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Central and Marginal Reference: A Comparative Study in Arabic and Syriac

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Abstract

This study deals with a basic issue within semantics, which is reference. Reference is an aspect associated with words when involved in real life discourse. By themselves, words have dictionary meanings which are void of reference. People use words and make them refer. Still here, reference is constrained by convention. In this paper, this concept of reference is investigated with Syriac so as to make clear how meaning is seen as distributed over types, and how reference is seen as being either central or marginal, along with identifying ways of how these may change over time. Change in this sense is explored with the attempt to pinpoint the reasons that initiated and led to such change over time. In this way, the aim is to arrive at those trends or laws which would go in effect to create the change. It has been concluded that the change is a result of a number of factors that may be linguistic or non-linguistic.

Keywords: Arabic, Central reference, Comparative, Marginal reference, Syriac

1. Introduction

The research in linguistic semantics aims to reveal the truth about meaning in human languages, as well as to know the linguistic laws that help to know the relationships that link the parts of the same meaning and what is included in meaning, and the relationships that connect one meaning to another. In semantics, attention revolves around meaning as a main axis; it is the basis on which this field of study is based, as it delves into understanding the meaning of words and sentences, and how they are analyzed accurately to reach an accurate interpretation. It is important to note that investigating meaning is not an investigation for an independent entity or an entity owned by words, but rather an understanding of the essence of words and sentences, and how they obtain meaning. We note, through the study of the meaning, the difficulty of differentiating between different types of meaning and multiple references of the same word, and can still distinguish and understand the meaning of the word in different verbal situations. Some people may think that once a dictionary is used, it would have clarified the meaning of the word, although this is available and sufficient for some words, but it is not enough for many other words, because there is no one single meaning of a word, so meaning may vary from one place to another or from one circumstance to another. Thus, semanticists differentiated between the types of meaning where the focus was to research the origin of the meanings of words and the ways in which those meanings develop since its inception. With the change of semantics, the problem of meaning has become only the beginning step of a long series of steps that lead to the disclosure of meaning; beginning with the central and moving towards the marginal ones.

2. Types of Meaning

Scholars have not reached an agreement on the classification of types of meaning, as many of them have divided the meaning into several categories. The exploration of reference and types of meaning is among the most important linguistic issues raised in the study of semantics. The generally accepted classification is that which is related to two main axes, namely the central reference and the marginal reference. What is called the basic meaning is the central reference; and what is called additional or suggestive is the marginal reference. This is shown as follows:

- i- The basic meaning or conceptual meaning is the primary and most important in semantics. This meaning is a major factor in linguistic

communication and represents the basic function of language, which is to transfer ideas and achieve understanding. The primary meaning is that which is shared by speakers of the same language; Nida has described this type of meaning as the meaning associated with lexical unity when it appears alone in a lesser context.

- ii- The additional or secondary meaning is the meaning that goes beyond the primary meaning and comes in addition to it. This meaning is non-static and variable depending on cultural and temporal changes and individual experiences. This meaning is manifested when making analogies and especially comparisons. In the following examples, the additional meaning is associated with a specific word. These are important aspects of understanding meanings and classifying them into primary meaning and additional meaning. For example:

- "They acted like sheep" (a state of submissiveness), and in Syriac such as "Hoshhu Ikh Arab".

- "He was like a mouse" (an example of cowardice), and in Syriac such as "Awa Ikh Agbra".

- "They were like lions" (in courage), and in Syriac like "Uwa Ikh Arya" (David, 1879, p. 85).

In the above instances, the additional meaning of each word appears, as docility spread among sheep, cowardice among the mouse, and courage among the lion (El-Khouly, 2001, pp. 76-77).

