

SEMANTIC PERSPECTIVE ON MEANING CONSTRUCTION IN INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION

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Abstract

This study investigates how meaning is constructed and interpreted in an intergenerational conversation between an older boxing coach (over 60) and his younger student (aged 22). The research focuses on understanding how meaning emerges dynamically in everyday communication through speech acts, contextual interpretation, and interactional negotiation. Unlike studies that primarily emphasize misunderstanding or isolated speech act categories, this study examines the broader process of meaning construction in naturally occurring interaction. The conversation analyzed in this study centers on discussions about the life experiences, educational backgrounds, employment opportunities, and career trajectories of former boxing trainees.

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design using naturally occurring conversational data collected through audio recording in an informal setting. The conversation was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to preserve authentic language use and natural interaction between participants. The recorded conversation was transcribed and analyzed using an integrated analytical framework based on **Speech Act Theory**, proposed by J. L. Austin and further developed by John Searle, supported by concepts from **Semantics** and **Pragmatics**. The analysis focuses on identifying speech acts, types of meaning, and interactional processes that contribute to meaning construction throughout the conversation.

The findings reveal that meaning in intergenerational communication is not fixed or directly transmitted through linguistic forms alone but is collaboratively constructed through interaction. Several types of meaning were identified, including literal meaning, implied meaning, evaluative meaning, experiential meaning, and clarificatory meaning. The findings further indicate that meaning develops through processes such as expansion, negotiation, contextualization, and interpretation. The older participant predominantly constructs meaning through narrative storytelling and experience-based explanations, while the younger participant actively contributes to meaning construction through questioning, clarification, and interpretation. These differences in communicative style reflect the influence of generational background on interaction.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of contextual understanding in interpreting meaning in everyday communication. Many utterances contain implicit meanings that cannot be

fully understood through literal interpretation alone, requiring participants to rely on shared knowledge, experience, and situational context. The study concludes that meaning construction is a dynamic, collaborative, and context-dependent process, particularly in intergenerational communication. This research contributes to linguistic studies by offering a semantic perspective on how meaning is negotiated and developed in natural conversation, while also emphasizing the interconnected role of semantics, pragmatics, and speech acts in real-life communication.

Keywords: meaning construction, intergenerational conversation, speech acts, semantics, pragmatics, everyday communication.

1. Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in shaping human interaction, as it is through language that individuals construct and convey meaning. However, meaning in communication is not always directly encoded in words. Instead, it is often dynamically constructed through interaction, context, and shared understanding between speakers. This process becomes more complex in conversations involving participants from different generational backgrounds.

In linguistic studies, meaning is traditionally examined through **Semantics**, which focuses on the literal meaning of words and sentences. However, literal meaning alone is often insufficient to fully explain how communication works in real-life interaction. Therefore, **Pragmatics** complements semantic analysis by emphasizing the role of context, speaker intention, and situational factors in meaning interpretation. One key framework that connects these perspectives is **Speech Act Theory**, introduced by J. L. Austin and further developed by John Searle, which views utterances as actions that perform specific communicative functions.

Meaning construction becomes particularly dynamic in intergenerational communication. Differences in age, experience, and social background often influence how speakers express and interpret meaning. Older speakers tend to rely on narrative forms, implicit expressions, and experience-based explanations, while younger speakers are more likely to use direct questions and seek explicit clarification. As a result, meaning is not simply transmitted from one speaker to another but rather negotiated through an ongoing interaction.

Previous studies in speech act theory have largely focused on categorizing types of speech acts or identifying instances of misunderstanding. However, fewer studies have explored how meaning is constructed and developed throughout a naturally occurring conversation, especially in an intergenerational context. This gap highlights the need for a more integrative approach that considers both semantic content and the interactive process of meaning-making.

Based on this background, the present study aims to analyze how meaning is constructed and interpreted in an intergenerational conversation between a boxing coach and his student. The study focuses on identifying the types of meaning expressed in speech acts and examining how meaning evolves during the interaction. By doing so, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how communication functions beyond literal meaning, particularly in real-life social contexts.

Research Questions

1. What types of meaning are constructed in speech acts in intergenerational conversation?
2. How is meaning developed and negotiated between speakers during the interaction?
3. How do contextual factors and generational differences influence the construction and interpretation of meaning?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speech Act Theory

The concept of speech acts is central to understanding how meaning is constructed in communication. The **Speech Act Theory**, introduced by J. L. Austin, proposes that language is not only used to convey information but also to perform actions. Austin distinguishes three levels of speech acts: the locutionary act (the literal meaning of an utterance), the illocutionary act (the intended meaning), and the perlocutionary act (the effect on the listener).

