

APPROXIMATION TO A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SAYINGS: ARGUMENTATIVE DIMENSION*

Teodoro Álvarez Angulo
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
talang@edu.ucm.es

Traducido al inglés por:
Roberto Ramírez Bravo y
Edmundo Mora Guerrero
Universidad de Nariño

ABSTRACT

This article shows an approach to the pragmatic analysis of sayings. It describes some characteristics of this type of paroemia that can be classified as belonging to argumentative speech, and introduces a brief analysis of some listed sayings about the theory of speech acts. The article also presents some pedagogical considerations and teaching suggestions to be considered when dealing with sayings in the teaching and learning process of foreign languages.

Key words: saying, pragmatics, speech acts, argumentation.

RESUMEN

El artículo muestra un acercamiento al análisis pragmático del refrán. Describe algunos rasgos de este tipo de paremia que pueden catalogarse como pertenecientes al discurso argumentativo e introduce un breve análisis del refrán inscrito en la teoría de los actos de habla.

Palabras clave: Refrán, Pragmática, Actos de habla, Argumentación.

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The saying in Pragmatics¹

In hypothesizing on the coexisting relationship between the argumentation processes and sayings some pleasing results are expected, especially in the sense of considering argumentation as a discursive act that has the aim of validating a statement, an action, or in particular an event; and as a method for obtaining determined objectives; likewise sayings are cultural concepts referring to a tradition and a form of creating a style of reflection (Tejero, 2001).

We can place this paroemia in the context of Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's theory (1984: 40 and ss) that states that argument is a type of social and intellectual activity which serves to justify or to refute an opinion and is beyond linguistic and philosophical ideas. From this perspective, sayings provide the setting for the field of study of argument called pragmadialectics, which offers a model of argumentative speech not defined in terms of form and content, but on the basis of processes of social interaction.

This dimension deals with identifying a pragmatic approximation of the meanings formed by what is said, what is interpreted and constructed related to the sayings and the context: that is, it looks at an approximation with the analysis of the contextual production of this type of paroemia understood as a propositional event and enunciation.

Sayings are understood as concrete linguistic decisions, performed by a reader in a communicative situation. They are defined within a pragmatic theory, and their interpretation depends on their semantic content but specifically on the contextual condition of emission, and they are valued according to adequate and inadequate/effective and ineffective pragmatic parameters.

In this piece of work pragmatics is understood as a theory of performance² (Grice, 1991. 1975) - ability to use language in a given situation; as a branch of the sciences of language which has the aim of studying the use of language. Among its tasks is explaining how a listener can man-

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1. The beginning of pragmatics can be found in the philosophy of language and specifically in John Austin's lectures presented at the University of Harvard in 1955 in which he introduced the notion of act of language and defended the functional action of language in communication; we do not describe the world we earn' out act: saying is doing.
 2. Pragmatics is assumed as the study of comprehension. It differs from the Chomskian idea in which linguistic production is suggested. For Benveniste (1977, 1974 and Ducrot 1980, 1988) Pragmatics is adopted as a competence theory, given that the pragmatic elements are immersed in the same language-integrated pragmatics.

age to interpret an enunciation in a "non literal" manner and why the reader has chosen a "non literal" form of expression instead of a literal expression (Moeschler & Reboul, 1999, 1994).

The task of Pragmatics, in this case, is assumed as the identification of the phenomena of inference in order to access the meaning of sayings; as with the process of sophisticated cooperation (Grice, 1991, 1975) in order to understand these and the identification of the elements that are relevant (Sperber and Wilson, 1986) or the Topoi¹ (Anscombe and Ducrot, 1994, 1983) which allows the saying to in crust itself in the communicative activity as an element of argumentation.

Following the work of Dik (1989), pragmatic information consists of sublevels such as: a) the general level which includes knowledge of the natural and cultural world; b) the situational level which makes up the knowledge of the speakers derived from the development of interaction; and c) the contextual level which touches on the polyphony of linguistic expressions exchanged in the immediately preceding speech.