Among the secondary meanings of words stand out the stylistic, psychological and phonetic meanings. For instance, stylistic meaning refers to the meaning of a word in relation to social conditions and geographical area of the speaker. Some words differ in their use, whether in writing, speaking or public speaking. Stylistic levels and shades appear in words, such as the use of the words "mom", "mama", "dad" and "daddy" and differ in being formal, colloquial, or vulgar. As for the psychological meaning, it refers to the connotations with which the word is associated with the individual, which is an individual subjective meaning that varies from person to person and does not enjoy generality or public circulation. As for the echoic meaning, an echo of the sound of some words is involved in making the meaning of those words, such as sounds that resemble in their shape the external meaning of those words,

such as purl, cat meow and dog howl. These words support the idea that some words originated when humans imitated the sounds heard in nature. There are also some words in the language that do not carry this element of meaning, as there is no relation between the phonetic form of the word and its meaning, and this relationship is a coincidence in most cases a pen, bag, earth, sky, cloud, vegetables, fruit, and many words of the language there is no relationship between its form and meaning.

3. Central and Marginal Reference

The term semantics is one of the terms that have been developed in the modern era, and its field of study has evolved, and semantic research has expanded in several fields and many linguists and researchers have devoted most of their research and research to address the problem of semantics. The study of semantics of language aims not only to reveal the truth of meaning in human language, but also to reveal the knowledge of the laws of language that help us know the relationships that connect parts of a meaning, those that contain meaning, and those that link one meaning to another. Meaning is the main subject of semantics, and the search for meaning is the basis of this science, not as a search as "an independent entity or entity owned by a word", but as a careful analysis of the meaning of a word or sentence by understanding what a word or sentence is. That is, how these words or sentences are"(Zwain, 1986, p. 91).

3.1. The Concept of Central and Marginal Reference

Language is the most important means of communication in human society. Different experiences in people's lives have left an impact on the understanding of words, but people have reached a common understanding, it may be enough in their public lives, and this fact is recorded in its vocabulary by linguists. It is called the central reference; the word (tree), and in Syriac (Ilana) takes one position in the child's life, but the word (love) in Arabic and (love) in Syriac varies according to age, and the change of the reference of the word. In childhood, the vocabulary takes a certain position, and this situation differs from the situation in youth and adulthood (Anis, 1976, p. 107). Anis explained the relationship between the central reference and the marginal reference: "A reference can resemble

those circles that are formed after throwing a stone into the water. This is not considered the central reference; it contains a set of meanings that some people understand in the center and some in the sides of the circle or on its borders. These circles widen in the minds of the few and contain shades of meanings that others do not share." (Anis 1976, p. 106). The central reference of the word (night) in Arabic means the time extending from the absence of the sun until its rise, while its marginal reference or the shadows of meanings in it, may mean (fear, watchfulness, anxiety, love, anticipation, etc. These meanings vary according to the recipient's culture, temperament, and linguistic stock.

3.2. Central Reference

It is the pictorial meaning or perceptual meaning and is the main factor in linguistic communication, which is the real means of language in performing its basic function, which is the exchange and transfer of ideas, it is required that a group of speakers of a particular language share the basic meaning, and this type of meaning is characterized by a complex and sophisticated organization that can be compared to similar organizations at the phonetic and grammatical levels. (Omar, nd., p. 36) and expressed by Lyons in the descriptive sense or basic meaning: "With regard to the descriptive meaning, there is a universally recognized fact that languages can be used to perform with correct or false descriptive statements according to the right or wrong of the (logical) issues they express" (Lyons, 1987, p. 36). While referring to the marginal reference in the non-descriptive sense, it is more heterogeneous in properties than the descriptive meaning, and less central (ibid, p. 35) The central reference is the meaning associated with lexical unity and is the meaning that appears when the word is used alone, and this meaning is considered a primary element in language communication. Through it, language is able to fulfill its primary function of understanding and transmitting ideas. Usually, we can identify a single meaning of a word and this meaning is considered more focused and distinct than the other meanings of the same word. This meaning is characterized by stability and comprehensiveness, and lexicographers seek to record and explain it in specific dictionaries (Omar, nd., p. 36). In this vein, we say that the central reference is the product of common understanding among the members of the speech community, it is

therefore a linguistic indication which is recorded and proved in the dictionary and recognized by the members of the same speech community. Central reference is an indication of the meaning centered in the minds of the speech community, and the reference grows and develops and draws its images and meanings gradually and unites its features as much as we know (Anis, 1976, p. 106).

