

Lexical Redundancy: An Effective Tool for Efficient Communication

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Abstract

This paper studies the relevance of lexical redundancy in assisting communication held within a noisy environment. Redundancy is a concept that is usually frowned at in the communication cycle and the use of English. Though it is frowned at, it is a unique feature of the English language. The data for the study were extracted from former President Olusegun Obasanjo's 1990 autobiography "Not My Will". Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik's 1985 theory of reduction which entails ellipsis and substitution was adopted for this study. To enable a sufficient source of "noise", the

reading of the text was carried out at Ahmadu Bello Way, Jos, Plateau State during core hours of activities around the market. The study highlights the relevance of redundancy to the communication cycle and the linking of core information that is presented with the use of the English language throughout the text. It further shows that distinct features such as repetition were preponderantly used in the text for the purpose of emphasis. The paper concludes that Redundancy is a core feature of communication and language use and it aids contextualization across discourse.

Introduction

Noise is a distinct component of human communication. Noise refers to anything that might impair the quality of the signal while it is passing through the channel of communication. This includes the actual noise in spoken language, bad handwriting and misspelling in written language, and any other cause of distraction. These noises may also include the quality of light, quality of handwriting, the font sizes, horns or vehicles. As such, Grant-Davies states, "We are faced with the challenge of dealing with, first, the noise and, secondly, the comprehension of the message. All these factors which may affect the signal while it is travelling in the channel are termed noise" (3). This is why an efficient model of communication allows for such cases of noise and a linguistic sign is given only part of its capacity. According to Chiari, the actual information carried by a signal is less than its maximum potential. We are plagued by different types of noises in our different communicative spheres (12). This is true for every communicative

event, be it the face-to-face interlocution, or reading a text or receiving a telephone call or reading through a newspaper.

There are factors that are tagged as "noises" by Shannon (11). These factors affect the efficient process of communication and therefore affect the quality of the message. Messages are often transmitted by human languages; verbal and non-verbal features as well as artificial languages.

Generally speaking, redundancy is made manifest in two facets: tautology and pleonasms. Tautology is perhaps the most familiar of redundancy occurrence. Tautology means to say something at least twice, making one part of the phrase superfluous. If someone was trying to describe how annoying a person was, they may say: *They were more annoying than a wasp stuck in a window, more annoying than locking your car keys in the car and more annoying than their computer crashing mid way through an assignment.* Although all three examples convey the same feeling, one would have sufficed. But by using diverse repetitions, the speaker's meaning is intensified. Sometimes tautology, or redundancy in phrases, is used for no effect and then the result is just wordiness in the language. Pleonasms are a more general form of redundancy than tautology. The concept of redundancy is often associated with superfluity and overabundance

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being thus perceived negatively in its general meaning. The notion has been present in linguistic debates since antiquity (Bauer 121), with a general meaning of abundance and also develops an extended meaning in the field of rhetorics where it is connected to pleonasm, accumulation, and repetition. All languages use redundancy in different ways and for contrasting ends.

Redundancy basically means the parts of language that could be done away with while allowing the meaning of the statement to remain basically the same. Redundancy is the construction of a phrase that presents some idea using more information, often via multiple means than is necessary for one to understand the idea. Chiari defines redundancy in Language as repetition of messages to reduce the probability of misinterpretation in transmission. Redundancy in language is a wide field with many subsets. But for most of these subsets, the basic themes are the same. With redundancy embedded in a language, the listener or reader will gain a greater understanding (12). Redundancy adds both emphasis and impact.

In rhetoric, the term "redundancy" tends to have a negative connotation and may be perceived as improper because of its use of duplicative or unnecessary wording. However, it remains a linguistically valid way of placing emphasis on some expressed ideas. This predictability due to language structure can be termed language redundancy (Aylett and Turk 123). Furthermore, at the phonological level, the redundancy of phonological rules may clarify some vagueness in spoken communication:

A speaker may know that 'thisrip' must be 'this rip' and not 'thisrip' because in English the initial consonants cluster 'sr' is illegal" (Pinker 178). By repeating certain elements of his/her output a speaker may facilitate the hearer's understanding of it. Repeated items, and thus a certain redundancy, will give the hearer time to absorb the content of the message at about the same rate as it is delivered (Tannen 49).

