

Functional Exchanges and Context in Point of the English Language as “*lingua franca*”. Case Study Agenda-Setting Concept

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Abstract: *The present-day society is characterized by a wide range of channels within the framework of which communication and language have a particular role in the transmission of specialized knowledge. The function and connotation of any conversational exchange implies the subject to acknowledge the norms and expectations as regards language that are assumed by the participants in a context. The perception of the world depends on ideologies whereas the concept of power constrains language use and, therefore, communication with others; the notion of context, accounting for the situatedness of oral expression or text implies concrete properties of participants and social identities, roles, relations as well as social actions of a specific case. The article at issue is intended to demonstrate the manner in which the perspective with regard to the concept of “agenda-setting” is related to ideologies and associations, and corresponding application in diverse contexts.*

Keywords: *context, lingua franca, oral expression, language, agenda-setting*

The passage of time characteristic to the phases of communities over the years has departed from past temporal concerns. The expeditious modality in respect of thought and expounding actual issues or matters has imposed an accordant, yet strenuous pace for the individuals to conform to the data of a continually dynamic, inconstant reality. The individual perceives everyday experience in conjunction with the degree of forbearance one possesses to have an insight or avail the imaginative faculty for the purpose of reflecting upon. The present society might be referred to as being defined by a plurality of values that endeavor to legitimize whilst the corresponding equivocal dimension implies a subjective assessment and distinctive decision. The actual society does not represent the appanage of an educated, literate minority but an ever-expanding social communication forum.

The interchange of ideas and concepts has to be differently, and contextualized interpreted due to the fact according to which it explains social realities and enables the individual to comprehend the outside world. An insight in point of conveying ideas takes into consideration a *mélange* of concepts, images, symbols, arguments, and judgements with the aim of a concrete conclusiveness. Specialized communication has included over the

course of time dissimilar cultural studies, even feminism, adding multicultural and political elements.

In the last twenty century, scientific interdisciplinary research has evolved due to information and communication technologies along with development of Internet. This has given rise to communicative situations, new cultural models, new varieties of English language, discourse and a flurry of new terminology and phraseology.

M.A.K. Halliday in his theory of language has focused on the notion of function, considering that language has three meta-functions: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. The interpersonal function plays the role of setting up and maintaining social relations, and indicates the roles of the participants in communication (Halliday 19). In other work Halliday pointed out that the interpersonal meaning can be expressed by mood, modality and key (Halliday 74). Later, he added pronoun system, attitudinal modifier and rhythmic features of words. (Halliday 126)

A different opinion assesses that the English language has a dual function as it communicates ideational meaning, having in view the pieces of information and the ideas conveyed; concurrently, it also transmits interpersonal content and implications, indicating a certain friendliness or cordiality level, or status distinction. Moreover, language collects meanings from its context, and especially in oral communication, the borders between language and context, and language and culture, begin to blur. Anthropologists have demonstrated that, to interpret language, a student draws on a considerable amount of cultural as well as linguistic knowledge (Zahariadis 5-7).

Current educational trends and challenges in respect of expanding access to educational opportunities and relevance of learning has determined that the language adjust to the necessities of present system of assuming perspectives, nuances in accordance with an environment being submitted to correspond to an analytical picture of a particular requirements/application on texts.

We use language to interact with people for some purposes: we may want to influence their attitudes or behavior, or to provide information that they do not know, or to explain our own attitudes or behavior, or to get them to take some actions, and so on. (Simon 65)

The information support of analysis in point of learning the English language entails a consistent range of specialized materials, thus enabling the individual/the student to acquire good knowledge and competences by means of social dialogue, critical thinking, ‘completed’ knowledge,

intergenerational conversation that aims to catalyze ongoing debate on the general picture of both the past and present.

The present time in which individuals cope with a considerable amount of material insight has determined bilingual and multilingual communication to become a significant issue in our modern society where language plays a special role in the transmission of specialized knowledge. It is significant to recall that U.S. leadership after the Second World War greatly influenced international relations and English started to be considered as “lingua franca”, namely the language of international communication.

