

A COURSEBOOK IN SEMANTICS

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Author's preface

A Coursebook in Semantics is a book written and intended for students at the Faculty of Philology in Skopje, who have elected to take the course *Semantics*. These are students who recognize the importance of studying and understanding how the different layers and segments in English are interwoven, and wish to see how they all come together to make English what it is.

The coursebook has been tailored to meet the needs of these students, to help them navigate and make sense of the complexities of various linguistic components from a semantic perspective and point of view. It is composed of nine chapters dealing with various notions and topics in semantics, introduced at the beginning by a Glossary of the key concepts that appear later on in the individual chapters, and followed by an Appendix which looks at potential topics and projects that might be analyzed and researched at greater length. Each chapter consists of a *learning objectives* section, which provides the main points that will be dealt with in more detail in that particular chapter, a *key concepts* section, which is followed by the main part where the learning objectives are discussed more thoroughly, and a *discussion and revision* section, with a variety of exercises and questions to prompt discussions on what has been covered in the given chapter. Admittedly, the final chapter is more openly structured than its predecessors as it is dedicated to exploring a variety of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of semantics. Though the chapters are individual in that they all stand alone, there is also a unity to them, as a whole, since it is inevitable that certain points and terms (will) appear and reappear throughout the coursebook. The Bibliography at the end provides an overview of selected significant books and works that have been consulted in the writing of this coursebook.

The level of English this coursebook maintains is that of B2/C1, in accordance with the CEFR, and it requires that students possess a solid foundation of (general) English grammar and linguistics, with an understanding of general linguistic terms and ideas. Though it is an introduction to the study of meaning in English, it is specialized in the sense that it does not provide grammar practice of general English. Students will further develop and enhance their linguistic knowledge through the application of linguistic principles, which invariably assumes a solid linguistic background.

This coursebook has been created with great care to meet the needs of its users, and the author sincerely hopes that is what it will ultimately achieve. Of course, gratitude and acknowledgement must also be expressed for all the help and encouragement received in the preparation of this work, and all responsibility for any mistakes that might have inadvertently made their way into the final version is duly accepted.

B. N. S.

Glossary of key concepts

Ambiguity - the quality of being open to more than one interpretation; a word/phrase is ambiguous when it has more than one sense, i.e. when it has two or more synonyms that are not themselves synonyms of each other (lexical ambiguity), whereas a sentence is ambiguous if it has two (or more) paraphrases which are not themselves paraphrases of each other (syntactic ambiguity).

Antonymy - it represents a paradigmatic relation, where substitution of lexical items is involved; a relation between predicates (words), where they have opposite meaning; there may be several types of antonymy depending on how the words are antonyms of each other; also known as semantic incompatibility.

Argument - any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or somebody, and used when the speaker has a particular referent in mind (referring expression).

Aspect - it is a semantic category rather than a morphological one, as it is connected more to the meaning of the sentence than the morphology of it, which has to do with linguistic form; has to do with how an event relates to the time we are discussing, i.e. it is the relationship between the reference time (RT) and the event time (ET).

Connotation - meaning that uses a particular word beyond its conceptual meaning; it is a type of associated meaning in that certain characteristics are associated with a particular word; has to do with the feelings and emotions associated with a word; it paints a picture and it invokes a feeling; also known as metaphorical meaning.

Context - this is very important in semantics because communication can only be completed if the parties involved in the process know and understand the language; the context is given by the interconnection of the different words used in a sentence for which the semantic properties must be known; in communication, context refers to the words and sentences that surround any part of a discourse, and that helps to determine its meaning; it is also called *linguistic context*; it puts meaning into the message.

Contradiction - it represents dissimilarity of sense at a sentence, i.e. proposition level; a proposition is considered to be contradictory of another pro-

position if it is impossible for them both to be true at the same time and under the same circumstances; a sentence contradicts another sentence if it entails the negation of the other sentence; a type of semantic relation between sentences occurring when two sentences cannot be true at the same time; if two sentences are contradictory, then one must be true and the other must be false.

Degree (of a predicate) - a number indicating the number of arguments (referring expressions) it is normally understood to have in a simple declarative sentence.

Deixis - it comes from Greek, meaning pointing; it refers to the use of general words and phrases to refer to a specific time, place, or person in context; a *deictic word* is a word which takes some element of its meaning from the situation (i.e. the speaker, the addressee, the time, and the place) of the utterance in which it is used.

Denotation - refers to the exact, literal meaning of a word; the dictionary definition; also known as conceptual meaning.

Figurative language - it refers to using words in a non-literal way, that is, in a way that moves away from the conventional order and meaning so as to convey a more complicated meaning, colorful writing, clarity, or comparison; figurative language can be contrasted with literal language, which describes something explicitly rather than by reference to something else; in that context, figurative meaning can be defined as the metaphorical, idiomatic, or ironic sense of a word or expression in contrast to its literal meaning.

Generic sentence - a sentence in which some statement is made about a whole unrestricted class of individuals, as opposed to any particular individual; generic sentences can be introduced by either *a/an* or *the*, depending on the linguistic context whether the said NP has referring interpretation or not.

Grammatical meaning - dominant in function words; meaning with reference to its function within a sentence rather than to a world outside the sentence.

Homonymy - it occurs when an ambiguous word has different senses that are far apart from each other and not obviously related, and there is no obvious conceptual connection between the two meanings of the word; any two words that share the same spelling or the same pronunciation are defined as homonyms.

Hypernymy - the semantic relation of being superordinate or belonging to a higher rank or class; the semantic field of a hypernym, also known as a superordinate, is broader than that of a hyponym.

Hyponymy - a semantic relation between a *hyponym* denoting a subtype and a *hypernym* denoting a supertype; the semantic field of the hyponym is included within that of the hypernym; a hyponym is a word or phrase whose semantic field is more specific than its hypernym.

Implication - in the context of semantics, the term *semantic implication* states that the set A of sentences semantically entails the set B of sentences, with the formal definition being that the set A entails the set B if and only if, in every model in which all sentences in A are true, all sentences in B are also true; it is a statement; when we imply, we suggest or express something indirectly, we hint or insinuate.

Inference - a logical conclusion based on an analysis of objects, sensations, events, facts, and ideas that seems likely in light of what is known; it is the process of drawing conclusions based on evidence and reasoning; it is a conclusion; when we infer, we read between the lines, we suppose or conclude, we make a well-informed guess.

Information - at its simplest, it refers to the bare representation of facts; a signal is informative if, regardless of the intentions of the sender, it makes the receiver aware of something of which they were not previously aware; language is used primarily for the communication of factual information, though there are other functions of information, such as descriptive, social, and expressive.

Language - a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves; the functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression; a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar; the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area.

Lexical meaning - dominant in content words; meaning in relation to the physical world or to abstract concepts, without reference to any sentence in which the word may occur.

Linguistics - the science of language, studying in greater detail the various aspects of language from the perspective of the major divisions, such as phonetics and phonology, morphology and syntax, and semantics and pragmatics.

Modality - it is a semantic category rather than a morphological one, as it is connected more to the meaning of the sentence than the morphology of it, which has to do with linguistic form; it has to do with whether something is possible or necessary and not the 'here and now'.

Non-verbal language - also known as non-verbal communication, is connected to paralanguage (context), and it refers to communication that occurs through means other than words, such as body language, gestures, and silence.

Paraphrase - a sentence that expresses the same, i.e. a similar proposition as another sentence is a paraphrase; sentences that have the same (similar) meaning are paraphrases of each other, i.e. these are sentences or phrases that convey the same (similar) meaning using different wording.

Perspective-sensitivity - it is a sub-type of context-dependence; it is the feature of a number of linguistic expressions whose meaning and interpretation depend on someone's perspective or point of view, i.e. to the perspectives under which they are used; these expressions are known as *perspective-sensitive items* (PSIs), and they can be defined as items whose meaning is sensitive to the mental or physical perspective of a certain individual.

Polysemy - when one word has several very closely related senses, which are connected by some concept, i.e. a word that has different meanings which derive from a common origin.

Pragmatics - a linguistic discipline which studies words and meaning but within context, i.e. it looks at how context contributes to meaning; it looks at the relationships between words, interlocutors, i.e. the people engaged in the conversation, and social contexts.

Predicate - in a semantic sense, it can be defined as any word (or sequence of words) which (in a given single sense) can function as the predicator of a sentence; a predicate cannot be ambiguous, it cannot have more than one sense, as opposed to the word, which can be ambiguous, i.e. can have more than one sense; it identifies elements in a language system, independently of particular example sentences; a simple sentence may contain more than one instance of a predicate (although it only has one predicator); predicates include words from various parts of speech (common nouns, adjectives, prepositions, verbs, but never the verb TO BE, or conjunctions); in line with the word/word form distinction, the predicate can be seen as the word form.