Based on the above, the aim is oriented towards the identification of the saying as a micro speech act inserted in a given macro speech act in a situation, which has as its function, among other aspects, the coming closer to assessing a state of hypothetical facts which can be interpreted as pseudo statements, for example:

- 1) Silence is worth more than a thousand words

With enunciation (1) the intention is to assess the action of *not speaking* with other actions such as: admitting something; assenting or agreeing to something; or it can be assumed in other contexts such as concealing and hiding. From this it is deduced that the enunciation integrates affected information through non-described variables which could be the cause of *not speaking*. For example "concern about other matters" or simply "They do not speak because of a toothache" This phenomenon can be assimilated to the point which Austin (1982. 1962), at a generic level called descriptive illusion.

- (2) The pot calling the kettle black (*el ladrón juzga por su condición*)

(2) Is an enunciation that, without a preceding or subsequent pragmatic context does not integrate a clear communicative function. Firstly, because the function of judging is not typical of he who commits a crime but of a judge or court. Secondly, because the word *thief* on the one hand includes "an insult in a wounding way", but on the other hand it is applied as an "affectionate insult" -you stole my love petty thief and even they talk about the "good thief"- a thief who robs a

thief has one hundred years of pardon (Saint Dimes) and the "bad thief (Gestas).

The "trial of the thief", to which this enunciation refers, probably has a harmful meaning but it is possible to think that the same "trial" is positive if it talks about the "good thief" "which means that this micro act of speaking, as we have presented it- out of context- is ambiguous and for this reason the argumentative profile which it refers to is blurred.

As can be seen, this type of paroemia is different in its expressed meaning from the statements which fully assess what Austin (1982, 1962) calls *constativos*; for example: *Mother Teresa of Calcutta died last century*.

In this sense, it is appropriate to interpret sayings on more than on the literal level in which it ends up converted into a "descriptive illusion"- "things are easier said than done" -*una cosa piensa el burro y otra el que lo está enjalmando*-, it is important to approach this saying from a contextual pragmatic dimension (Searle, 1980, 1969), and find the value of this type of declaration (Benveniste (1977, 1974; Ducrot, 1988) in which the subject constructs and negotiates significance and produces meaning in the real conditions of communication.

Based on the above, this speech is understood as the pretext for suggesting the adoption of an attitude or the performance of an action insofar as it is incruited in a macro act of speech and an argument is identified in its structure, an argument that justifies its inclusion. Let's see a case in which subject A comments to subject B that the mayor of his town again forgot the name of A for the popular housing award and for this reason he continues paying rent; B reprimands by pointing out that in these circumstances it is necessary to demand and protest publicly if necessary because *he who does not ask does not get...* (*El que no llora no mama*).

3) *He who does not ask does not get*

a. *he who does not ask*

b. *he does not get*

The structure 3)a. introduces the saying and presupposes: *If he does not ask*. Which in turn, suggests: *ask*, so that it becomes a probable condition (not necessary) or justification to get 3)b. to suck³ that is to say, to achieve the purpose.

3. Common argumentative place or gradual rules commonly admitted: life is short (You have to hurry up- *hay que darse prisa*) principles based on the speech which states the necessary ways to assign a meaning to the enunciation (Moeschler and Reboul. 1999, 1994).

In this micro act of speech, the illocutionary force (Searle, 1980, 1969) is constructed in the first part of the enunciation, in 3)a. and it is constructed on need to condition the success of a second action, 3)b. In this way of thinking lies the importance of pointing out that there are effects conventionally associated with the expression of sayings which are made on the basis of an ulterior situation- the speech of subjects A and B, or of a subsequent situation, if B's speech is introduced with 3): *He who does not ask does not get*. In these circumstances it is convenient to claim (...)"

In the example it can be seen that the macro speech act in its totality probably stems from real problems of stigmatization, discrimination or omission, among others, and causes a subsequent action, presumably of inclusion, acceptance or memory.