3.3. Marginal Reference

It is the semantic that accompanies the word when it is launched, so it gains a certain reference that benefits every listener according to his experiences (Anis, 1976, p. 107). Anis gives an example of marginal reference after defining it by saying, "...the interpretation of these shades varies from one individual to another based on their personal experiences, moods and body composition, in addition to the heritage they had from their parents and grandparents" (ibid). He also adds that when the term "penicillin" is mentioned in front of a healthy villager, its reference is limited only to a specific type of medicine that he may have heard of. But when the same word is mentioned in front of a sick person, it evokes a shadow of meanings associated with their personal experience, as those shadows extend to their painful experiences of repeated injections and their medical suffering over time. Thus, the understanding of the word "penicillin" in the patient's mind is different from the understanding in the villager's mind (Anis, 1976, p. 108). The initial central meaning goes beyond the primary central emotional or indirect meaning as it is accessible after thinking and thinking about the pronunciation as well as standing in the direct meaning (central meaning), that is, the process of understanding the marginal meaning and perception in the text requires the search for linguistic relationships in the context and the derivation of what is contained from the original meaning. This is fixed and urgently changing to reach the psycho-emotional reactions of the speaker, taking into account the specific meaning that directs the word to the intended meaning. It's a good idea! From the above, it seems to us that the marginal reference does not go beyond the semantic shadows associated with the lexical meaning of words to other areas, it is not limited to suggestions, but also includes the effects of stylistic patterns and grammatical changes. Ali points that these shades include intonation, arrangement of phrases, methods of

exclamation, praise and slander, and the use of participles to have mercy or exaggeration in praise and slander, these phenomena all share in the disclosure of the speaker's emotions, and his emotions towards the thing spoken of (Younis, 2007, p. 187). Marginal reference is: " An echo of linguistic signs, closely related to the linguistic elements of reference , which are the elements ratified by the term signs, because they are made up of two parts, signifier and signified, and there is nothing in theory that prevents all these linguistic elements, lexical or grammatical, special suggestions from occurring in the minds of speakers. If we look at the linguistic reality, we will see synthetic elements with grammatical connotations. They would include marginal shades and emotional meanings which are perceived differently by different members of that community in their interpretation, and how to feel about them (Younis, 2007, pp. 185-186). Marginal reference is responsible for the masterpieces of literature, which created a world known as "literary criticism". Arab critics address what they called public and private taste, and there is no doubt that private taste is greatly affected by what we call marginal reference, which varies according to different people, their moods, experiences, their emotions and the societies in which they live. Anis argued that the marginal reference is closely related to what psychologists know as emotion (Anis, 1976, p. 117). These reactions are most often expressed in shades of meaning, which include counseled memories, such as painful images (Anis, 1976, p. 108). It seems that Anis counted the general agreement between people in the meaning of the word, as in the case of such words as (bankruptcy, citizen, efficiency, sale, and ownership (Anis, 1976, p. 111). If differences arise in the extent of the concept of each of those words, this difference is a matter of marginal reference .

3.4 Central reference Vs. Marginal reference

The human relation with language begins at an early age; a child learns a lot of the meaning of words and linguistic expressions, and the meaning that the child learns at the beginning of life is characterized by naivety and uncomplicatedness, and the greater the spiritual and linguistic development, the more its meaning changes in a child's eyes depending on the new experience he learns, and depending on the and circumstances he is going through. The letters change in relation to how words are

pronounced and combined as to his experiences, inclinations, conflicts, desires, and emotions. The meaning perceived by the general public is shared through feelings and influences of adhesion and bonding, the words vary in emotional impact depending on our interests and inclinations, and to illustrate this fact, we will mention the following story:

It is said that three travelers passed by a water spring, sat down and rested around it, they also heard a voice: "it will be such a spring", so they differed in interpreting this phrase: One said, that it was said by a merchant, and then he said that he must have a fortune the size of this spring. The second said that it was said by a young doctor, he interpreted the word Juda. The word "spring" has a meaning shared by three individuals, and it is equally understood with all individuals who belong to the same linguistic environment, and it means a water spring, in addition to the common meaning, it has a different marginal meaning to anyone individual. So, marginal reference might be:

- 1- The multitude that has no limits
- 2- Serenity and purity
- 3- generosity.