Redundancy can also be semantic or lexical. A writer can achieve this via his choice of words. However writers often use diverse vocabularies for

simple reasons of style, such as a desire to avoid repetition. In this case, it could be said that the differences among the words are 'neutralized' by the context. Even when an author makes a lexical choice for semantic (rather than stylistic) reasons, it does not follow that the interpretation stands or falls on the hearer's or reader's ability to determine precisely why one word was chosen rather than another. After all, people normally communicate not by uttering isolated words but by speaking whole sentences.

The concern of this study is in the use of lexical redundant features of language to transmit messages and preserve the quality of the message. The paper looks at textual entries of lexical redundancy, a form of redundancy that entails the repetition of distinct features of the language which constitutes the core of the message.

The paper addresses the efficiency of lexical redundancy in the effective transmission of communicative processes by addressing the following questions:

1. What features of lexical redundancy aids the effective and efficient transmission of linguistic messages?
2. What processes do the features of lexical redundancy use in achieving effective communication?

Literature Review

Basically, redundancy is the construction of a phrase or usage of words that presents an idea using more information, often via multiple means than is necessary to aid understanding of the idea being shared in the discourse. It is a concept that ranges from information science, to electronic computing, all through to linguistics. There are different views to what redundancy entails to the layman, to the communication analyst and finally to the linguist. For the communication analyst, redundancy involves the repetition of messages to reduce the probability of errors in transmission, excessive wordiness or repetition in expression.

Collins English Dictionary (2003) defines redundancy as "the state of being redundant, something redundant or excessive; a superfluity". Redundancy is the repetition of linguistic information inherent in the structure of a language in the sentence. In looking at the linguistic approach

to redundancy, it is important to note that the linguist considers the relationship between language and the human brain. The human brain can cope with simple mistakes in text, which may not be noticed, as the brain expects what is coming and corrects it as it goes along, much like an automatic spell check on a computer. Thus, by utilizing redundancy, we are helping the brain's natural ability to overcome linguistic units that are not comprehended. This is done by emphasizing those words/phrases/sounds we need and which sink into the brain.

The human brain is a very capable machine and only keeps the bits of language that are necessary in order to comprehend the meaning of the language. A famous example of this is the knowledge that a paragraph written without vowels can largely be understood if the reader looks at it, because it is the consonants that add meaning to the words while the vowels add ease of pronunciation. We are immersed in a sea of information, and to organize and control the vast amount of information, there is need to understand that people invent codes. Effective codes require systematic rules and these rules imply constraints. Wherever there are constraints on any phenomenon, sign system or language, there are laws. Hence, constraints are the prerequisites of any law and every natural law is a constraint which infers predictability as well (Lyons 63). In effect, redundancy is applicable with the rules of the English Language. The constraints are our rules in sentence formation, pluralization, subject-verb agreement, among others.

The English language is a rule-governed language. Because of this feature, there are overlapping relationships and rules used to emphasise the centrality of the message. Some of these rules have their meanings reflected in what has gone before or what will come again. They entail restating things from prior knowledge. Thus, the manipulation of redundancy is fundamental in communication because without redundancy, no natural language could have developed, nor artificial (computer) language devised.

Lexical Redundancy

Researchers such as Darwish, Evans and Green, Grant-Davies generally consider an authentic text

as a text originally created to fulfill a social purpose in the language community for which it was intended. According to this view, novels, postcards, telegrams, advertisements, travel brochures, tickets, timetables, and telephone directories written in the target language for the genre-intended target language audience can all be considered as authentic texts, since they all constitute language in action within a specific time. Aylett and Turk also argue that good readers take advantage of the natural redundancy found in authentic texts, using it to help them reconstruct the entire text even if they have learned only a portion of the graphic material (5-6). Moreover, according to Scott, Louwerse, McCarthy and McNamara the normal redundancy within authentic texts is a feature of the English language and likely a factor in helping L2 learners come to understand unfamiliar words without too much disruption in their overall understanding of the text (16).

The process of communication involves the speaker in the process of encoding the information which he wants to communicate (the message) in a linguistic sign. The linguistic sign, termed 'signal', is then sent through a channel of communication to the hearer who receives the signal and decodes it to obtain the information (the message) sent by the speaker. This process may be represented in the following diagram:

Speaker ? encoding ? signalchannel ?
 signal ? received Decoding ? Message received by the speaker.

Such a model of communication would be economical, but it would not be efficient because it lacks means of overcoming 'noise'.

