

Indexicals in Television News Broadcast

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Abstract

This work investigated the use of indexicals in television news broadcast. Indexicals are expressive words that signal the appropriate use of information in text. They serve to point to objects, personalities and ideas particularly in television news broadcast. This paper therefore aimed at examining the characteristic indexicals used as text creating linguistic features in news broadcast. The corpus for the study consists of news bulletins of TV Gotel, Yola, Adamawa State- Nigeria. Four bulletins broadcasted within the month of August, 2012, were randomly selected from the television. The method of data analysis was descriptive. The findings show that indexicals are significant features of television news broadcast. Pronoun indexicals point at personalities and topics, while adjectives describe events, and adverbs point at times and manners in which such events occur. The paper, suggests that practicing journalists and students of mass communication should be encouraged to use indexicals as they write, report and cast news over the television.

Key words: indexicals, bulletins, news broadcast, deixis.

1.Introduction

Indexicalities are elements of pragmatics in which the features of language refer directly to the circumstance or context of an utterance. In other words an indexical expression (such as today, that, here, utterance, you, etc) is a word or phrase that is associated with different meanings on different occasions. In conversion, interpretation of indexical expressions may in part depend on a variety of paralinguistic and the shared experience of the participants (Jauro, 2011). Bawmgarten (2008) and Finch (2000) in the same context, see indexicals as deictic references to all the features of language that orient utterances in spaces, time and speakers stand point.

Extensively, indexicals are expressive signs that point to the truth of a proposition made by a speaker in an utterance or in utterances. Jauro(2011) found out that the term was first used by Pierce (1931) to refer to demonstrative pronouns and other words which call the attention of the hearer to aspects of the immediate situation on which attention is focused upon, otherwise known as index. Indexes function to draw the attention of the hearer and make him use his power of observation, to establish a real connection between his mind and the objects. Abercrombie (1967) cited by Lyons (1977) uses the term “indexes” to refer to “signs which reveal personal characteristics of the writer or speaker”

Indexicals can also be referred to as signs sent by a sender to a receiver for interpretation. This is derived from Moris’(1938) characterization of semiotics into syntactic, semantic and pragmatic entailments in line with Montague’s (1970) proposal that pragmatics should be considered with the study of signs and their users in contexts including indexicals. Filmore (1972, 1975) and Lewis (1983) on the other hand, point out those utterances such as: *come, go, left, and right*, which seem to invoke different points of reference, or different perspectives in different contexts. Based on this, they contend that indexicals make a speaker to engage in gesticulatory expressions of what is intended and conclude that indexicals are determined in part by the *extra - linguistic* features of time and location of the speaker’s intention. Indexicals can also vary from context to context; hence they are commonly referred to as *context-sensitive expressions*. In the same vein, Reichenbach (1947), points out that words and morphemes that indicate tense are also indexicals, because they refer to different time intervals from context to context.

Indexicals are therefore expressive words that point to the truth of a proposition. Such expressive words are found in all languages. The general phenomenon of the occurrence of such words in any language is known as deixis. Deixis is realized by means of demonstratives, first and second person pronouns, and specific time and place adverbs such as *now* and *here*, and any other grammatical features that are connected to the circumstances of utterance. Thus,

Perry (2001) contends that not all pronouns are indexicals, and not all indexicals are pronouns. Levinson (1983) points out that deixis or deictic words and expressions can also be referred to as indexicals.

Most writers and speakers have problems with the use of indexicals. Television news broadcast have been criticized for poor use of language. Some of these mistakes border on indexicals. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the use of indexicals in television broadcast: to describe their characteristic features in the genre and their appropriateness in reporting and casting news.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Kaplan's (1989a) theory of indexicals which describes the meaning of indexicals in a systematic way. Kaplan identifies three categories of indexicals as: *Pronoun*, (I, he, she, this, that, etc.); *Adverb*, (here, now, actually, presently, today, and yesterday and tomorrow.) and *Adjectives* (actual and present). He further distinguishes between two types of indexicals, pure indexicals such as: I, today, tomorrow, actually, present, and (perhaps) here and now which are not determined by the speaker's actions or intentions and true demonstratives which are determined (in part) by the speaker's accompanying pointing gestures, or by the speaker's intention to refer to a particular object. Thus it can be said that reference to pure indexical is automatic while reference to true demonstratives requires the use of extra-linguistic factors.

One of the fundamentals of Kaplan's theory is that linguistic expressions have contents or *contexts*. He refers to the content as "C". Each context has at least an agent, time, location, and possible world associated with it. Kaplan points out that the content of a sentence, with respect to context, has a truth value *at the world of the context*. He also states that the content of a sentence with respect to a context can be evaluated for truth at a world other than the world of the context. For example the content of 'I am a philosopher' with respect to *C*, is the proposition that Fred is a philosopher. At *W* (presumable), this proposition is false, but it can be true at some other world, say *W*, in which Fred is a philosopher. In this way, the *sentence* 'I am a philosopher' is false in *C* and *W*₂ but true at *C* and *W**. (Notice that the context is the same both times, while the world is different.) Therefore, the sentence "it is *possible* that I am philosopher' is true with respect to *C* and *W*; and the content of the sentence, with respect to *C*, is true in *C*.