The decade of the 1950s is regarded as an unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale. This expansion managed to create a unified world which was dominated by two forces, namely, technology and commerce which generated a demand for an international language.

Learning English became the need of an instant, neither for the contentment nor advantage of mastering a language, definitely English is to be regarded or perceived as being the core in respect of technology and commerce, being accepted internationally. Hence, a new generation of learners has been created as regards the motive to acquire knowledge of a language in point of selling a product, the proper understanding of an instruction manual or the continual updating with the developments/innovations and journals available only in the above-mentioned language in the medical field. Among the factors which led to the creation of ESP (English for Specific Purpose), Kennedy and Bolitho include the following:

the introduction of governmental mass education programs with English as the first and sometimes the only foreign language; the need of English as a common medium of communication as a consequence of the growth of business and increased occupational mobility; the facilitation of access to scientific technical literature. (Kennedy, Bolitho 14-15)

The following aspects need to be considered to promote the students' awareness as regards the linguistic system underlying a specific genre and to understand the structure of texts of a discipline:

- ◆ lexical and syntactical items – subject-specific terminology; nominal use; metaphorical use of words; iconic language; active vs passive use; modality; distinctive usual presence of verb tenses;
- ◆ discourse features – coherence and cohesion; intentionality; topicality; discursive organization; persuasive devices.

It is an empirical matter to find out for each culture which are the basic categories, whether there are universal/general categories, and how such contextual categories control specific structures of text and talk – as when a power relation between participants controls the choice of personal pronouns or when the knowledge of the speaker about the background of the recipient controls the presupposition structure of the discourse. For each of the following concepts (professor, university, student) one might need a vast amount of further information in order to account for the specificities of discourse production, e.g., time periods, types of agents, institutions and their relevant properties and actions. Information is always active because it needs to control all current discourse structures, whereas global level information may be backgrounded and activated when needed at certain moments in discourse production.

An effective academic text is marked by creative thinking and originality, impartiality, reasoned argument, persuasive evidence, sound conclusions. The content should be concise, but sufficient, and the style clear and accessible. What a word means is often defined by its relationship to other words along with the contexts in which has appeared to the subject over time. The metaphorical use of terms/locutions allows us to move beyond their purely Denotational use –where a word only describes a thing, rather than the feelings or ideas it suggests, thus helping to extend the range of expressions and interpretation, enabling one to explain feelings about things in a way that creates readily available images. The metaphorical and idiomatic use of words and phrases is not always popular, however. For example, a common phrase, used especially by politicians, is *at the end of the day*, which means something like ‘*my main point is*’. This expression, along with another one blue-sky thinking (thinking creatively) have become so widely used. When an individual is speaking, he/she constructs words and phrases with individual sounds and uses pitch change, intonation and stress to convey different meanings (Harmer 27).

To write or to speak at an academic level, a correct understanding of words is necessary. Depending on the case, the researcher should also be aware in point of words:

- ❖ origins and families
- ❖ usage and appropriateness (formal/informal, written/spoken)
- ❖ synonyms and their usage
- ❖ collocation patterns
- ❖ grammatical functions
- ❖ participation in idioms

Talk is a central part of most of our lives; through it we carry out activities, negotiate relationships, try to construct understandings about the

world around us and develop our own sense of identity. Not only are there various manners of expression according to the context, but the forms may have different significance and meaning depending on where and when they are used. The English language provides a variety of resources for pursuing individual purposes, but it also shapes purposes and ourselves, even as we use it.

The issue of origin and original meaning can sometimes clarify the correct usage, whereas words belong to certain word families and particular ones are appropriate in specific situations, formal or informal, written or spoken. For instance, ‘nevertheless’, is appropriate in formal, written texts or academic lectures. Similarly, we use ‘stuff’ and ‘something’ all the time in informal speech, but in more serious writing we need to replace them with words such as ‘material’, ‘component’, ‘element’, depending on the case. Words have synonyms, but their meaning and usage rarely overlap completely.