Sayings seen as a micro expository speech act (Austin, 1982 (1962) or directive speech (Searle, 1980, 1969) function in an indissoluble way from a theory of the action, a theory in which saying is doing, in which words come to life. In this context, the way in which an enunciation follows social and cultural conventions in the attribution of meaning and linguistic conventions in the phonic, semantic (metaphoric) and morphosyntactic context is highlighted. That is to say, it follows some rules, in such a way that the speaker invokes a deliberate effect on the hearer through the fact that he recognizes the intention of the transmitter.

The pragmatic processing of the enunciation is registered in the central thought system to a greater extent than in the linguistically specialized system. From this perspective, one can speak of Cognitive Pragmatics in which the interpretation is based on the act of speaking that makes it possible to pinpoint a type of paroemia, sayings in our case, in which the inferential phenomena stand out in the comprehension of the enunciation and finally a true or false value is attributed to them.

In the attribution of meaning to sayings polyphony (plurality of voices) is perceived, a commentator is seen as responsible for the speech act and an enunciator defines the points of view brought onto the scene by this commentator⁴ (Ducrot, 1980). This leads us to hypothesize that the saying is not only the operation of a code, but also the staging of phenomena of inference (responsible for the formation of the hypothesis) in which the

4. To suck: the young (la cría) sucks the milk from the breast of the mother: to gobble: to obtain a thing without merits or efforts (Moliner 1998). In other enunciations like: She left him in the lurch (lo dejó mamando), the term suggests deceived, tired, bored, (irritated, plantado, engañado) and others with sexual connotations.

representation is structured from implications which form the guarantee or assumption of relevance and finally allow the speaker to interpret meaning: cognitive effort and contextual effect.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1986), implications do not come from the meaning of the sentence but from the conjunction of linguistic and nonlinguistic information combined with non-demonstrative characteristics because there is no obvious guarantee of the outcome- You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear (*aunque la mona se vista de seda mona siempre se queda*) - and of presumable metaphoric explanations - where there is smoke there is fire - (*donde hubo fuego cenizas quedan*)- every cause has an effect (*toda combustion genera residuos*).

It is important to point out that the implicit or the explicit meaning of sayings is constructed in the course of interaction and it can be assessed by the confidence that the user has in himself and of the symbolism that his culture provides. For example, the inhabitants of a region in which there is no clear difference of seasons, probably won't understand the meaning: neer cast a clout, till May is out (*Hasta el cuarenta de mayo no se quita el monje el sayo*)⁵.

The dimension of the inference in which the saying operates can be assimilated with the proper wisdom to the implicating concept (generated in the non literal dimension of the saying (Grice⁶, 1975). From here the concept of non demonstrative pragmatic of the inference can be constructed tentatively because it is not caused by forms or meanings of the sentence but by meanings which can suggest the enunciation of the saying.

This model of inference, is explained in the context of sayings as enunciations, and in other information that provides the situation, the context of the conversation and in general the symbolism in which the speakers operate (setting). In this setting, the creative event of interpretation is produced which depends on the cognitive capacity of the speakers to construct the significance of the context-meaning and sense. That is, in this setting comprehension and coherent interpretation are activated

5. A very popular saying used in Spain to mean that winter can have an effect until the first days of June; for this reason, it is not suitable to keep the true clothing of this season before the aforementioned month.

6. If Austin gave up the descriptive characteristics of the enunciation, Grice showed that what is implied in communication is not only implied by the informative content of the enunciation.

with the principle of relevance in which the interpretation stops at a moment and continues until the possible depletion of the enunciation.

The aforementioned reaffirms that the saying and the inferences are not made up and neither are interpreted independently, but in relation to the context in which a certain number of data is developed: interpretation of the context (in which the short-term memory acts) and interpretation of preceding enunciations (which is performed by the mid-term memory) and reconfiguration of the conceptual information which has been previously dealt with (which occupies the long term memory). It could be said that the creation of these contexts makes the adequate interpretation of the saying possible.