Predicator - the word (sometimes a group of words) which does not belong to any of the referring expressions and which, of the remainder, after eliminating the referring expression(s), makes the most specific contribution to the meaning of the sentence; it identifies the semantic role played by a particular word (or group of words) in a particular sentence (in this sense it is similar to the grammatical term *subject*); a simple sentence only has one predicator (although it may contain more than one instance of a pre-

dicate); in line with the word/word form distinction, the predicator can be seen as the word.

Proposition - it is that part of the meaning of the utterance of a declarative sentence which describes some state of affairs, typically involving persons or things referred to by expressions in the sentence; in uttering a declarative sentence, a speaker typically asserts a proposition; by uttering a simple interrogative or imperative sentence, a speaker can mention a particular proposition without asserting its truth, resulting in corresponding declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences having the same propositional content.

Reference - it is the relationship between parts of a language and things outside the language, in the world; by means of reference, a speaker indicates which things in the world (including persons) are being talked about; *variable reference* refers to one and the same expression having a different referent on different occasions; the relationship that exists between a word and its referent(s).

Referent - it refers to the object, or person, in the world, being referred to by a certain linguistic (referring) expression; the actual entity, or entities, that a word signifies.

Referring expression - it is any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone, or a clearly delimited collection of things or people, i.e. it is used with a particular referent in mind; it is an expression (a word or a phrase) that is used to indicate which thing, or person, is being talked about; the same referring expression can be used to refer to different things (*variable reference*), different referring expressions can be used to refer to the same thing, some referring expressions may have no referent, and some expressions may have a constant referent; some expressions can be used as referring expressions, some never can, and some expressions can be used to refer or not, depending on the kind of sentence they occur in; whether an expression is a referring expression or not, i.e. whether it has referring interpretation or not, is heavily dependent on the linguistic context, as well as on the circumstances of the utterance.

Relevance - when an item of information has a contextual effect in a given context, we may say it is relevant in that context; establishing the relevance of a new assumption involves inference; the communication process involves not only encoding, transfer, and decoding of messages, but also numerous other elements, including inference and context.

Semantic barrier - these are obstacles in communication that distort the meaning of a message being sent, that is, they are the root of the various misunderstandings that may arise between the sender and the receiver as

a result of the different meanings of words and other symbols used in the act of communication.

Semantic field - it refers to organizing or classifying vocabulary that is related by meaning; it is similar to the concept of *lexical field*, which also refers to organizing or classifying vocabulary, but this time according to topic rather than meaning.

Semantic memory - it is a type of long-term declarative memory that refers to facts or ideas which are not immediately drawn from personal experience; it refers to the memory of meaning, understanding, general knowledge about the world, and other concept-based knowledge unrelated to specific experiences.

Semantic technology - it supports artificial intelligence in simulating how people understand language and process information; by approaching the automatic understanding of meanings, semantic technology overcomes the limits of other technologies.

Semantics - the branch of linguistics concerned with meaning; the study of meaning in language, i.e. the study of the meaning of words and sentences; it tries to clarify and explain the nature of meaning.

Semiotics - or semiology, in general, is the study of signs, symbols and signification, and their use or interpretation; it is all about studying how meaning is created, rather than knowing what it is; it is the language of signs.

Sense - it deals with the relationships inside the language; the sense of an expression is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language; it is an abstraction.

Sentence - loosely, it can be defined as a string of words; a given sentence always consists of the same words, and in the same order, and any change in the words, or in their order, makes a different sentence; traditionally defined, it is a grammatically complete string of words expressing a complete thought, thus excluding any string of words that does not have a verb in it, as well as any other strings.

Sign - generally speaking, it is any motion, gesture, image, sound, pattern, or event that conveys meaning; in linguistics, a sign is the smallest unit of meaning, and it refers to any unit of language (morpheme, word, phrase, or sentence) used to designate objects or phenomena of reality.

Speaker meaning - refers to what a speaker means, that is, *intends to convey*, when they use a piece of language; the same words/sentences can be used by different speakers on different occasions to mean different things.

Synonymy - two, or more, predicates (words) that have the same, i.e. a similar meaning are known as synonyms; a relation between individual senses of

words; a paradigmatic relation which is achieved between elements of the same category, i.e. elements that can be substituted for each other.

Syntax - it refers to the set of rules that allow language users to create an infinite number of sentences that are grammatically correct and valid; it is the study of how words and morphemes combine to form larger units such as phrases and sentences.

Tense - it is a semantic category rather than a morphological one, as it is connected more to the meaning of the sentence than the morphology of it, which has to do with linguistic form; it is a relationship between the interval of time being talked about and the time of speaking.

Universe of discourse - (for any utterance) it refers to the particular world, real or imaginary, or part real, part imaginary, that the speaker assumes they are talking about at the time.

Utterance - it is any stretch of talk by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that speaker; it is the use of a piece of language by a particular speaker, on a particular occasion, such as a sequence of sentences, or a single phrase, or even a single word; utterances are physical events; an utterance does not necessarily have to be an actual token of a sentence, it can be a part of a sentence, such as a phrase, or a single word.

Verbal language - also known as verbal communication, is about language, both written and spoken; in general, verbal communication refers to our use of words; in verbal communication it is the language (content) that is the focus, that is, the words that are used by the speaker, and how they are heard and interpreted by the recipient, and this can be realized through written or oral communication.

Word - a single distinct meaningful element of speech or writing, used with others (or sometimes alone) to form a sentence and typically shown with a space on either side when written or printed; a speech sound or a combination of sounds, or its representation in writing, that symbolizes and communicates a meaning and may consist of a single morpheme or a combination of morphemes; a single unit of language that means something and can be spoken or written; anything that is spelled with the same sequence of letters and pronounced with the same sequence of phonemes in a standard dialect.

Word form - the different ways that the word can exist in the context of language.

Word/sentence meaning - what a word/sentence actually means, and is applied to words and sentences in the sense of *to be equivalent to*; what it counts as the equivalent of in the language concerned.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the study of semantics

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- what is language?
- what is linguistics?
- what is semantics?
- what is a word?

Key concepts: language, linguistics, semantics, word, word form

What is language?

Broadly speaking, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines *language* as “a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression.” Other dictionary entries of the concept are more succinct, as is the brief definition offered in the *Cambridge Dictionary*, as “a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar”, which is similar to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of “the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area.”

Though at first glance the question of what language is appears to be a fairly straightforward one, as the concise definitions from above may lead us to believe, we shall see that it is anything but. On the contrary, it is far from simple to answer, as it invites multiple approaches with which it can be dealt, and numerous directions it can be developed in. As such, a number of definitions for language have been proposed, each one valid from the perspective it has been taken into consideration, going as far back as ancient times.

In the search for the origins of human thought, Greek philosopher Socrates, known as the ‘father of western philosophy’, believed that the words of existing languages were created by *nomothetes*, *lawgivers* or *legislators*. Though Socrates did not write down any of his thoughts, his dialogues were recorded

mainly by the philosopher Plato, his student and protégé, and they were in the form of dialogues, in which in a question-and-answer style he would examine and discuss a given topic with his interlocutor. Socrates did not look for the conventions for using a common name; rather, he searched for the common nature that justified the use of a common name. In essence, for Socrates there was a need for the justification of how language is applied: the justification for applying a common name, in his opinion, was the ability to *define* the name, not by describing a word's use in the language (or 'grammar'), but by giving an account of the common nature that the common-name named.

Plato attempted to figure out whether the connection between words and things was entirely *arbitrary*, where the meaning of linguistic signs cannot be predicted from its word form, nor is the word form dictated by its meaning and/or function, or *conventional*, as in used and accepted by most people and, as such, usual and traditional. It is difficult to understand how language enables human beings to gain knowledge or understanding of the world, and Plato was inclined toward the belief that this was, indeed, possible independently of language. In essence, he set off from the belief that words are by nature connected to the things they name.

Plato's view was challenged by the Sophists, who viewed language simply as a tool for influencing people, as in law courts and assemblies, arguing that words do not reveal the natures of things, but that they are simply other things, without any cognitive value in themselves. Interestingly, this was in line with what Shakespeare (1564–1616) noted in *Romeo and Juliet*, with Juliet's famous quote "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet", essentially stating that 'things are what they are, no matter what name you give them.'

