

The case of Semantic Ambiguity: English usage in Nigerian politics.

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Abstract:

This thesis is an attempt at examining the significance of semantic ambiguity to communication. The work is based on data collected from the political events which occurred and the speeches that were made during the Nigerian Second Republic (1979 - 1983). The semantic analysis of the data has been done largely in terms of Componential Analysis.

The thesis reviews the theoretical and attitudinal controversies surrounding the concepts of semantics and semantic ambiguity. It also examines the implications of these controversies for a study on communication in an L2 medium in politics. The work also establishes that the complexity and dynamics of the relationship that exists between language and reality make the occurrence of semantic ambiguity a linguistic inevitability. It further characterizes second-language-induced cases of the semantic phenomenon, and reveals that though the occurrence of semantic ambiguity does not discriminate between L1 and L2 situations of the use of a language, the incidence of the semantic feature is higher in an L2 situation. The work suggests that the moral characterizations of semantic ambiguity should be de-emphasized in linguistic studies, as such characterizations more properly belong to the discipline known as Ethics. It reveals that rather than being a linguistic aberration, semantic ambiguity is a linguistic normality which, moreover, constitutes a linguistic facility.

Finally, the thesis highlights two potential areas for further research: (1) the semantic structure of contradiction in the 'interlanguage' of L2 users of English who have Nigerian languages as their L1s (2) the socio-cultural determination of logic in meaning.

Keywords: Semantic/ political/ language/ English/ linguistic

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