this is how the daughter in-law is dressed.] Interrogative

In the first sentence she avoids mentioning that the cloth being referred to is bad. However, the negation maker [I am *not* saying that the dress is bad] already points this out. The inference made is that the dress is bad. The second sentence begins with a negating conjunction (but), and then, asserts herself that she cannot accept such a daughter in law. She then concludes with an interrogative remark: where would her husband look/face with such kind of dressing (in her house). The negative emotion is elicited, while on the hand asserting her position on the kind of dress points out that she was saying that the dress was inappropriate. This interpretation is inferred.

Sentence structures have been used in context to communicate indirectly by shift of exchanges in affirmative and normative, interrogative and sarcastic, affirmative and sarcastic, negation and interrogative syntactic forms.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study findings have demonstrated that a speaker can tactfully use lexical and syntactic structures in utterances as a linguistic strategy to communicate a message indirectly. In lexical forms, implications have been given by the change of the verb tense and the use of diminutive forms. The syntactic context has been obtained through a shift in the sentence intent or motive. A shift departing from the normative intent to an interrogative or diminutive sentence is a cue that the speaker has given as an implicature. In addition, the shift from normative to sarcastic sentences has also been used to provide indirect communication.

5.2 Recommendations

Despite the conversational cues given in lexical and syntactic structures, it is the prerogative of the listener to choose the meaning they would like to agree with. This will depend on other factors at play that determine the meaning of the message. Therefore, the listener ought to pay attention to conversational cues and adjust when needed in order to interpret the intended meaning. Indirect communication provides for multiple meanings; however, the intended meaning is the major intention of the speaker.

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