Aristotle, who, in turn, was a student of Plato, saw language as, above all, a meaningful spoken phenomenon; "spoken words are signs of concepts", further asserting that written words are symbols of spoken sounds. His claim was that language by convention, whether spoken or written, was not the same for all. Furthermore, in his view, the distinguishing feature of human language was its semantic scope, his belief being that only human beings have the ability to use *language* to indicate good versus bad, and right versus wrong, while other animals can 'voice' only their pain and pleasure. His view aligns with that of English philosopher John Locke, who claimed that "God made human beings capable of articulate sound". This ability, however, would not by itself lead to having a language, since articulate sounds are produced even by parrots, for example. As such, "in order for human beings to have language, therefore, it was further necessary that [man] should be able to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions, and to make them stand

as marks for the ideas within his own mind; whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's minds be conveyed from one to another."

According to Noam Chomsky, known as the 'father of modern linguistics', "language is the inherent capability of native speakers to understand and form grammatical sentences. A language is a set of (finite or infinite) sentences, each finite length constructed out of a limited set of elements." He also introduced the distinction in terms of language users with the concepts of *competence* versus *performance*, where the former refers to the ideal user's knowledge of the rules of their language, and the latter has to do with the actual realization of this knowledge in linguistic communication. Chomsky's view on language sees *sentences* as the basis, which may be limited or unlimited, and are made up of only minor components, and his theory is based on the idea that all languages contain similar structures and rules, a *universal grammar*. The fact that children everywhere acquire language the same way, and without much effort, would support the idea that we are born wired with the basics already present in our brains.

In line with this, there are recent studies which show that humans are, in fact, born with a basic fundamental knowledge of language, which sheds light on the age-old linguistic *nature versus nurture* debate. Humans are unique in their ability to acquire language, and these aspects might arise from linguistic principles that are active in all human brains. In this context, we may mention *behaviorism* in connection with language learning, as *behaviorists* consider learning a language as a set of mechanical habits which are formed through a process of imitation and repetition. Humans learn a language through repeating the same form and text until it becomes a habit; children imitate the sounds and patterns which they hear around.

In fact, Leonard Bloomfield, an American linguist instrumental in the development of structural linguistics in the United States, adopted a strictly behavioristic approach in his study of language. In defining language, he focused on the utterances produced by all the community's people and, as such, did not take into consideration the aspect of writing. Furthermore, his belief that all the utterances that can be made in a speech community makes the language of that speech community placed the emphasis on form, not meaning, as the basis of language. He rejected the classical view that the structure of language reflects the structure of thought, as he believed that spoken language was the only object of study.

In line with the notion of structural linguistics, it was, in fact, Swiss linguist, semiotician, and philosopher, Ferdinand de Saussure, whose research and conclusions provided the starting points in this direction. He was

a proponent of the view that language must be taken as a social phenomenon, a structured system that can be viewed both synchronically and diachronically, as well as a borderland between *thought* and *sound*, where the two come together to provide communication. He also introduced two terms that have become common concepts in linguistics – *parole*, the speech of the individual person, and *langue*, the system underlying speech activity, where spoken language includes the communication of concepts by means of sound-images from the speaker to the listener.

Desmond Cyril Derbyshire, a renowned linguist specializing in Carib languages, defined language as “... undoubtedly a kind of means of communication among human beings. It consists primarily of vocal sounds. It is articulatory, systematic, symbolic and arbitrary.” Derbyshire’s definition sees language as the best source of communication, which is in agreement with how John Lyons explains it – as “the principal communication system used by particular groups of human beings within the specific society of which they are members.”

Edward Sapir, yet another eminent name in the world of linguistics, as well as a cultural anthropologist, defined language as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.” Essentially, in defining language as ‘non-instinctive’, we are saying that when we speak with friends in our native language, we do not think much before speaking, i.e., there are no stimuli for us to talk.

According to Henry Sweet, an English phonetician and language scholar, “language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts.” American linguists Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager argued that “language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates”, which is in line with how Mary Finocchiaro explained it, as “a system of arbitrary, vocal symbols which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture to communicate or to interact.” Likewise, Mario Pei defined language as “a system of communication by sound, operating through the organs of speech, among members of a given community, and using vocal symbols possessing arbitrary conventional meaning,” while Ronald Wardhaugh explained it as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.” David Crystal, a prominent British linguist, defined language as “the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression,” noting five important stylistic

features of written language: graphic, orthographic, grammatical, lexical and discursive, and two of spoken language: phonetic and phonological.

As can be seen, there are numerous explanations of the concept of *language*, some opposing, others complementary. However, we can, by no means, conclude that a particular view is the right one, while the others are wrong, if for no other reason than that they are all attempts to describe a complex concept, which is a rather abstract one to start with, and there are many instances where the definitions overlap and enhance each other. In addition, the concept is explained and defined from different perspectives and linguistic approaches, which is another reason for the plethora of opinions. Thus, all these different ways from which language can be analyzed serve to enrich our knowledge and understanding of something that though we may inherently know, we may have difficulty grasping in such a way as to be able to phrase coherently.

Another thing that we may conclude in our attempt to define language is that, besides the fact that there is no black-or-white answer to this, an either/or, the discussions concerning this concept have been going on for centuries, and they will, in all likelihood, continue for centuries to come.

Language functions

Though there are different approaches and theories in defining *language*, we can all agree on the importance of language in people's lives. The fact that we can use language to talk about language itself assigns it its *meta-lingual function*, as in the use of certain linguistic signs or terms in the analysis and description of particular studies. In addition, we may note the following other functions of language: *interpersonal* – this is perhaps the most important sociological use of language – to establish and maintain social relationships; *textual* – to create relevance to context; *informative* – to convey messages and to inform somebody about some information, for which the use of declarative sentences is the most frequent; *performative* – to change people's social status or control the reality on some special occasions, such as in marriage ceremonies, the sentencing of criminals, the naming of a ship at a launch, the blessing of a child, the cursing of enemies, and so on; *emotive* – to change the emotional status of an audience for or against somebody or something, such as the use of swear words, obscenities, involuntary verbal reactions to beautiful scenery or a piece of art, among others; *phatic* – to maintain a comfortable relationship between people without any factual content, that is, the use of language in social interactions, to keep the 'social wheels' turning, such as the use of jokes, impersonal, meaningless expressions, such as greetings,

farewells, comments on the weather, and so on; and *recreational* – to use language simply for the sheer joy of using it, such as a baby babbling, poetry, verbal dueling, chanting, and so on.

Another indisputable fact where language is concerned is that it is a *system*, that is, the elements of language are combined and organized according to rules, and that it is *arbitrary*, in the sense that there is no intrinsic connection between a given word and the actual object it signifies. The very fact that different languages have a different word for one and the same object just goes to illustrate the *arbitrary nature of language*, that is, that it is not possible to deduce the underlying meaning of a word from its word form.

And, finally, we may say that language is *vocal*, because sound is the primary medium for all languages, no matter how well developed their writing systems are. In fact, evidence indicates that writing systems came into being much later than the spoken form, and that they are attempts to capture sound and meaning on paper.

As of 2022, there are 7139 active languages in the world. Regardless of how different they may be, and which family they belong to, there are, nevertheless, five general features that are distinct of human language systems as opposed to non-human ones, such as *arbitrariness*, *duality*, *creativity*, *displacement*, and *cultural transmission*. The notion of *arbitrariness* was first introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure and has to do with the fact that the forms of linguistic signs have no logical and intrinsic relationship to their meaning, i.e., that different sounds are used to refer to the same object in different languages. *Duality* refers to languages having two levels of structures, which then combine to form meaningful units. Sounds, for example, make up the lower, basic level, while meaning makes up the higher level. *Creativity* is a feature unique to human beings, and language is considered to be creative in that it allows its users to form and interpret new signals, messages they have never said or heard before. Furthermore, words may be used in new ways to mean new things, and they can be understood by those who have not previously come across that use. The feature of *displacement* means that human languages allow their users to understand abstractions and generalizations; in other words, to symbolize objects, events, and concepts that are not present, in time and space, at the moment of communication. This allows us, for example, to talk about people that may no longer be alive, events that have long passed, or places that are very far away. This is contrary to how animals usually ‘communicate’, since their communication tends to be controlled by the ‘here and now.’ Human language is ‘stimulus-free’, as opposed to animal communication, which is more under ‘immediate stimulus control’, which allows us to communicate about things that do not (yet) exist, as we do not need to be

triggered by any external stimulus in the world or by any internal state. And, lastly, *cultural transmission* refers to the fact that human languages are passed on from one generation to another by teaching and learning, as opposed to animal call systems, which are genetically transmitted, by instinct.

What is linguistics?

Linguistics is the science of language, studying in greater detail the various aspects of language from the perspective of the major divisions, such as phonetics and phonology (sounds in language), morphology and syntax (grammar in language, with morphology focusing on words, and syntax focusing on sentences), and semantics and pragmatics (meaning in language).

Sub-branches of linguistics

The different branches of linguistics can be further sub-classified as *microlinguistics* (core branches of linguistics) and *macrolinguistics* (peripheral branches of linguistics).