(Younis, 2007, pp. 177-178)

Thus, we can determine the difference between the central reference and the marginal reference from the following table:

Central Reference	Marginal Reference
Shared by common people who belong to the same speech community	Shared by some individuals in that speech community, and varies along an individual's difference, culture, experience, and intentions
Perceived by pure cognitive abilities depending upon the knowledge of context or conversational deduction, or principles of communication	Perceived on a pure emotional basis, and so response to words is psychologically based.
It is directly associated with the most important function of language which is stating.	It is associated with the function of influencing others.

We note the difference between meaning, and its psychological and social suggestions associated with the difference between the rhetorical function of language and the function of influence. We can observe the correspondence between the central and marginal reference in three levels: goal, action, and result (Esteta, 2008, pp. 283-284). In terms of purpose, the central reference has an informational aspect, while the marginal reference has an expressive aspect. The speaker aims to talk about something or ask about something that has a central connotation, and at the marginal level, the speaker does not declare the true meaning, but hides it. Inventory of relationships between meanings are a result of the inventory of meanings, and marginal is influenced by the inventory of relationships between meanings. In terms of the result, the difference between them is clear: the direct (central) reference has a direct impact in most cases, while the marginal impact is indirect, less severe, and more flexible.

4. Semantic Change

Abdel Tawab believes that language is a living organism, and that it is subject to what living organisms are subject to in their origin, growth and change (Abdul-Tawab, 2000, p. 35). It is a social phenomenon that lives in society, grows with its growth and decomposes with its decadence, a phenomenon that can evolve or become extinct, exactly similar to a social phenomenon that occurs in society, not the creation of an individual or group of individuals, but a society in which its members are forced to find the means of understanding along with means of transfer and exchange of ideas. It is the inevitable result of life in the world. The individual cannot stop or freeze the change of language! Language develops and changes as any other thing or issue. Semantic change is a term referring to a state in which a word obtains a new meaning other than its lexical meaning, and this phenomenon has been called "change of meaning" (Al-Sa'ran, p. 280). Semantic change is one of the topics of historical semantics, as it examines the change of one language through the centuries, which includes sounds, morphology, grammar and vocabulary. In his book *The Role of the Word in Language*, Ullman states, "Change in meaning is only an aspect of the change of language, language is not static or static at all, although progress in it can sometimes be slow and sounds, structures, grammatical elements, word forms and meanings are all subject to change and evolution" (Ullman,

The Role of the Word in Language, p. 153). Linguists have classified semantic change into three types as follows:

1. Change affecting the rules related to word functions, sentence structures, phrase formation and other grammatical and morphological rules.
2. The change that affects the styles as happened in the popular dialects descending from Arabic, where their styles differed significantly from the first Arabic styles.
- 3-Change that affects the meanings of words, as when narrowing or broadening occur (Wafi, 2004, p. 313).

4.1 Stages of Semantic Change

Ullman believes that all changes that occur with language (a semantic change is an example c) are in two stages: the first stage of innovation, which is initiated by an individual or group of individuals, and the second stage is that of spread based on the power of imitation and emotional powers: "If the innovator is heard in a phrase or in phrases - as is most often - stuck in the mind, As a result, others used it, and gradually ran out into the language system" (Ullman, nd., p. 153). It is clear from the above that the phenomenon of semantic change is a common phenomenon in all languages. Anis says, "This evolutionary process in semantics is gradual and takes a long time" (Anis, 1976, p. 145)

4.3 Reasons for Semantic Development

The French linguist Antoine Meillet saw earlier this century that there were three main reasons for the change in meaning: linguistic, historical and social. According to Ullman, these three types together can illustrate many states of meaning change. However, it cannot be considered as an absolute universal, i.e., it cannot include all cases (Ullman, nd., p. 157). Of the most important reasons for semantic change are:

1- Need

A type of semantic change that can be carried out by talented people with speech skills, such as poets and writers, and is implemented by the

language academy of sciences. Or, if there is a need for the writer to clarify the importance or enhance its influence in the mind; this is why it led to resorting to metaphors (Anis, 1976, p. 145). Linguists can resort to ancient words whose connotations have become extinct in their lives and make them associated with some modern words.