The frame for this analysis is therefore based on Kaplan's (1989a) classification of indexicals into: pronouns, adverbs and adjectives.

3. Methodology

This is a corpus based study; the approach to research adopted is descriptive. 4 Television News Bulletins within the month of August, 2012 from a reputable non-Governmental Television Broadcast Station- TV Gotel, Yola were collected. The Bulletins were collected by stratified random sampling. The analytical procedure is based on Kaplan's classification of indexicals into: pronouns, adverbs and adjectives. The corpus for the study is provided in the order below.

The Corpus: The corpus for the study consists of the following bulletins:

Table 1: Television News Headlines (Corpus) for the Study

TV Station	Date, Month and Year of Broadcast	Television News Headlines
TV Gotel	3 rd August 2012	Police Warns Public Against Use of Tinted Glasses Without Permit
TV Gotel	5 th August 2012	The Federal Executive Government Council has approved a draft budget proposal of 4.929 trillion for 2013, as announced by the minister of finance Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Ewela
TV Gotel	7 th August, 2012	House Vows to deal with erring contractors
TV Gotel	9 th August, 2012	Residents describe as Shocking turn around in power supply

The study sets out to investigate whether indexicals are features of TV Gotel News broadcast as samples and also to determine the extent to which the use of indexicals are constrained by their context of use in television news bulletins in general.

4. Findings and Discussions

The analysis goes to show that pronouns, adjectives and adverbs are important linguistic features used in establishing relationship between propositions in TV news broadcast. All are significant in the study. In the news bulletins under study, three types of indexicals by Kaplan (1989a) were identified. They are: Pronouns, Adjectives and Adverbs.

TEXT I

Those spoken to regretted the long years of irregular supply of electricity but noted that development in the last few days have been encouraging and reassuring that the days ahead will be better (residents describe as shocking turn around in power supply, TV Gotel, 9th August, 2012, page 3)

From text I above, it is understand that the indexical sign "those" underlined is used to index, point or identify people (Those spoken to) who exist as realities in the proposition and in the universe of discourse. When there are more persons in distant location, the plural form of such demonstrative indexicals are used. The other singular demonstrative pronoun "that" in the same text is used as a non-indexical and referential function but to consolidate the article "the" to give coherence the entire statement.

TEXT II

The ban on the use of tinted glass on cars is still in force. This is according to a statement by the Adamawa State Police command. Therefore, motorists without factory tinted glass or permit are advised to remove theirs (Police warns public against the use of tinted glasses without permit, TV Gotel, 3rd August, 2012 page 9)

The underlined indexical marker "this" above, points at a body of agency referred to in the discourse which is "The Adamawa State Police Command". In speech, it may involve hand gesture and the shared experience of the participants. But this is a written text read out to the public in form of news broadcast. It is functioning as an indexical whose main function is as a pointing word to an object.

The major function of the pronoun analyzed in the TV Gotel News bulletin factually pointed at or identified realities in the discourse, mostly personalities whose identification is objectively necessary for the realization of intended meaning made in the news bulletin.

TEXT III

Sharadeen Ganiyu emphasized that the present condition of the country reflects the poor implementation of the budget (The federal executive government council has approved a draft budget proposal of 4.929 Trillion 2013, as announced by the Minister of Finance DR Ngozi Okonjo Ewela)

Text III above has the adjective indexical "present" to point at the present condition of the country which reflects the poor implementation of the budget. The use of indexical "present" describes the state of the country despite the previous implementation of the budget meant to change the physical structures of the country. It indicates non proper implementation of the budget which affects both development of human and natural resources. The indexical "present" therefore describes or is concerned with what is happening now.

TEXT IV

The house of Assembly has threatened to carry out punitive measures on contractors who have extended mobilization money paid them with little or nothing to show for it. The public hearing which rounded up today saw ten contractors in attendance (House vows to deal with erring contractors, 3rd August, 2012, page 6)

In text IV above the indexical "today" is used to show the time and manner an action took place in the event of the report to the time (the public are hearing on contractors who have expended mobilization money paid them with nothing to show for it) it has rounded up. The pointing needs not necessarily been seen; rather the intention of the expression should have an embedded action as represented by the verb phrase "...Saw ten contractors in attendance".

It can therefore be deduced that based on the results obtained from the analysis, indexicals are a significant features of Television news broadcast. Television news broadcast reports on topical issues involving personalities which invariable are political figures. Thus, the events being discussed and the personalities involved are most often identified by means of pronouns to demonstrate the truthfulness of the proposition being made. The adjective "present" also describes events and conditions of objects, personalities in the news reports and the adverbs point at the time events are done or are to be done.

5. CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this investigation to show that indexicals are important features of language in Television news broadcast. Pronoun indexicals help television news broadcasters point out the subject matter of discourse and the personalities involved to the listeners; adjective indexicals describe events and their conditions to listeners and lastly, adverbials point at time and manner events take place. The study therefore recommends that journalists should vary their choice of indexicals in different contexts for a more effective style to point at the intending meaning in the message to the listener and that the students of language, mass communication and journalism should be taught the proper use of indexicals in Television news broadcast and reporting.

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