Branches of linguistics

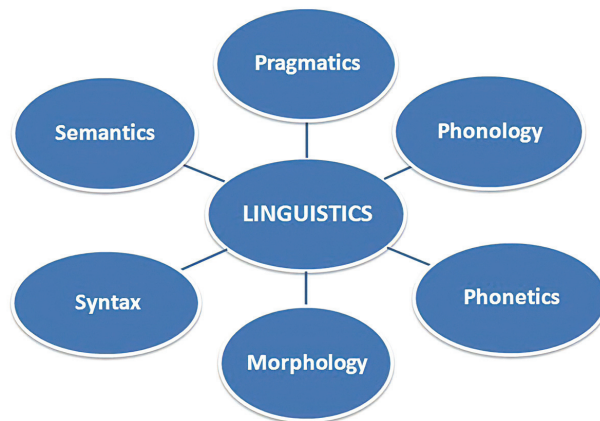


Figure 1. Core branches of linguistics - microlinguistics

Microlinguistics is made up of the following branches: *phonetics*, the study and classification of speech; *phonology*, the study of sounds; *morphology*, the study of words and how they are formed; *syntax*, the study of the arrangement of words and phrases; *semantics*, the study of meaning and relationships of words; and *pragmatics*, the study of language in context.

Macrolinguistics consists of the peripheral branches of linguistics which are the result of the interdisciplinary approach of studying linguistics in combination with a given social science/humanities subject, thus illustrated as follows:

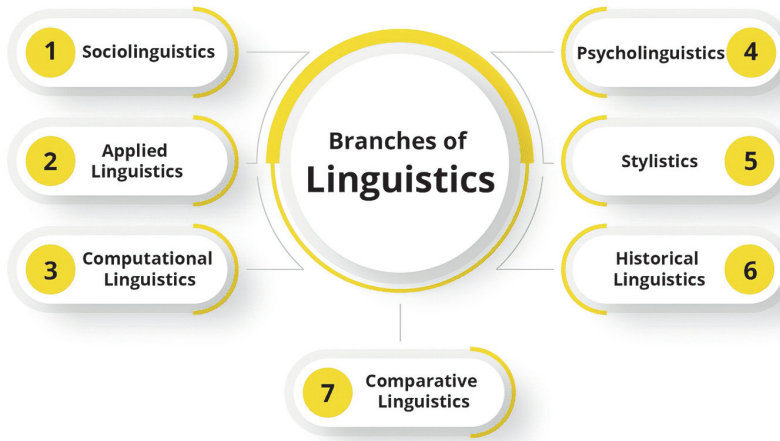


Figure 2. Peripheral branches of linguistics - macrolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to social factors, including differences of regional, class, and occupational dialect, gender differences, and bilingualism (linguistics + sociology); *applied linguistics* is concerned with the practical applications of language studies, as in, for example, language teaching, translation, and speech therapy (linguistics + language); *computational linguistics* is the branch of linguistics in which the techniques of computer science are applied to the analysis and synthesis of language and speech (linguistics + computers; artificial intelligence); *psycholinguistics* is the study of the relationships between linguistic behavior and psychological processes, including the process of language acquisition (linguistics + psychology); *stylistics* is the study of the distinctive styles found in particular literary genres and in the works of individual writers (linguistics + literature); *historical linguistics* is the study of the history and development of languages (a diachronic study of language, as opposed to a synchronic one); and *comparative linguistics* is the study of similarities and differences between languages, especially the comparison of related languages with the aim of reconstructing forms in their lost parent languages.

Besides these, we may combine the study of linguistics from the perspective of anthropology – *anthropological linguistics*, or from the perspective of philosophy – *philosophical linguistics*. The study of linguistics in context of language processing and language representation in the brain gives us *neuro-*

linguistics. In addition, we have *cognitive linguistics*, which focuses on the study of natural language as an instrument for organizing, processing and conveying information; *text linguistics*, more widely known as *discourse analysis*, studying the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used, dealing with how sentences in spoken and written language form larger meaningful units; *applied linguistics* focusing on the application of linguistic theories, methods and findings to explain various language problems that may arise in other areas of experience, among others.

Other distinctions that may be noted in the context of linguistics are *descriptive* versus *prescriptive linguistics*, where the former describes and analyzes the language people actually use, while the latter attempts to lay down rules for the 'correct' use of language. We would not be able to classify one type as more important than the other, though we may note that most modern linguistics is descriptive in nature, whereas the more traditional grammars of the past tended to tell people how to use a language, hence making them prescriptive. The fact that languages have rules does not exclude that they are also constantly evolving and developing, and that these changes should certainly be observed, noted, and described.

Another important distinction is *synchronic* versus *diachronic / historical linguistics*, with the former studying language at a particular point in time in history, and the latter studying the language developments over time, focusing on the differences in two or more states of language over the period of decades or even centuries.

We may conclude by elaborating on our opening explanation of *linguistics* as 'the science of language', in that it is the scientific or systematic study of language in the sense that it scientifically studies the rules, systems and principles that govern human languages. Its two main purposes are that: 1) it studies the nature of language, attempting to establish a theory to describe languages in the framework of that theory; and 2) it examines all the forms of language in general and attempts to establish a scientific understanding of the ways in which it is organized in order to meet the needs it serves and the functions it performs in people's lives.

What is semantics?

The term *semantics* may be said to originate from ancient Greek, *sēmantikós* (*significant*), but it may also be seen as connected to the Greek word *sema* (*signs*). In fact, the term is one of a group of English words formed from the various derivatives of the Greek verb *sēmainō* (*to mean* or *to signify*). For

this reason, *semantics* is closely connected to *semiotics*, which is a study of signs, and *semantics* is the study of their meaning.

Semantics can look at *meaning* at the levels of words, phrases, sentences, or even larger units of discourse. Thus, at its simplest, it can be defined as *the study of meaning in language*, i.e. the study of the meaning of words and sentences. As we have seen so far, it represents a core branch of linguistics, connected to meaning, and it represents a relatively new addition to the study of language, as the term was first introduced in 1883 by Michel Bréal, a French philologist, regarded as the ‘father of modern semantics’, to describe how words can have different meanings for different people due to their experiential and emotional backgrounds.

The other core branch semantics is grouped with in connection to meaning is that of *pragmatics*, with the difference that while *semantics* focuses on the meanings of words without setting an emphasis on their context, *pragmatics* places an emphasis on the context in addition to studying the meaning of the same words.

Though the concept of *meaning* is a rather abstract, fuzzy one, there are *semantic rules*, which help to make communication possible. These are, in essence, rules that people have agreed upon to give meaning to certain symbols and words, and semantic misunderstandings may occur when people assign different meanings to the same words or phrases. Thus, while *syntax*, for example, describes the rules by which words can be combined into sentences, *semantics* describes what they mean.

Types of semantics

Since *meaning* is such a complex concept, on one hand, and is so crucial in the study of semantics, on the other, we may note that there are different kinds of semantics, depending on the theory they are based on, such as *formal semantics*, *lexical semantics*, *conceptual semantics*, *cognitive semantics*, *cross-cultural semantics*, *computational semantics*, and *logical semantics*, among others.

Formal semantics deals with the logical aspects of meaning, and it uses techniques from math, philosophy, and logic to analyze the broader relationship between language and reality, truth and possibility. It is an interdisciplinary field, sometimes regarded as a sub-field of both linguistics and philosophy of language, and it is the study of grammatical meaning in natural languages using formal tools from logic and theoretical computer science. Though there is the more recent *lexical formal semantics*, the term refers to

formal sentence semantics, and it is the study of the meaning of syntactically complex expressions.

Lexical semantics is essentially word meaning; it is concerned with the analysis of word meanings and the relations between them, and it breaks down words within a line of text to understand the meaning in terms of context, and to see how they are arranged. This can include a study of individual nouns, verbs, adjectives, prefixes, root words, suffixes, or longer phrases or idioms. This sub-branch of semantics is also known as *lexicosemantics* and, at its simplest, it is the study of lexical meaning as opposed to grammatical meaning, studying language in isolation, not in use, focusing on the meaning of words, and how meaning is created through context. In line with lexical semantics, there is also *phrasal semantics*, which is concerned with breaking down syntactic units larger than words, including phrases and sentences, within a line of text to understand their meaning in terms of context. Thus, the distinction between *lexical semantics* and *phrasal semantics* is that the former is the study of the individual meaning of words, while the latter examines how smaller parts of discourse, i.e. words, combine to form the meaning of larger linguistic expressions, i.e. sentences.