The actual information carried by a signal is less than its maximum potential. A text should not contain more than is required to transmit a message, but a message is required to perform a communicative function. While some scholars advocate for conciseness, thereby providing a supposedly flawless communication, this does not account for the linguistic challenges faced in the course of interacting and the essence of communication as a full and robust process in itself as well as written texts. We find then and reconnect with the communication processes due to cues that are dropped off in the body of the texts.

Methodology

This study aims at looking at the creative aspect of language. The study is on lexical redundancy and how it aids effective communication. It involves a textual analysis of Former President Olusegun Obasanjo's 1990 autobiography titled "Not My Will". Excerpts with lexical redundant entries were collected from its 262-page-text that was intentionally read on Ahmadu Bello Way, Jos, Plateau State during core hours of activities around the market. It was read without a prior knowledge of the content of the text. A total of 25 lexical redundant entries were deliberately collected and 10 randomly selected for this study. The study uses Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik's theory of reduction to give the crux upon which the theoretical framework of this study is based. They are of the view that the application of reduction is largely a function of syntax. Whatever grounds there may be in any given case for expressing oneself with maximum explicitness, there are generally strong preferences for the most economic variant. Some other things being equal, language users will follow the maxim "reduce as much as possible". It is equally in the nature of reduction as a cohesive device in a text to recover back in totality the form that has been reduced from the original sentence. This entails a total recover ability from the context of the text. There are two forms of reduction: substitution and ellipsis. Ellipsis involves a reduction whereby the structure of a sentence is abbreviated avoiding any form of redundancy. Substitution involves a replacement of a marker in the sentence probably with a pronoun. This paper refutes the sufficiency of this theory in dealing with communication adequately within a noisy

environment. The paper justifies the availability and effectiveness of a sufficiently managed redundancy in human communication, especially a form of communication that is not face-to-face.

The data for this paper are presented in two sections. The first section entails a tabular presentation of the source of redundancy and the second section holds all the excerpts for further discussions.

Data Analysis

The table below carries the ten (10) lexical redundant entries from the excerpts outlined below.

Excerpt 1 "The lessons to my mind are that old political habits die hard and to have political activities in Nigeria that completely exclude old politicians is an illusion at which old politicians take a good laugh."

A text is usually an account of different discourse, this text was not different, just before the text on "old politicians" was an account of the "military's relationship with old politicians". In substituting the second entry of "old politicians" with a pronominal marker "they", the resultant communicational challenge then will be what "they" refers to: The "military or the old politician"? Furthermore, the context of the communicative string is immediately affected, since one reader will ascribe the context of "military" and another "old politicians." The repetition of the "old politician" provides an intentional pointer to the context of the discourse.

Table 1

S/N of excerpts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lexical redundant units	Old politicians	Democracy	Inflation	Shortages	Planned	The three of us	Local government	Polity/ Political and social environment	President Carter	Mallam Ciroma

Excerpt 2. Lexical redundancy is also used for emphasis. The central message of this excerpt is democracy. The writer intentionally pulls out the reader to his side by the use and repetition of the word “democracy”. It is pertinent to note here that in substituting with the pronominal form “it”, the originality of the text will be lost. Texts are often read in the absence of their authors. As such the advantages ascribed to face-to-face discussions are not available. The author uses the intentional spatial repetition of lexical entries to show where the central message is. Features such as lexical redundancy help to keep the reader within the focus of the writer, thereby creating an identical communicative flux. “Democracy may not necessarily ensure rapid economic development.... Democracy is the option.... Democracy is man's.... Therefore the natural instinct of man as a governed animal is for democracy and I believe that for this reason, democracy will not only survive but it will spread....Democracy is a game of inclusion... Democracy takes institutional pluralism for granted.”

Excerpt 3. Within the context of bad governance, the challenge of “inflation” was brought in. In substituting “inflation” with the pronoun marker “it”, the result will be an ambiguous sentence, where “it” will refer to “corruption” as well as “inflation”. “...seems to have been done was inflation which was running at the rate of over 40 per cent. Inflation had been heightened by the ill-advised....”

Excerpt 4. There are certain features of lexical redundancy that will not take on pronoun forms. The central message has to be communicated as the author intends it. The central message in this excerpt is that of “shortages”. The writer emphasizes this in three connected sentences. This is one of the distinct features of lexical redundancy. In repetition, it shows where the writer intends deliberate communication on an intentional subject. “There were shortages, some artificially created by the traders.... There were shortages...general shortages....”