Based on the above, it is legitimate to judge that the context of the saying is composed of propositions which arise from three types of data. Those which are extracted from long term memory, like the ideological, political and religious data that the subjects have acquired during their development; others that can be extracted from memory at mid-term, which can be the discursive and conversational contexts in which the saying is produced; and the information which is produced in the short-term memory and which is extracted from the physical environment, that is to say, the perceptive facts which are extracted from the situation in which communication takes place (Dik, 1989). These three types of data make up the cognitive environment of the speakers of the enunciation⁷.

In other words, the context in relation to how the saying is interpreted is made up of data extracted from the cognitive environment of the speaker, which without a doubt is permeated by the idiosyncratic characteristics of the mental operation and by diagrams and models of perceiving and assuming a life style and being. In this complex process, the saying causes the concept, the representation, the conjecture, the expectation and the process to be followed.

The argumentative fact of the saying is registered in this pragmatic context. In this context one can understand how a popular sentence is repeated traditionally, out in verse from *-problems don't seem so bad if you keep cheerful (el que canta las penas espanta)-* or at least with a certain rhythm, harmony or assonance that makes it easier to retain No

7. "The cognitive setting of an individual is a group of facts which for him are evident. An evident fact for an individual is a certain moment if and only if this individual is capable at the moment to mentally represent this fact and to accept its truth or probable true representation" (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

man is a prophet in his own land – (*nadie es profeta en su tierra*)- obtains stability in form and figurative meaning.

This context speaks about sentence⁸ in as much as it becomes a piece of advice or reason of practical application to life, in this order, the primary argumentative features can be detected.

Let us see a case:

4) He who bites off more chews little. (*El que mucho abarca poco aprieta*)

Apart from being a bimember structure, with mnemonic elements, easy to retain by memory, it is formed as a discourse in which a probable fact is assessed (Anscombe. 1997) by a subject that as agent, probably carries out two actions: *he bites off and chews (abarca y aprieta)* in a specific intercommunication context

At the level of meaning, 4) is probably reduced to a micro speech act in which an affirmation composed of two propositions is carried out:

- he who bites off more (*el que mucho abarca*)
- he who cannot chew (*el que poco aprieta*)

It would be said that it is a deductive argument in which there is a condition: a. *If he bites off more (si mucho abarca)* then the conclusion b. *he will not be able to chew (poco aprieta)* is introduced.

If $p \rightarrow q$ and $\sim p \rightarrow \sim q$

If you want to reach $\sim q \rightarrow \sim p$; or

/the enunciation p/ therefore /enunciation q/ (modus ponens, Weston. 1994). In another way of meaningful composition this would be:

he who bites off little is able to chew or (el que poco abarca - mucho aprieta)

chews too much \rightarrow bites off little (mucho aprieta - poco abarca)

8. The old Greek called sentence to the feeling of the mind. Its use was very frequent in speakers, although it was also found in daily speech. This phenomenon is still maintained because when we swear and speak from the heart we say what we feel. Some people used the word "sensa" (sensu are the feelings of the body). The custom led the concepts of the soul to be called feelings and sentences to the sayings which give light to a speech, mainly reduced to brief clauses. The older sentences are those that Greeks called gnoma, taken as advice or decree and said not by whichever person, either in a routine or false way or with cramming. (he who only speaks with sentences says many dull, cold and useless things, if they are very frequent he cannot have any choice): Some modern authors call the noema a concept, a name which they gave to what is not said but which is conceived (Quintiliano, Lib. (Book) V quoted in Besa Campubri, 1997).