In a broad sense, the notion of *context* is to relate to particular coaxial elements that, to a certain extent, might alter the use and interpretation with regard to the frame of reference, namely ample cultural values and expectations, past experience and current loquacious intentions as morphemes/idioms evoke nuances and associations from specific practical knowledge that reflect the history of corresponding use (Maybin, Mercer, Hewings 13).

Anthropologists have attested a perspective as regards the proper use and exposition of language, considering that one individual draws on a considerable amount of cultural as well as linguistic knowledge in the process. Within any single community there will be a range of manners of addressing – different uses of language associated with legal, educational, and religious institutions, with particular associations or cultural, interpersonal instances. In view of the comprehension as concerns the function and denotation of a conversational exchange the actant is submitted to be conscious of the values, background and the expectations about the tongue held by a communicator in a cultural context (Maybin, Mercer, Hewings 43).

In this regard, the phrase “agenda setting” encompasses connotations in terms of the aim that is intended by textual communication. The pillars of agenda setting are rooted in media studies and connected to the adage: “Mass media doesn’t tell you what to think, but it tells you what to think about” (McCombs, Shaw 48). So, the voters were not told how to vote (hence they were undecided), but rather the media implemented on what topics to vote for. This aspect can be perceived as: media that directs the interest of the public.

In a mediated democracy agenda setting is the important part of any campaign but can have a negative impact on civic society and the public sphere due to the public becoming cynical about the information it receives. The concept of agenda-setting was established by Walter Lippmann, who is renowned for his work *Public Opinion*, published in 1922. In the opening chapter of this volume, i.e., “The World Outside and the Pictures in our Heads”, the intellectual father of this concept summarizes the agenda-setting idea but does not employ this phrase. In the scholar’s perspective, the news media, the aperture to the ample realm beyond direct experience, model and control the individual’s cognoscible maps of the respective realm. In this respect, Lippmann professes that public opinion “responds not to the environment, but to the pseudo-environment constructed by the news media” (Lippmann 28). The access granted to the public to various facts can be limited by the operation of information subsidies performed by political parties; moreover, these entities may also impose the hegemonic pattern in an information society. Nevertheless, the agenda setting hallmarks the news management strategy of any political organization, which represents a key feature of the public relations state (Lilleker 28).

In order to comprehend policymaking, one should first tackle the shape and content of the agenda-setting process, which has been thoroughly studied in the American political environment. In this regard, a great contribution was brought by Schattschneider (1960), Jones and Baumgartner 2005, Cobb and Elder 1972, and Kingdon 2003 [1984]; the revolutionary research conducted by these scholars greatly contributed to the development of political sciences and agenda-setting studies.

Understanding that the process of agenda-setting is central to explain a broader understanding of political ideas and concepts such as power and policy making, Schattschneider affirmed that:

Political conflict is not like an intercollegiate debate in which the opponents agree in advance on a definition of the issues. The exposition of the substitutes represents the ultimate instrument of power, thus the antagonists are not to agree totally in point of what the issues are taking into account that the term power is part of the definition. There is a system and at the helm is the political actor that controls it and decides the in matters of politics, as the rendering of alternatives stands for the choice of conflicts, whereas the choice of conflicts allocates power. (Schattschneider 68)

On the other hand, in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, the agenda-settings term is defined as:

The art or science of controlling an agenda so as to maximize the probability of getting a favorable outcome, as many social choice procedures have the property that a given set of preferences can lead to different outcomes if votes are taken in a different order, there is often scope for manipulative agenda setting. The phrase is also used more broadly for efforts to change the political agenda by adding or subtracting issues. (McLean, McMillan 7).

In his highly influential study of agenda-setting, John Kingdon provides an explanation of this concept which is the following:

A governmental agenda encompasses a list that officials grant interest or concern at a specific interval of time. Hence, the process of agenda-setting limits the set of issues to be focused on in relation to the current problems being approached. (Kingdon 205)

The nuances and connotations of the above-mentioned expositions lead to the idea according to which “If one wants a policy to be adopted, first has to get the individuals that are involved in the process of decision to confer on it” (Princen 1).