Excerpt 5. “He wanted to know whether Col Taiwo had told him what they planned. He said yes that he

had heard what they planned.” This excerpt further highlights the intentionality the author adheres to in his choice of lexical entries. The anaphoric reference to the lexical entry “planned” keeps the message within the author's context.

Excerpt 6. “To hand-over the running of the administration of the country and the army to the three of us....the three of us could jointly shoulder the responsibility of the Armed Forces and the Nation.”

Excerpt 7. “In a nutshell, the essence of the Local government reforms was to use the local government as an instrument of development at the grassroots level and make the government close to the people and vice versa. The Local government reform was followed by elections into the local government....” Lexical redundancy is used to situate the author's discourse within context, the choice of the lexical entry points directly to the desired intent of the author. This is a prominent feature of lexical repetitions within the text. Lexical redundancy provides clarity, situates the author's central message and makes room for fluidity of discourse.

“...which had implications for the polity and the political and social environment endangered.”

“During the visit I held talks with President Carter and his secretary of State, Mr. Cyrus Vance. My meeting with President Carter was mainly on South Africa....” This is another clear indication of a prevention of ambiguity. If the pronoun form “him” is used, it will read “my meeting with him was mainly on South Africa.” The question that arises then will be since there are two distinct and well elaborated antecedents which does 'him refer to?' Was it Mr President or Mr Cyrus Vance?

“His successor Mallam Ciroma brought a perceptible change to the service. Ciroma was a stickler to the rules and ethos of the service.... When he felt strongly on an issue, he never hesitated to put forward his arguments....Mallam Ciroma never wavered after that on the implementation of the decision....Mallam Ciroma accepted my decision with equanimity.”

Findings

While redundancy may appear wordy and present

the texts as too elaborate and wordy, lexical redundancy holds a pertinent key to effective communication. Most texts are read in the absence of the writer with different forms of “noise” but the presence of lexical redundancy features such as repetition and contextualization aids in preserving the originality of the texts. The writer creates wordy emphasis that aids in keeping his reader within his discursive context. The English language presents us with a striking display. Its lexicon establishes an instance of redundancy as a “liability” and yet it is precisely the liberal use of redundancy that provides linguistic expressions with an extraordinary measure of “reliability”. A text becomes redundant when it represents or involves information that readers already have, either because they knew the information before reading the text or because it was presented earlier in the text. This though shows that coherence and readability require a certain level of redundancy, which is a natural feature of any language. The presence of overlapping information or coherence ties between sentences creates redundancy which contributes to the coherence of a text by adhering to the norms of the text, thus presenting readers with new information in the content of familiar and given information. For a text to be readable there must be some overlap of information within the text and some overlap between the text and the readers' prior knowledge. The more easily readers can relate new information to what they already know the more easily they can understand and retain that information. This is the crux of shared knowledge and it provides ease in comprehension.

When the discourse is transitory and evanescent and the addressee is unable to span the whole sentence to ascertain its structure due to the unavailability of the writer or speaker, there is need for the redundant items to serve as a structural signal. Redundant items are omissible in English sentences because the English word order is grammatically distinctive but lexical redundant entries are often necessary for effective communication. The Redundancy rule enables one to avoid repetition in each lexical entry of redundant or predictable information. Such a statement of lexical relationship would capture essentially the same set of facts as the deep structure treatment. But without any mention of the level of

the deep structure, it can be abandoned not because it is not deep enough to handle all the facts but because it is deeper than necessary, thus providing adequate and more than sufficient information. By intentionally subjecting the selected text to noise, it provides proof that noise is a distinct and constant part of human discourse. The variation of the noise does not mitigate the relevance of the lexical redundant entry. Redundancy keeps the context of the message within scope; as such, the centrality of the author's intent is not lost. What a reader gets from redundancy can be likened to a check list of information to enhance clarity.

Conclusion

The communicative value of any text is tested in the quality of the message it can linguistically transmit. Lexical redundancy naturally constitutes more than is required but, in so doing, it provides more information on the context of a speech or text. Readers or listeners do not ascertain beforehand the communicative challenges associated with written or spoken texts before we embark on our communicative events. We just communicate because it is a distinct feature of man that is primary to its co-existence with others. As well, we do not measure or determine the quality of “noise” that exists around us. As such, intentionally or unintentionally we are exposed to noise and it is expected of us to make the best of the communicative event. Lexical redundancy is an indicator in the dark; it is intentional, as such keeping us on track of the context and the central purpose of every string of communication.

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