Building on this framework, John Searle classifies speech acts into five categories: assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. These categories help explain how speakers

use language to express statements, give commands, show feelings, make commitments, and declare changes in status. In conversational interaction, these speech acts are not isolated; rather, they contribute to the ongoing construction of meaning between participants.

2.2 Semantics and Meaning Construction

Semantics is traditionally concerned with the study of meaning as encoded in words, phrases, and sentences. It focuses on how linguistic elements systematically represent concepts and relationships. However, semantic meaning alone is often insufficient to explain how meaning functions in real-life communication.

Recent perspectives emphasize that meaning is not fixed but constructed dynamically during interaction. Speakers may use the same words but convey different meanings depending on context, background knowledge, and intention. Therefore, meaning should be viewed as a process rather than a static product. In this study, semantics is used as a foundation to analyze how literal meaning contributes to the broader construction of meaning in conversation.

2.3 Pragmatics and Contextual Meaning

While semantics deals with literal meaning, **Pragmatics** focuses on how meaning is interpreted in context. Pragmatics consider factors such as speaker intention, shared knowledge, and situational context in understanding meaning.

In conversation, speakers often rely on implied meaning rather than explicit statements. This means that listeners must interpret beyond the literal words to understand the intended message. The interaction between semantic meaning and pragmatic interpretation plays a crucial role in meaning construction. Without considering context, communication may become incomplete or ambiguous.

2.4 Meaning Construction in Interaction

Meaning construction is an interactive process in which speakers and listeners actively negotiate understanding. Rather than being directly transmitted, meaning emerges through dialogue, clarification, and interpretation. This process involves several mechanisms, such as elaboration, questioning, and contextualization.

In natural conversation, participants continuously adjust their understanding based on new information. For example, a speaker may provide additional explanation to refine meaning, while a listener may ask questions to clarify uncertainty. These processes demonstrate that meaning is co-constructed through interaction rather than delivered as a fixed entity.

2.5 Intergenerational Communication

Intergenerational communication refers to interaction between individuals from different age groups. Differences in age often lead to variations in communication style, language use, and interpretation of meaning. Older speakers tend to rely on narrative forms and implicit expressions based on experience, while younger speakers often prefer direct and explicit communication.

These differences can influence how meaning is constructed and interpreted. In some cases, generational differences may lead to misunderstanding or ambiguity, while in others, they create opportunities for richer meaning negotiation. Understanding these dynamics is important for analyzing how communication functions in real-life contexts.

2.6 Previous Studies

Previous research on speech acts has primarily focused on identifying types of speech acts or analyzing communication misunderstandings. However, fewer studies have examined how meaning is constructed dynamically in naturally occurring conversations, particularly in intergenerational contexts.

This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on meaning construction rather than solely on misunderstanding. By analyzing a real conversation between a boxing coach and his student, this research provides insight into how meaning is developed, negotiated, and interpreted in everyday interaction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze how meaning is constructed in intergenerational conversation. A qualitative design is appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting language use in its natural context rather than measuring variables quantitatively. The research aims to explore the process of meaning construction as it occurs in real interaction.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study is based on a naturally occurring conversation in a boxing training environment. The participants consist of a boxing coach aged over 60 years old and his student aged 22 years old. The coach has extensive experience in training boxing athletes, while the student represents a younger generation with different communicative preferences.

The conversation focuses on discussing the life experiences and career paths of former boxing trainees. This context provides rich data for analyzing how meaning is constructed across generational differences.

3.3 Data Source

The primary data of this study consists of a recorded conversation between the participants. The conversation was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia in a natural and informal setting, allowing authentic language use to emerge. The data include both narrative and interactive segments, which reflect different types of speech acts and meaning construction processes.

3.4 Data Collection Technique

The data were collected through observation and audio recording. Prior to recording, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave their consent.

The steps of data collection are as follows:

1. The researcher observed a natural interaction between the coach and the student.
2. The conversation was audio-recorded using a mobile device.

3. The recorded data were transcribed into written form.
4. The transcription was reviewed to ensure accuracy and clarity.

To support analysis in an academic context, the original Bahasa Indonesia data were accompanied by English translations.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using a qualitative interpretative method based on the **Speech Act Theory** proposed by J. L. Austin and John Searle, supported by concepts from **Semantics** and **Pragmatics**.