The intention of the above-mentioned data was to turn the concept of agenda-setting into a significant issue as regards the field of political science and public policy studies. The present perspective takes into consideration the manner in which subjects/problems are tackled, debated or prioritized. If the term is not analyzed thoroughly there is the likelihood that the meaning of it will appear as paradoxical, namely what might be reason for individuals to be interested in a discussion lest the exchange of ideas/opinions would lead to political decisions/activities. Concurrently, it is essential to mention that only the topics on the agenda are to be considered and taken into account for consultation, fact which assesses the importance of it with respect to political actors. Changing or modifying an existing policy implies signaling and inserting the problem on the agenda so as to raise awareness. In fact, if the subjects are satisfied with the status quo will try to keep the issue off the agenda in order to prevent an eventual analysis (Princen 1-2).

The core sense of the concept at issue acquires different values according to the International Encyclopedia of Political Science, as follows:

1. Economic, energetic, military, social issues that individuals heed, at a particular instant, and by reference to which manifest an active

attitude, taking the form of debates, proposals of public policies, preparation of political decisions;

2. Content and priority of matters/problems to be subject of discussion as regards a representative institution (The Parliament), govern or any congregation or party leadership. (Badie, Berg-Schlosser, Morlino 68)

The “agenda” has as reference the presence of a wide range of themes that certain social actors grant a relative significance to and are in the form of a prioritized list of subjects. Language understanding consists in the mediation provided by mental constructions and mental patterns of utterances, whereas semantic inferences do not generally depend on the exercise of referential abilities. The public agenda indicates the social poignancy of specific arguments/topics (Charaudeau, 1998).

A theme (“an issue”) has to fulfill the following conditions in order to be comprised within public agenda, namely to represent the object of particular concurrent definitions that are negotiated by a consistent number of social groups; to become the core/thesis of a communication procedure, thus attracting attention; to be introduced within a typology of themes that are part of the nation legacy (Beciu 116).

The perspective in respect of politics as a tussle as regards the possession of control has determined an enquiry in relation to conditionality, the mechanisms and outcome of the process. An element to be emphasized is that the clash locus plays a vital part in any political context; thus, in order to decipher the operation and adjustment modalities of political systems throughout history, one should tackle this locus.

Notwithstanding, the agenda-setting phenomenon – conceived as an endless and unwitting element engendered by the communication process – occurs in election and non-election contexts, in national and local settings, in an extensive variety of geographical environments on the globe; it has also progressively extended to a great number of agendas situated outside the realm of political communication.

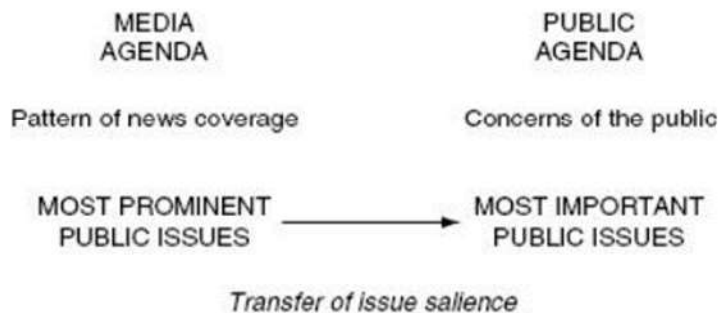
The corollary of the information that has been analyzed denotes the perspective according to which *agenda setting* is currently a common phrase in discussions of politics and public opinion. The phrase summarizes the continuing dialogue and debate in every community, from local neighborhoods to the international arena, over what should be at the center of public attention and action. In most of these dialogues, news media has a significant and sometimes controversial role (Beciu 117).

Politics, like all spheres of social activity, has its own code, a term used by linguists to refer to a language variety particular to a specific group (Beard 5).

The issue of public agenda in an electoral campaign has been addressed from the outset of the '70s within the context of American scholars' studies with regard to the "climate of opinion" and the electoral behavior (in particular the "undecided" or "volatile" electors). The nucleus of the "agenda-setting" studies is represented by the research pattern that was founded by McCombs and Shaw to be identified in a 1972 material, entitled "The agenda-setting of mass-media", from *Public Opinion Quarterly*. The 1968 electoral campaign inspired the study of these two American scholars, who tackled this event in connection with the roles played by mass-media, and with the vote option of the constituents of Chappel Hill University City, North Carolina. As a consequence of the study, McCombs and Shaw formulated the thesis according to which mass media "constructs" the agenda and/or the priorities of the civil.