- 2- Psychological and social need
- 3- Misunderstanding:

4.3. Forms of Semantic Development

It may take any of the following forms:

1- Broadening

That is, when the transition from a special meaning to a general one occurs, the number of referents denoted by the word becomes more than those usually and conventionally denoted by it (Omar, nd., p. 243). To Anis, a child may call any man "father", and so is the case of using the word "mother" by a child (Anis, 1976, pp. 154-155). Similarly, a child can use the word "apple" to refer to all round objects that resemble it in shape, such as an orange and a tennis ball. This expansion of meaning is considered the result of the projection of part of the discriminatory features of the pronunciation. For example, when a child uses the word "uncle" to refer to all men, he reduces the discriminatory features of the term such as kinship, focusing only on masculine traits and puberty (Omar, nd., pp. 244-245).

2- Narrowing

This means shifting meaning from the general to the particular, so as to reduce its scope of reference (Omar, nd., p. 245). This means transforming the reference from an overarching meaning to a specific meaning or restricting its scope. Anis called it "specification of meaning". People in their public life are not only inclined to the faculties that are in their minds, but they prefer special connotations to live with them, so they hear and touch them, and this makes it easier for them to circulate and deal with them in a more realistic and tangible life.

3- Transference

Vendrees pointed out in the transfer of meaning by saying: transference occurs when two meanings are equal or when they do not differ in their general and their specific aspects of reference. Transference of meaning includes various ways (metaphor, and metonymy, using the whole for part, or part for whole). (Omar, nd., p. 247). An example of a change of meaning is the change in the reference of the word (mustache), which in the past meant the beauty of the mouth and clean teeth, in modern usage means beard (Omar, nd., p. 248), and in Arabic, the words "angel" and "messenger" once meant someone sent by someone on a mission, and later evolved into those sublime connotations we hear now, and the word "luggage" was used to refer to the bride's precious and expensive equipment and furniture, as well as luxury cars (Anis, 1976, p. 158).

Conclusions

- 1- Meaning cannot be easily subdivided into several categories without a debate.
- 2- Central reference is shared by people belonging to the same speech community, while marginal reference is considered unique to some individuals in a speech community, and may vary according to the individual's culture, experience, tendencies and emotional perception.
- 3- The difference between the central and marginal reference is a matter relevant to the goal of the referencing word; is it to state something or to express an emotion. The former is the central, while the latter is the marginal.
- 4- Language changes in many ways; one such a way is the semantic change which is liable to affect any language due to a variety of reasons related to either to specific individuals, or whole speech communities. Along all these, various factors may lead to these changes, which might be linguistic or nonlinguistic, social, psychological, or political.

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الدلالة المركزية والدلالة الهامشية في اللغة السريانية

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المستخلص

يقوم بحثنا الموسوم (الدلالة المركزية والدلالة الهامشية في اللغة السريانية) بتناول اهم المباحث اللغوية التي اهتم بها الدرس الدلالي وهو مبحث اقسام الدلالة وانواع المعنى حيث تقوم هذه الدراسة على بيان الدلالات المركزية والهامشية للمفردات وما يطرأ عليها من تطور من خلال اعطاء نبذة من المفردات اللغة السريانية واللغة العربية ومعرفة دلالاتها وما طرأ عليها من تطور واهم مظاهر هذا التطور والاسباب التي ادت الى حدوث التطور الدلالي عبر الزمن ، وجاء اختيارنا لهذا الموضوع لما للدراسة الدلالية من اهمية في الدراسات اللغوية لانها تهدف الى الكشف عن حقيقة المعنى في اللغات الانسانية ومعرفة القوانين اللغوية.

الكلمات الدلالية : المعنى . الدلالة . الدلالة الهامشية . الدلالة المركزية . التطور الدلالي.