This can be converted, of course into a fallacy, in a pseudo demonstration given that not always *bites off more (mucho abarca)* *a* implies *chews little (poco aprieta)* and in all its alternatives. In another order this could be:

- bites off more so chews little ----- $+ p \rightarrow + q$ *mucho abarca entonces poco aprieta*
- chews too much so bites off more----- $+ p \rightarrow + q$ *mucho aprieta entonces mucho abarca*
- bites off little so chews little ----- $- p \rightarrow - q$ *poco abarca entonces poco aprieta*
- chews little so bites off little ----- $- q \rightarrow - p$ *poco aprieta entonces poco abarca*

And so on, a number of prepositional combinations exist.

If 4) and its variants are to be in the literal dimension - at the level of meaning - the use of new technology and tools can surely refute such sentences.

At the level of meaning, and in a particular context 4) abstracts a form of perceiving inherent life styles to a culture, it abstracts elements (ideological, religious, economic, linguistic, etc.) which make up the vitality of the macro speech act and the alternating intensions of the affirmation. It is the suggestion towards an attitude or an action: moderation opposite to behavior, reflection in attitudes and possible aptitudes. In this context of communicative action referential transferences, analogies and comparisons of meanings ("selfishness", "non-fulfillment", "lack of solidarity", "greed", among others) are produced to achieve the closest conjecture to the previous purpose of the transmitter.

We go to another example in which the situation is asserted a little more.

Let's imagine a teacher's meeting in which the head of the academic unit is chosen and in which subject A constantly asks to be allowed to speak and sets himself the aim of earning the erudite image of expert in the theme and so tries to get the favor of the voters, but unfortunately his interventions are inappropriate. Before this circumstance, probably the speaker is censured with enunciations, among others, such as:

- 4) He who bites off more chews little or (*el que mucho abarca poco aprieta*)
- 5) He just blows hot air (*El que mucho habla mucho yerra*)

In this case, we are approaching the following fact: the structure: he who bites off more (*el que mucho abarca*) can only argue the conclusion, chews little (*poco aprieta*) if and only if the enunciation is translated into pragmatic, ideological and specific intercommunicative contexts. The conclusion is the explicit enunciation for which the argument is used. In the previous situation the saying can ask for *wisdom, moderation, good sense, discretion, caution and precaution*; or it can suggest *selfishness, individualism and greed*, among others. The enunciation of this saying is not appropriate in a discursive context which evokes, for example; the style with which a swimmer tries to better his swimming in butterfly stroke.

In case 5) the structure he who blows (*el que mucho habla*) can only argue the conclusion just hot air (*mucho yerra*) if and only if the enunciation is translated into cultural, pragmatic, ideological and specific intercommunicative contexts.

In the setting of connotations, this micro act of active speech 5) activates on the subject the drives⁹ (*cora*) for the construction of meaning and elaboration of the most appropriate conjecture for the case. Hypothetically the meanings could suggest: don't talk, say inappropriate things, be quiet, he is impertinent, be careful with what you say, let other people talk, behave yourself, we do not believe it, among others.

Based on the cognitive ideological and pragmatic diagrams the speaker decides which meaning to take on for himself.

As can be seen, in this exercise the uniqueness of the subject speaker is questioned, thus the condition of the polyphonic subject is recovered (Ducrot, 1983) as is that of the dialogical subject (Bajtin, 1992 [1977], 1989[1975]). It is dialogical because it claims the concepts of the subjects which produce meaning and fosters the dimension of I in relation to the other (Kristeva, 1974). An exchange of thought is produced through which the communication of awareness whose existence is conversation occurs and its unity consists of living with each other in an exchange and mutually symbolic enrichment.

As was shown above, the inclusion of the saying in a macro act of speech, fulfills the function of arguing in as much as it causes an attitude

9. Drives are understood as unconscious forces which activate determined conducts; they are related to the principle of pleasure which is about removing all painful excitement and the principle of reality. It is configured from the primary group of drives submitted on the principle of pleasure and the super I from the group of moral prohibitions internalized in the form of moral conscience.

through an enunciation which integrates an assertion A and a conclusion B in a given context of communicative action.