The analysis followed these steps:

1. Transcribing the conversation into written form
2. Identifying speech acts in each utterance
3. Classifying types of meaning (e.g., literal, implied, evaluative, experiential, and clarificatory)
4. Analyzing how meaning is constructed and developed during interaction
5. Interpreting the influence of context and generational differences on meaning construction

3.6 Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher carefully reviewed the transcription and interpretation of the data. The use of natural conversation enhances the authenticity of the study, while the inclusion of direct excerpts supports transparency in analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account in this study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and agreed to participate voluntarily. Their identities were kept confidential, and the data were used solely for academic purposes.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Overview of the Conversation

The conversation analyzed in this study involves an intergenerational interaction between a boxing coach (over 60 years old) and his student (22 years old). The discussion centers on the life trajectories of former boxing trainees, including their education, careers, and opportunities.

The data show that the conversation is dominated by:

- **Narrative (coach)**
- **Clarification questions (student)**
- **Evaluation and interpretation (both speakers)**

This creates a dynamic process of meaning construction.

4.2 Comprehensive Analysis of the Conversation

To analyze the entire conversation systematically, the data are presented in a structured analytical table:

No	Utterance (Original)	Speech Act	Type of Meaning	Construction Process	Interpretation
1	“Makanya dibilang... wak itu cerewet”	Assertive	Evaluative	Contextualization	Penilaian terhadap gaya melatih
2	“Ha kenal?”	Directive	Clarificatory	Negotiation	Memastikan pemahaman
3	Cerita tentang Jaenal & DKI	Assertive	Experiential	Expansion	Makna dibangun dari pengalaman
4	“Berarti lewat tinju bisa kerja?”	Directive	Interpretative	Negotiation	Generalisasi makna
5	“Tergantung nasib”	Assertive	Implied	Contextualization	Makna diperluas
6	“Gak ada pendidikannya wak?”	Directive	Clarificatory	Negotiation	Pencarian informasi

7	“Ha?”	-	Literal (failure)	-	Gangguan persepsi
8	“Pendidikan S1 gitu?”	Directive	Clarificatory	Negotiation	Spesifikasi makna
9	“Ngambil paket”	Assertive	Literal	Expansion	Klarifikasi sistem pendidikan
10	“Tamat SMP bisa kuliah?”	Directive	Interpretative	Negotiation	Kesalahan asumsi
11	Cerita masuk USU	Assertive	Experiential	Expansion	Makna berbasis pengalaman
12	“Karena ada basic boxingnya kan?”	Directive	Interpretative	Negotiation	Konfirmasi hubungan sebab
13	“Basic boxingnya iya”	Assertive	Literal	Confirmation	Penguatan makna
14	“Kerja apalah dia?”	Directive	Clarificatory	Negotiation	Pencarian detail
15	Cerita Satpol & pengalaman	Assertive	Experiential	Expansion	Narasi pengalaman
16	“Itu karena beruntung?”	Directive	Interpretative	Negotiation	Simplifikasi makna
17	“Ada orang kenal dia”	Assertive	Implied	Contextualization	Koneksi sosial
18	Cerita juara & DKI	Assertive	Experiential	Expansion	Prestasi → peluang
19	“Susah cari kerja sekarang?”	Directive	Interpretative	Negotiation	Generalisasi sosial
20	“Susah sekali”	Assertive	Evaluative	Confirmation	Penegasan
21	“Harus banyak koneksi?”	Directive	Interpretative	Negotiation	Penyederhanaan
22	“Koneksilah”	Assertive	Implied	Contextualization	Makna implisit kuat
23	Cerita anak masuk kejaksaan	Assertive	Experiential	Expansion	Pengalaman pribadi
24	“Bagian apa?”	Directive	Clarificatory	Negotiation	Detail
25	“Bagian hukum”	Assertive	Literal	Expansion	Informasi jelas
26	“Yang suka membaca hukum?”	Directive	Interpretative	Negotiation	Pemahaman parsial