Conceptual semantics, which has to do with the cognitive structure of meaning, deals with the most basic concept and form of a word before our thoughts and feelings have added context to it; it analyzes the conceptual elements that allow people to understand words and sentences. This sub-branch includes the analysis of both the *denotative* (literal, dictionary definition) meaning of a word, as well as the *connotative* (the emotion evoked from a word) meaning, added by the associated layers of emotions, thoughts, and experiences which humans connect to language, and derived from the way in which a person interprets a word or a sentence's meaning. For example, we know that a *cougar* is a large wild cat. However, the word has also come to indicate an older woman who is dating a younger man, and this is where context is important. As such, semantics and connotation are closely entwined.

Cognitive semantics is a sub-field of cognitive linguistics, and it is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of meaning and the mind. It focuses on language from the perspective of general human cognitive abilities, and, as such, argues that it can only describe the world as people conceive of it. Its approach is concerned with the patterns and processes by which conceptual content is organized in language. The main beliefs of cognitive semantics are that grammar exhibits a conception of the world held in a culture, that knowledge of language is acquired and contextual, and that the ability to use language draws upon general cognitive resources and not special language modules.

Cross-cultural semantics is a sub-branch of semantics which investigates the relationship between meaning and culture in discourse. It offers a contrastive approach to various interactional meanings as expressed by different forms, as well as the cultural influences on word meanings, exploring whether words have universal meanings, and what differences and similarities translate between one language/culture to another. For example, we may look at the cross-cultural semantics of address practices – a contrastive analysis of the various forms of address used in English and other languages, analyzing the interactional meanings expressed by different forms of address, where the forms analyzed would include greetings, titles and opening and closing salutations used in letters and e-mails, among others.

Computational semantics is a relatively new discipline that combines knowledge from formal semantics, computational linguistics, and automated reasoning, and it is concerned with computing the meanings of linguistic objects such as sentences, text fragments, and dialogue contributions. It is focused on the processing of linguistic meaning, and in order to do this, concrete algorithms and architectures are described. Within this framework, the algorithms and architectures are also analyzed in terms of time/space complexity, data structures they require, and communication protocols.

Logical semantics is concerned with concepts such as *sense* and *reference*, and *presupposition* and *implication*. It is the study of meaning in formal and natural languages, using logic as an instrument, where formal and logical languages are both seen as sets of sentences of which the truth conditions have to be specified relative to a model, an abstract representation of the world. As such, logical semantics can also be described as *truth-conditional semantics* and *model-theoretic semantics*, an approach where meaning is seen as being the same as, or simplified to the truth conditions; it is a sub-branch concerned with the language-world relationship, a formalized theory that associates each sentence of natural language with a meta-language conditional under which it is true.

Semantics is undoubtedly becoming increasingly popular as an area of study, and as such, there are a number of other sub-branches, varieties and disciplines, each with their own focus of study, and each with their own set of postulates and theories. The one thing we may say with certainty is that semantics is everywhere around us, in our everyday life.

Semantics in everyday life

One part of studying language is understanding the many meanings of individual words. Once we have a handle on the words themselves, context

comes into play, since the same word can be said to two people and they can interpret it differently. For example, in a situation where a man tells a woman *I care for you... a lot*, the context in which it has been said would have a decisive role in the meaning it carries. If it has been said unexpectedly, while walking together on the street, for example, it would probably make the woman's heart melt. On the other hand, if this is his response to the woman telling him that she loves him, and after a long pause at that, she would probably be feeling crushed. So, the context, i.e. the current situation, plays an important role in everyday semantics.

There are numerous examples of everyday words that may have more than one meaning. A *water pill* could be a pill with water in it, but it is also understood to be a diuretic that causes a person to lose water from their body. *Crash* can mean a car accident, a drop in the Stock Market, to attend a party without being invited, ocean waves hitting the shore, or the sound of cymbals being struck together. In addition, depending on the context, a *flowering plant* could be referred to as a *weed* or a *flower*; a *human* can be referred to as a *male*, *female*, *child*, *adult*, *baby*, *bachelor*, *father* or *mother*; calling someone a *lady* means more than simply being female, according to semantics; if she is a lady, she possesses elegance and grace; *young* can allude to a *colt*, *filly*, *piglet*, *baby*, *puppy*, or *kitten*; saying *something is challenging* leads us to believe that *it has not been a good experience*, not just difficult, but also unpleasant; *to move* can mean *to change place*, *push*, *pull* or *carry*, or *stir emotion*; calling someone an *angel* does not mean they live in heaven, but that they *have a lovely disposition*; *to create* can mean *to build*, *make*, *construct*, *erect*, *compose* or *imagine*; *on* can have many meanings, such as: *on call*, *on the roof*, *on cloud nine*, *on edge*, *on fire*, *on purpose*, *on demand*, *on top*, or *on the phone*, etc.

Theories of semantics

The study of words through semantics provides a better understanding of the multiple meanings of words, and it is an excellent illustration of the great versatility of language. As meaning is so complex, linguists, and semanticists in particular, face considerable challenges in dealing with it, and, as such, a number of different theories have been proposed to help tackle the concept. Generally speaking, the *semantic theory*, the first sort of theory, is a theory that assigns semantic contents to expressions of a language. The second sort of theory, a *foundational theory of meaning*, is a theory which states the facts on account of which expressions have the semantic contents that they do. Besides the two traditional schools of theories of meaning, the *referential theory* and the *representation theory*, we may also make note of two

more – the *semantic field theory* and the *prototype theory*, which are seen as the major ones in the study of linguistics, and semantics.

The *referential theory* argues that a linguistic sign derives its meaning from something in reality. For example, words like *man* and *fish* are meaningful in that they each refer to an individual or a collection of living beings existing in reality. However, some linguistic signs, like *ghost*, *dragon*, *unicorn*, merely denote something imaginative. This is connected to the idea that the *reference* of a word is the relation between the linguistic expression and the entity in the real world to which it refers. In contrast to reference, *sense* is defined as its relations to other expressions in the language system. This theory sees *meaning* as the relationship between words and objects, and argues that the best way of indicating the meaning of a word is to refer to the object represented by that word, while the object denoted by a word is called its *referent*. Thus, *reference* is a relationship in which a symbol or sign (a word, for example) signifies something, while the *referent* is the thing signified, and it may be an actual person or object, or something more abstract, such as a set of actions. Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher, and Hilary Putnam, an American philosopher, are the two names that are closely linked with this theory, promoting the idea that the meaning of a word or expression lies in what it points out in the world. In line with this, the concept of *referential meaning*, also called *denotative meaning*, *descriptive meaning*, *conceptual meaning*, or *sense*, refers to the logical, cognitive, or denotative content of an expression, whereas the concept of *connotative meaning*, also known as *associative meaning*, denotes the associations and secondary meanings the expression evokes.

The *representation theory* supports the idea that language in general, and words in particular, are only an *icon*, or representation, for an actual *thing*, or form, being symbolized. In other words, they conjure in our minds pictures of things, events and ideas. However, there are a number of *function words*, such as *a*, *an*, *the*, *or*, which conjure no pictures of this kind. Semantic representation is an abstract language in which meanings can be represented, yet opinions differ about whether it is sufficient or necessary in terms of how it relates to syntactic representations. This theory represents a theoretical linguistic framework in the generative tradition, and was created and developed by Edwin S. Williams, who compared it with other frameworks, such as Noam Chomsky's minimalist program, arguing that his idea offered greater descriptive and conceptual advantages over them. The main part of the proposal holds that linguistic derivation is the result of mappings and mismappings between an open set of representations, which correspond to increasingly larger locality domains and join *syntactic* and *semantic*, as well as *pragmatic* levels.

The *semantic field theory* proposes that a group of words with interrelated meanings can be categorized under a larger conceptual domain, and

this entire entity is, thus, known as a *semantic field*. The words *boil*, *bake*, *fry*, and *roast*, for example, would fall under the larger semantic category of *cooking*. The semantic field theory holds that lexical meaning cannot be fully understood by looking at a word in isolation, but by looking at a group of semantically-related words. Semantic relations can refer to any relationship in meaning between lexemes, including *synonymy* (*big* and *large*), *antonymy* (*big* and *small*), *hypernymy* and *hyponymy* (*rose* and *flower*), *converseness* (*buy* and *sell*), and *incompatibility*. The semantic field theory does not have concrete guidelines that determine the extent of semantic relations between lexemes, and the abstract validity of the theory is a subject of debate. Knowing the meaning of a lexical item, therefore, means knowing the semantic entailments the word brings with it. However, it is also possible to understand only one word of a semantic field without understanding other related words, as for example, in a taxonomy of plants and animals: it is possible to understand the words *rose* and *rabbit* without knowing what a *marigold* or a *muskrat* is, respectively. This applies to *colors* as well, such as understanding the word *red* without knowing the meaning of *scarlet*; however, understanding *scarlet* without knowing the meaning of *red* may be less likely. A semantic field can be very large or very small, depending on the level of contrast being made between the lexical items. While *cat* and *dog* both fall under the larger semantic field of *animal*, including the breed of dog, like *German shepherd*, would require contrasts between other breeds of dog (*corgi* or *poodle*), thus expanding the semantic field further.