The role of agenda-setting in point of news media entails the influence in respect of the salience of an issue along with the fact according to which there is a consistent number or not of individuals being interested/opinionated about a particular topic. Currently, there are various issues that might trigger public attention; still, a few manage to become the core of interest, and news media play an important part in what represents the control or impact of daily foreground/ pertaining issues.

Rather than being a purposeful and plotted influence (similar to the phrase "to have an agenda"), this is an unwitting consequence engendered by the need felt in the news media to elect and place in the limelight certain topics connected to the most conspicuous accounts of the moment.



(Apud McCombs 25)

The pillars of the "agenda-setting" pattern in the opinion of Dearing and Rogers assess the following:

that a theme of public agenda implies a series of concurrent "definitions"; for this reason the "public agenda" results from a process

of political negotiation; the “agenda-setting” analysis is focused on the “relative interest that mass media, political leaders and people to be directed toward to specific subjects”; the aspect of ascension and decline along with the idea of competition are under discussion. “Agenda-setting” indicates the intensity of particular public themes as priority, thus being measured the changes and in respect of an issue (“salience”). (Dearing, Rogers 5-6)

The interest as regards mass communication has involved agenda-setting studies as an alternative to search for individual level directional media effects, which had often been found to be minimal. The result indicates that public agenda-setting research investigates an indirect effect (“what to think about”) rather than a direct media effect (“what to think”). The present paradigm has directed mass communication research in the direction of studying the manner in which media news coverage affected the salience of an issue, rather than directional media effects (Lilleker 27).

The subsequent research (sociologic surveys, content and experimental assessments) has partially confirmed the hypothesis of a causal ratio between mass media and the agenda of civic whereas the “agenda-setting” pattern being a “general conceptual framework” in point of the analysis of different political communication phenomena, substantiation of mass media sociology. Within the context of the dominance in respect of the pattern of agenda, an emphasis on particular dimensions has to be assessed, namely the interrelation of three types (media, public and politic priorities); the influence of collateral factors –the impact of various categories of audience, particular characteristics of voters, the role of interpersonal communication as regards the opinions of electors, the discussions with respect to the importance of themes, the effects of political publicity in relation with media coverage depicts a metaphoric explanation on the limited part/representation of media that becomes the core issue. The source-concept to be transferred over presses does not represent a mirror of the reality, but a reflector that shed light on certain aspects.

The data in point of the notion and understanding of mass media effects has been perceived as follows:

Despite important shortcomings, the agenda-setting approach has contributed to a more advanced understanding of the media’s role in society.... It has helped to change the emphasis of mass communication research away from the study of short-term attitudinal effects to a more longitudinal analysis of social impact. This is no minor contribution. (Carragee, Rosenblatt, Michaud, 42)

The impact of agenda-setting does not result from a reduced number of notifications, it is due to a significant flow that might differ in content, still being focused on the same general issue.

Present research on the above-mentioned phrase has involved the idea according to which the focus has been repositioned on the reciprocal influences among various processes. Special attention should be paid to the underlying interest that varies from one agenda to another, along with the manner of interaction, the modality according to which the media coverage might lead to legislative activity.

Within the framework of a community the agenda-setting phrase, a conventional and polymorphic concept entails nuances/interpretations according to the circumstances in which it is used. The intention of this article is not to exhaust the meanings and uses of this concept but to present the more important meanings of this lexical construction.

The analysis of the concept at issue has as definite aim, the relevance of the notion of agenda-setting within context, different ideologies and political evolutions that influence it. While access to the agenda can mobilize, lack of access demobilizes those who need persuading into political action. Thus, it creates a civic society that is represented politically, that feels it is impotent, and so ignores its political duty pursuing consumerist rather than political power.

However, many posit that it is the media that set the agenda, and each media organization has its own agenda; therefore, the political communicators are compelled to respond with the news management techniques (Lilleker 29).

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