A: He who blows (*el que mucho habla*)

B: Just hot air (*mucho yerra*)

Under these circumstances it is licit to bring us closer to identifying the argument and counter argument in the saying as discursive events which are present in various acts of speech in the sociocultural context of the subject. It is argued in terms of:

- Economics: buy cheap get cheap (*lo barato sale caro*);
- Religion and work: The early bird catches the worm (*al que madruga Dios le ayuda*) and is counterargued: everything at its appointed time (*no por madrugar el día amanece más temprano*).
- Justice: the pot calling the kettle black, -(*cada ladrón juzga por su condición*), among others,
- Abundance: you reap what you sow (*quien bien siembra bien recoge*)
- Physical: you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear (*el mono aunque se vista de seda, mono siempre queda*);
- Awkardness: It is an unfair world (*Dios da sombrero al que no tiene cabeza*);
- Aptitudes: he's bound to make good with his experience (*a quien bien baila, poco son le basta*) etc.

These are argumentative speeches, because as we said before they are intended to cause a change of attitude in the subject and this includes his aptitudes in a context of action; because they are means used to cause reasoning and judgment (Lewendowsky, 1982); generally, because they are a device or discursive strategy used by an announcer with the purpose of convincing the other in a specific context (Moeschlery Reboul, 1999. 1994).

They are counter argumentative speeches because they are also used to contradict a previous saying and induce a deeper reflection about what is said or done. For example, in opposition to: *por la maleta se conoce al pasajero*. (judge a book by its cover) another arises which can indicate: *looks are deceiving, all that glitters is not gold*.

From another perspective, the saying can take the form of an evocation, in which it is meant to influence and persuade someone about something, through these enunciations it is meant to have an audience believe or do

things or both, be this audience a unique person or a whole group. This is a way of explaining and justifying a manner of understanding and being in the world (Ribas, 2002). It is a manner of acting linguistically on the other with the intention of affecting his cognitive schema (Grice, 1990), elaborated in a determined context of social activity and which makes it possible to interpret the meaning of the linguistic fact.

Sayings considered as a popular philosophy openly allow sentences leading to solving or justifying problems that affect the daily life of the individual or society as it was said, problems related to money, health, awkwardness, death, engagement and the physical, among others. It works with the desire to educate, in an argumentative explanatory way, in embarrassing or simplistic situations which appear in daily life –*As the saying goes in the good old days (en tus apuros y afanes pide consejos a los refranes)* is planned in some way to moralize and regenerate behaviors, trying to penetrate the psychology of the subject or subjects to whom the saying is attributed.

The condition of the sentence of the saying is registered at real level, presumably because it is the fruit of constant and traditional social experience, because it has been configured as a collective good which makes it possible to satirize or ridicule in an argumentative way, an action or behavior. In the same way, it can be said that incrustated in the discursive order is a communicative technique which imprints eloquence to linguistic intervention.

Sayings include rules that have a didactic function which provokes reflection in order to produce reflection, in this event, the following can be detected:

- Comparisons: show me your company and I will tell you who you are (*dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres*).
- Aspirations: The grass is always greener on the other side (*la suerte de la fea la bonita la desea*);
- Exemplifications: A friend in need is a friend indeed (*el que es fiel en poco, lo será en mucho*).
- Justifications: The leopard can't change his spots (*genio y figura hasta la sepultura*)
- Caution: If you keep your mouth shut, you won't put your foot in it. (*En boca cerrada no entra mosca*), among others

Generally, it can be said that sayings prescribe standards of conduct in a subjective way; not in a self-sufficient way but contextualized or incrustrated in broader speech- in a macro speech act.

In conclusion, sayings are a paroemia which is configured as a micro act of speech inserted into the discursive event and which generally takes shape and is carried out in a pragmatic context. This action setting requires the participants to generate inferences that make it possible to detect the argument in which the condition to live better is referenced. Sayings present at the level of meaning an affirmation which is understood as a condition and a conclusion. At the level of meaning they present polyphonic and dialogical characteristics of the paroemias.

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