The *prototype theory* was formulated in the 1970s by Eleanor Rosch, an American psychologist, and it led to set-theoretic approaches of *extensional* or *intensional semantics*. It is especially evident in cognitive linguistics, and, hence, cognitive semantics, and its main postulate is that natural categories are organized around ideal examples, *prototypes*, and that other items belong to the category to the extent that they resemble the prototype. The term *prototype* can be defined as “a category that allows listeners to understand a concept”; basically, it is a cognitive reference point, i.e. the prototype is an example of what we should be thinking; it is the best example or cognitive representation of something within a certain category. Thus, categories form around prototypes, and new members are added on the basis of their resemblance to the prototype. There is no requirement that a property or a set of properties must be shared by all members, and the features and attributes are generally gradable. Category membership is a matter of degree and categories do not have clear boundaries. This theory provides insight into the way we conceive certain ideas and objects, and prototypes may help children learn the meanings of new words. The disadvantages, on the other hand, are that prototypes may be culturally and socially dependent, as they may vary across

populations, and there are many words that do not offer clear mental images, such as *forget*, *concept*, *without*. For example, a *robin* or a *sparrow* may be seen as a prototype of the category *bird*, whereas a *penguin* or an *ostrich* might not be the best choice of this category. Defining a prototype as the bundle of typical features of a category, we can imagine *birds* as *creatures that are covered with feathers, have two wings and two legs, and the majority of which can fly*. Thus, a *penguin* might not be the best choice here as a prototype, since it lacks some of the typical features, such as the ability to fly.

What is a word?

So far we have looked at a number of fundamental concepts in the study of language, and we shall conclude this chapter by adding several more, which are essential for our understanding of semantics, some of which have been noted so far, and others which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters. Here we will simply (re)mention them, as they (will) keep recurring in our discussions on meaning, which is, as we have seen so far, the focus of semantics.

Thus, we have noted that semantics is a sub-branch of linguistics, but specifically, it falls under *morphology*, which, at its simplest, is the study of the forms of words, that is, how they are formed, and their relationship to other words in the same language. Morphology analyzes the structure of words, as well as the parts of words, such as stems, root words, prefixes, and suffixes.

The term *word* is central in any discussion concerning language, and it is interesting to note that there is no one standard definition that would cover all the branches of linguistics. Loosely, it can be defined as “a single distinct meaningful element of speech or writing, used with others (or sometimes alone) to form a sentence and typically shown with a space on either side when written or printed”, or as “a speech sound or a combination of sounds, or its representation in writing, that symbolizes and communicates a meaning and may consist of a single morpheme or a combination of morphemes.”

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines *word* as “a single unit of language that means something and can be spoken or written,” while the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* offers several options for the concept, taking into consideration the various aspects from which the term may be analyzed. As such, we have the following: (1a) a speech sound or series of speech sounds that symbolizes and communicates a meaning usually without being divisible into smaller units capable of independent use; (2a) the entire set of linguistic forms produced by combining a single base with various inflectional elements without change in the part of speech elements; (1b) a written or printed cha-

racter or combination of characters representing a spoken word. However, these are just a starting point for the more precise ways in which the concept can be explained, depending on the perspective from which it is looked at.

Traditionally, *morphologically* speaking, a word is “a unit of language that carries meaning and consists of one or more morphemes which are linked more or less tightly together, and has a phonetic value. Typically a word will consist of a root or stem and zero or more affixes.” *Phonetically* speaking, a word of a spoken language can be defined as “the smallest sequence of phonemes that can be uttered in isolation with objective or practical meaning, while a *phonological word* is “a prosodic unit that can be preceded and followed by a pause.” *Syntactically* speaking, words can be combined to create phrases, clauses, and sentences, which is the main concern of this branch – relating to the rules of language; thus, how words and morphemes combine to form these larger units, such as phrases and sentences. From a *pragmatics* perspective, words are defined in terms of how they are used in a practical sense, as they can mean different things, and often the same word can mean something different depending on the context in which it is used. Finally, from a *semantics* point of view, which is of crucial interest to us here, a word is “a string of characters that can have different meanings”, as for example, *ja-guar*: car or animal; *driver*: one who drives a vehicle or the part of a computer; *rows*: the plural noun or the third person singular of the verb *to row*, among others. Essentially, anything spelled with the same sequence of letters and pronounced in the same way is seen as one word, while the different ways that the word can exist in the context of language are known as *word forms*.

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. “No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you that his parents were poor but honest.” (Bertrand Russell)
2. “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*)
3. What function does language play in our daily life?
4. What if there were no language?
5. Do animals have ‘language’?
6. What makes it difficult to determine the precise number of words in a language?

Chapter 2

Language in use

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- the function of language in society
- verbal and non-verbal language
- different types of signs
- utterances, sentences, propositions

Key concepts: non-verbal language, proposition, sentence, sign, utterance, verbal language

The function of language in society

In Chapter 1 we looked at the concept of *language*, as well as the various attempts at defining it, going as far back as ancient times. Despite the fact that, as we noted, no consensus has been reached in this area, what is indisputable is the fact that the main aim of language is to facilitate communication, as well as to allow for the expression of identity, play, imagination, and emotional release, among others. *Language* enables us to communicate our thoughts, ideas, and feelings with others as quickly as possible. It represents a means of communication among people, i.e. it is a system of individual signs that serve to communicate and express a person's ideas of the surrounding reality, and a social phenomenon. In fact, every aspect of our life involves language, and it is what distinguishes us, humans, from other animal species, as, though all species have their ways of communicating, humans are the only ones that have mastered cognitive language communication.

Despite the fact that there are numerous uses of language, essentially its primary ones are *informative*, *expressive*, and *directive* in nature. Language is used to reason, to express ideas, to argue a point, to provide directions, etc. The basic functions of a language are interdependent, and they are used in various degrees. Linguists have identified different functions of language, though they have not agreed on the precise number, and, as such, there are many classifications depending on its ways of use.

In the section that follows, we shall take a closer look at how the functions of language are classified according to several renowned linguists, na-

mely, Geoffrey Leech, Roman Jakobson, and Michael Halliday, noting that there is overlapping, and that these are by no means the only distinctions that exist.

Functions of language according to Leech

According to British linguist Geoffrey Leech, there are five main functions of language: *informational*, *expressive*, *directive*, *aesthetic*, and *phatic*.

1. The *informational function* is seen as the most important, since, as its name implies, it helps us deliver messages, describe things, and give the listener new information.

2. The *expressive function* is needed when we want to express our feelings; words that do not provide any particular information but are used to express attitudes and feelings, such as swear words, and various exclamations. The expressive function is used in literature and poetry.

3. The *directive function* is used to bring about certain actions or reactions, such as in commands or requests. It is a function of social control and interpersonal interaction, and in this case the reaction of the listener is more important than the thought expressed by the speaker, since this reaction determines whether such a phrase has achieved the aim or not.

Sometimes *directive sentences* may express more than one function, as, for example, if we say “I’m hungry”, we may note that it provides both information about us, and is a request for food. This sentence also expresses our feelings, so essentially we have three functions of language represented in one short sentence.

4. The *aesthetic function*, according to Leech, does not have any particular purpose, as it serves neither as a request nor a message. Here, words are used as a tool of poetic art, and as certain signs (such as the use of different adjectives, like *gorgeous*, *elegant*, *stunning*), where the beauty of the chosen words and phrases is more important than the actual usefulness of the information.

5. The last function that Leech distinguishes is the *phatic function*, the sole purpose of which is to maintain social relationships, and to begin or continue the conversation, such as small talk about the weather, for example. This does not provide us with any necessary information, nor does it express our feelings, but it helps us to interact with people. The real reason for such talk is simply our desire to talk.

Functions of language according to Jakobson

Russian-American linguist Roman Jakobson distinguishes six functions of language: *referential*, *emotive*, *conative*, *phatic*, *metalingual*, and *poetic*, according to which an effective act of verbal communication can be described, each with an associated factor – *context*, *addresser (sender)*, *addressee (receiver)*, *contact*, *common code*, and *message*, respectively.

1. The *referential function* is oriented toward the *context*; it usually describes a situation, object, or its state, as in “The autumn leaves have all fallen now” or “Water boils at 100 degrees.”

2. The *emotive function* is not about the context of the statement, but about the emotions added to it, as in the interjections and exclamations in it, like in “Oh, such a pity!” and “Bah!”; this function is oriented toward the *addresser*.