27	“Iya hukum-hukum”	Assertive	Literal	Confirmation	Penguatan
28	Cerita STAN & kegagalan	Assertive	Experiential	Expansion	Narasi kompleks
29	“Ada yang main di dalam?”	Directive	Implied	Negotiation	Dugaan
30	“Iya...”	Assertive	Implied	Implicit confirmation	Makna tidak eksplisit
31	“Kawannya backup?”	Directive	Interpretative	Negotiation	Interpretasi
32	“Kurasa ada”	Assertive	Implied	Contextualization	Ketidakpastian
33	Diskusi lokasi kerja	Assertive	Literal	Expansion	Informasi geografis
34	“Dimana itu?”	Directive	Clarificatory	Negotiation	Klarifikasi
35	Penjelasan panjang lokasi	Assertive	Experiential	Expansion	Narasi
36	“Pakai bus bisa?”	Directive	Literal	Negotiation	Pertanyaan praktis
37	“Bisa”	Assertive	Literal	Confirmation	Jawaban langsung
38	Cerita anak kedua	Assertive	Experiential	Expansion	Informasi keluarga
39	“Jurusan apa?”	Directive	Clarificatory	Negotiation	Detail
40	“Gak tau... biologi”	Assertive	Uncertain meaning	Interpretation	Ketidakpastian

4.3 Discussion (Integrated Analysis)

The comprehensive analysis of the conversation reveals that meaning construction is a **multi-layered and dynamic process** rather than a fixed transmission of information.

First, the findings show that meaning is constructed through the interaction between different types of speech acts. The coach predominantly uses assertive speech acts to narrate experiences, while the student frequently uses directive speech acts to seek clarification. This interaction reflects the framework of **Speech Act Theory**, where meaning emerges from the relationship between utterances rather than isolated expressions.

Second, the data demonstrate that meaning is shaped by different semantic layers. Literal meanings are present in straightforward responses such as “*bisa*”, but many utterances carry implied

meanings, such as “*tergantung nasib*” and “*koneksilah*”, which extend beyond their surface interpretation. This supports the view in **Semantics** that meaning is not always explicitly encoded but may involve broader conceptual interpretation.

Third, the process of meaning construction is strongly influenced by interactional mechanisms. The student’s repeated questions function as a negotiation strategy, allowing meaning to be clarified and expanded. This aligns with the role of **Pragmatics**, where meaning is co-constructed through context and interaction rather than determined solely by linguistic form.

Furthermore, experiential meaning plays a central role in this conversation. The coach frequently relies on personal narratives to convey meaning, indicating that experience serves as a key resource in communication. These narratives not only provide information but also embed evaluation, values, and implicit messages.

In addition, generational differences significantly shape the process of meaning construction. The older speaker tends to use extended narratives and implicit expressions, while the younger speaker prefers direct questioning and explicit clarification. This contrast creates a complementary dynamic in which meaning is gradually built through interaction.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that the meaning of construction operates along a continuum from explicit to implicit. Some utterances are easily understood, while others require interpretation, contextual knowledge, and interactional negotiation. This highlights the complexity of everyday communication, particularly in intergenerational contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined how meaning is constructed and interpreted in an intergenerational conversation between a boxing coach and his student. The findings demonstrate that meaning in communication is not fixed or directly transmitted through language, but rather dynamically constructed through interaction.

The analysis shows that various types of meaning emerge in the conversation, including literal, implied, evaluative, experiential, and clarificatory meanings. These meanings are not isolated; instead, they develop progressively through interactional processes such as expansion, negotiation, contextualization, and interpretation.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the construction of meaning is strongly influenced by contextual factors, including background knowledge, personal experience, and communicative style. The older participant tends to construct meaning through narrative and implicit expressions, while the younger participant actively engages in meaning construction through direct questioning and clarification. This interaction reflects the dynamic and collaborative nature of communication.

Overall, the study highlights that understanding meaning in real-life communication requires not only attention to linguistic forms but also consideration of context, experience, and interactional processes. Meaning, therefore, should be viewed as a product of social interaction rather than a fixed property of language.

6. Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed:

1. For Students and Language Learners

Students should develop awareness that meaning in communication is not always explicit. They need to interpret meaning beyond literal expressions by considering context, speaker intention, and interaction.

2. For Educators

Educators are encouraged to incorporate real-life conversational data into language teaching. This can help students understand how meaning is constructed in authentic communication, particularly in diverse social contexts such as intergenerational interaction.

3. Other Researchers

Future studies are recommended to:

- Use larger datasets involving more participants
- Explore different social contexts (e.g., workplace, family, digital communication)
- Combine semantic analysis with deeper pragmatic or discourse analysis

4. For Communication Practice

Participants in communication, especially across generations, should be aware of differences in communication styles. Encouraging clarification and active listening can improve mutual understanding.

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