3. The *conative function* is oriented toward the *addressee*, that is, it is a function that is directed toward the receiver, and it is used in imperatives and apostrophes, as in “Richard! Do close the window!”

4. The *phatic function* is the same as mentioned above, in Leech’s distinction.

5. The *metalingual function* is used to establish mutual agreement on the code (for example, a definition); essentially, it is the use of language to describe itself.

6. The *poetic function* puts the focus on the message for its own sake; as its name implies, it is mainly used in poetry, it usually exists as is, and it helps to distinguish poetry from other genres.

It is interesting to note that several competing names have been proposed for the ‘same’ factors and functions, as a different name often indicates, insists on, reveals, hides, or even results in an important conceptual difference. As such, some other names for the *factors* are: *referent (context)*, *sender* or *enunciator (addresser)*, *receiver* or *enunciatee (addressee)*, *channel (contact)*, while some other names for the *functions* are: *denotative*, *cognitive*, *representative*, *informative (referential)*, *expressive (emotive)*, *appellative*, *imperative*, *directive (conative)*, *relational* or *contact (phatic)*, *metasemiotic*, and *esthetic* or *rhetorical (poetic)*.

Functions of language according to Halliday

British linguist Michael Halliday offers a set of seven functions of language, as follows: *regulatory*, *interactional*, *representational*, *personal*, *imaginative*, *instrumental*, and *heuristic*.

1. The *regulatory function* is language used to influence the behavior of others, and it is concerned with persuading/commanding/requesting other people to do things you want.
2. The *interactional function* is language used to develop social relationships and ease the process of interaction.
3. The *representational function* is language used to exchange information, and it is concerned with the relaying or requesting of information.
4. The *personal function* is language used to express personal preferences, identity, feelings, emotions, personality, opinions and reactions of the speaker.
5. The *imaginative function* is language used to explore the imagination or to create an imaginary system or ideas, as well as to tell stories, jokes, fairy tales, and so on.
6. The *instrumental function* is language used to express what someone might need.
7. Lastly, the *heuristic function* is language to learn and explore the environment.

Thus, differentiating language in terms of what it is used for, we may say that *emotive language* uses connotative words to express the feelings, attitudes, and emotions of a speaker; *phatic language* has a social task, as in greetings, farewells, small talk; *cognitive language* tends to be denotative in nature, and it conveys information; *rhetorical language* influences thoughts and behaviors, and it employs words to be persuasive by using emotionally vivid pictures; *identifying language* focuses on naming persons or things specifically, and clarifying exactly what the speaker is talking about; *denotative language* is used for conveying the literal, explicit meaning of words and expressions; *connotative language* is used for conveying metaphorical meaning, as well as the emotional nuances of words; and *slang* is used to serve social purposes, as in to identify members of a group, to change the register of discourse toward informality, to oppose established authority, among others.

As we have seen so far, there is no agreement in terms of the exact number of functions of language. Besides the linguists mentioned above, there are other linguists who offer their own views and provide other classification systems. For example, H. Douglas Brown, like Halliday, distinguishes seven functions of language, and his system is similar to that of Leech. Generally, this approach to language functions was first introduced by J. R. Firth, who saw language as an interpersonal and interactive tool, forming our behavior and helping us influence the behavior of others.

Verbal and non-verbal language

Though not the only medium of communication, language is undoubtedly the most effective, and we can make the distinction between *verbal* and *non-verbal language*, i.e. between *verbal* and *non-verbal communication*.

At its simplest, in *verbal communication* it is the *language* (content) that is the focus – the words that are used by the speaker, and how they are heard and interpreted by the recipient, and this can be realized through written or oral communication. An important notion here is that of *feedback*, which is revealed in the information exchange, as without feedback, the communication process is incomplete. In fact, the function of feedback in the process of communication is to alert the speaker as to whether the message has been received and understood by the recipient, and this can be achieved by using both verbal and non-verbal cues and responses.

In the context of *verbal communication*, in its oral form, a distinction may be made in the auditory component between that of *hearing* and *listening*, where the former refers to the ability to perceive sound, which is an involuntary activity, while the latter is more selective, and has to do with the actual paying of attention, involving the decoding of sound into meaning, and is further sub-divided into *passive listening* (little more than hearing) and *active listening*.

Non-verbal communication, on the other hand, is connected to *para-language* (context), and it conveys just as much, if not more, information than verbal communication. Non-verbal communication refers to *body language*, such as: *gestures* – hand movements, like hand-wringing, open-hand movements, finger-pointing, fist-thumping, knuckle-cracking, etc.; *eye contact* (or lack of) – whether the speaker is looking at the listener/audience being addressed; *posture and proximity* – revealing how interested the speaker / listener is; *facial expressions* – including whether the forehead is smooth / wrinkled; eyebrows – also, smooth/wrinkled; whether the jaw / mouth is firm / relaxed; *body movement* – such as shrugs and shuffles, arms crossed or left loose, striding or standing in one position; and *vocal cues*, such as *speech patterns, tone* (sarcastic or sincere, warm or cold, rich and expressive or dull and flat), *pitch, speed* (slow, hesitant, fast, jerky, abrupt, or an even-steady pace), *volume* (shouting, barely audible, or medium volume), *intonation*, among others.

Communication is crucial in all spheres of life as it helps us to avoid frustration and misunderstandings. It is vital, though, that we are aware that the actual words we use play just a small part in how we communicate with people on a daily basis, since much of what we are communicating is rooted in our actions, the non-verbal cues we emit, and our behavior while communicating.

Different types of signs

Language is a complex system of symbols, or *signs*, which are shared by members of a community. These may be spoken, written, or signed with the hands. Generally speaking, a *sign* is any motion, gesture, image, sound, pattern, or event that conveys meaning. The general study of signs is called *semiotics*. As such, in semiotics, a sign is anything that communicates a meaning that is not the sign itself to the interpreter of the sign. The meaning can be intentional, such as a word uttered with a specific meaning, or unintentional, such as a symptom being a sign of a particular medical condition.

All sorts of sights, sounds and smells can be *natural signs*; they communicate to someone who observes and can interpret, but their messages are unintentional, essentially they are the by-products of various events. Unlike natural signs, *conventional signs* have human senders, as well as human receivers; each one has an intention and an interpretation.

Words are *linguistic signs*, similar in certain respects to natural and conventional signs. They do not 'have meanings' but, rather, are capable of conveying meanings to those who can perceive, identify, and interpret. Words go together to form sentences, which, in turn, convey meanings – the meanings of the individual words and the meaning that comes from the relation of these words to one another.

In *linguistics*, a *sign* is the smallest unit of meaning, and it refers to any unit of language (morpheme, word, phrase, or sentence) used to designate objects or phenomena of reality. *Linguistic signs* are bilateral; they consist of a *signifier*, made up of speech sounds (that is, phonemes), which refers to any material thing that signifies, such as words on a page, a facial expression, an image, and a *signified*, created by the sign's sense content, essentially the concept that a signifier refers to. As Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure defined it one century ago, the *linguistic sign* is comprised of two elements: the sensible sound-image (*signifier*), and the intelligible concept (*signified*).

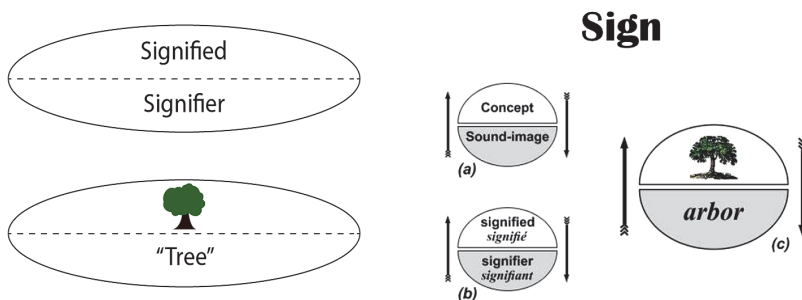


Figure 1. Linguistic sign

Utterances, sentences, propositions

These three concepts – *utterances*, *sentences*, and *propositions* – are three key concepts in the study of semantics.

Utterances

Out of the three, the concept of the *utterance* is the most tangible, and, as such, the least abstract one, as it can be held as a physical event. Essentially, an *utterance* refers to any stretch of talk by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that speaker. It is the use of a piece of language (a sequence of sentences, a part of a sentence, a phrase, or even a single word) by a particular speaker, on a particular occasion. An action performed via an utterance is known as a *speech act*.

It is important to note that not all utterances are actually tokens of sentences; sometimes they can be parts (fragments) of sentences (phrases, single words), as these are used in communication all the time since people do not communicate completely in well-formed sentences. These fragments can be taken as incomplete versions/abbreviations of whole sentences.

There is no one definitive classification of the concept of the utterance, though the different classifications are, for the most part, similar, and in accordance with their views and their focus of study. American linguist Charles W. Kreidler, for example, classifies utterances by distinguishing seven types – *assertive*, *performative*, *verdictive*, *expressive*, *directive*, *commissive*, and *phatic*.

Assertive utterances are utterances intended to tell us how things are in the world; they are representations of reality, as for example, *The sky is blue*; *Earth is the third planet from the Sun*.

Performative utterances not only describe a given reality, but also change the social reality they are describing, as, for example, *I now pronounce you husband and wife*; *You're fired*. They usually contain the first person pronoun *I* in combination with a given verb describing a speech act, also known as *performative verbs*, such as *apologize*, *condemn*, *authorize*, *declare*, *name*, *object*, *promise*, etc.

Verdictive utterances are speech acts in which the speaker makes an assessment or judgement about the acts of another, usually the addressee. These include ranking, assessing, appraising, condoning. *Verdictive verbs* include *accuse*, *charge*, *excuse*, *thank*, and are illustrated in the following examples: *I commend you for sticking it out until the end*; *I congratulate you on performing so well*.

Expressive utterances are used to express a psychological state, and they include agreement, volition, disagreement, compliment, pride, expressing sorrow, thanking, greetings, non-directed complaints in exclamations and apologizing. The most dominant type of expressive utterances is *agreement*. Expressive utterances are retrospective and speaker-involved, and the most common *expressive verbs* are: *acknowledge, admit, confess, deny, apologize*, as in *I admit that I was wrong; I apologize for having disturbed you*.

Directive utterances consist of asking, inviting, ordering, begging, requesting, suggesting, recommending, demanding, permitting, etc., as in *Don't go that way*, which illustrates a forbidding utterance. This type of speech act focuses on the speaker's commitment.

Commissive utterances commit the speaker to some future course of action, and include promising, threatening, offering, refusal, pledges, as, for example, when someone says *I'll be back*, which represents the speaker's promise that they will be back.

Phatic utterances are non-verbal expressions used in non-verbal communication for emphasis or to add detail to the message that a person conveys or expresses, such as smiling, gesturing, waving, etc.

Language is not a phenomenon that stands on its own, nor is it studied in that way. It is an integral part of society, affected by it, and subject to all the changes that may occur at a given time. As such, when different aspects of language are studied, they are not studied in isolation, but rather with the aim to advance research in various other segments of life. This is the case with the study of utterances, which, apart from their linguistic analysis, can also help in research on verbal communication in psychotherapy and interpersonal relationships.

In terms of the intended meaning of an utterance, we may distinguish six conceptually distinct levels, where *level 0* is the speaker's *literal meaning* – the conventional meaning of the words as used by the speaker; *level 1* is the speaker's *occasion meaning* – the pragmatic, on-record intended meaning; *level 2* is the *hint level* – intended to be recognized as intended, but off-record; *level 3* is the *manipulation level* – intended to be understood by the hearer but not to appear as intended by the speaker; *level 4* is the *secret or deception level* – meanings that underlie an utterance yet are not meant to be recognized, and, lastly, *level 5* is the *subconscious or self-deception level* – meanings that underlie an utterance but are not fully known even to the speaker.

Sentences

Loosely defined, a *sentence* can be understood as a string of words, where a given sentence always consists of the same words, and in the same order, and any change in the words, or in their order, makes a different sentence. Traditionally defined, a *sentence* is seen as a grammatically complete string of words expressing a complete thought, and it excludes any string of words that does not have a verb in it. Thus, where utterances are physical events, sentences are neither physical events nor physical objects – they are the ideal string of words behind various realizations of utterances.

While we may say that an utterance can be in a particular accent (that is, a particular way of pronouncing words), it would not make sense, in the strict sense of the word, to say that a sentence is in a particular accent, because a sentence itself is only associated with phonetic characteristics such as accent and voice quality through a speaker's act of uttering it. Thus, accent and voice quality belong strictly to an utterance, and not to the sentence uttered.

Based on their forms, sentences are traditionally classified as *declarative* if they tell something, *interrogative* if they ask something, or *imperative* if they request action. Actual utterances, on the other hand, can have various functions that are independent of form. For example, a person can ask a question without truly seeking information (*rhetorical question*), as in *Did you really like that silly book?*; make a statement that is intended as a request, as in *It's very warm in here with that window closed*; or produce a command that is not meant to elicit action from the addressee, as in *Have a good time*. In addition, *Did you know it's raining?* can be a way of informing, and a person who says *I suppose you'll be going away for the holiday* may well be asking for information. In addition, a speaker may, for humor or irony, produce an utterance that is just the opposite of the message they wish to convey. The form of an utterance does not necessarily coincide with the speaker's real intention. Despite the lack of 1:1 equivalence in terms of function and form, syntactically speaking, three sentence types are recognized in English: *statement*, *command* and *question*, that is, *declarative*, *imperative* and *interrogatory sentences*, respectively.

Sentences can also be classified as *simple*, *compound*, *complex*, and *compound-complex*, depending on the number and the type of clauses they consist of. As such, the *simple sentence*, despite its name, is not necessarily short or simple; on the contrary, it may be long, with many parts and compound elements, but if there is only one independent clause, it is, nevertheless, a simple sentence. Two simple sentences joined together form a *compound sentence*, which, conversely, may be broken into two complete sentences, each with their own subject and verb. A *complex sentence* contains both a de-

pendent and an independent clause, while a *compound-complex sentence* combines at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

Propositions

The concept of the *proposition* is the most abstract of the three concepts, and it refers to that part of the meaning of the utterance of a declarative sentence which describes some state of affairs. It typically involves persons or things referred to by expressions in the sentence. In uttering a declarative sentence, a speaker typically asserts a proposition. The proposition is involved in the meanings of other types of sentences, not just in declarative sentences, such as in interrogatives and imperatives, where corresponding declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences have the same propositional content.

The notion of *truth* can be used to decide whether two sentences express different propositions. If there is any conceivable set of circumstances in which one sentence is true, while the other is false, then we can be sure that they express different propositions. *True propositions* correspond to *facts*, and only true propositions can be known. On the other hand, *false propositions* do not correspond to facts. Propositions can be entertained in our mind regardless of whether they are true or false.

For example, in the sentence “John can go”, the speaker asserts the proposition that ‘John can go’, while in the sentence “Can John go?”, the speaker mentions the same proposition, but merely questions its truth.

In conclusion, it is useful to create a visual image in our mind, a kind of a family tree relationship among these concepts, as shown in Figure 2 below. For example, a single proposition may be expressed by using several different sentences (for example, *Tom broke the window*, or *The window was broken by Tom*), and each of these sentences may be uttered an infinite number of times.

A *proposition* is an abstraction that can be grasped by the mind of an individual person. In this sense, a proposition is an object of thought, but propositions should not be equated with thoughts, because thoughts are usually understood to be private, personal, mental processes, while propositions are public in the sense that the same proposition is accessible to different persons: different individuals can grasp the same proposition.

In addition, a proposition is not a process, whereas a thought can be seen as a process going on in an individual’s mind. However, the word *thought* may sometimes be used loosely in a way which includes the notion of a

proposition. For instance, we may say, “The same thought came into both our heads at the same time.” In this case, the word *thought* is being used in a sense quite like that of the word *proposition*. Undoubtedly, the relationship between *mental processes* (= *thoughts*), *abstract semantic entities* (= *propositions*), *linguistic entities* (= *sentences*), and *actions* (= *utterances*) is complex and multi-layered.

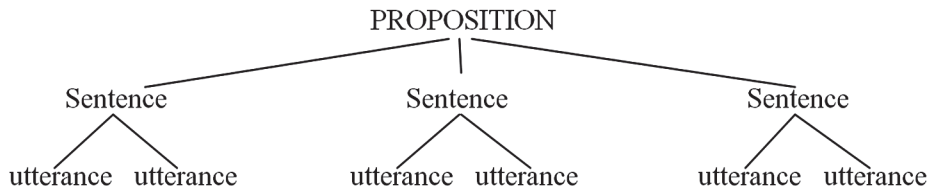


Figure 2. Relationship: utterance - sentence - proposition

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. Can the following represent utterances?

(a) “Hello.”

(b) “Not much.”

(c) “Utterances may consist of a single word, a single phrase or a single sentence. They may also consist of a sequence of sentences. It is not unusual to find utterances that consist of one or more grammatically incomplete sentence-fragments. In short, there is no simple relation of correspondence between utterances and sentences.”

(d) “Pxgotmgt.”

(e) “Schplotzenpflaaaaaargh!”

2. Do all authentic performances of *Macbeth* begin with the same sentence?

3. Do all authentic performances of *Macbeth* begin with the same utterance?

4. Does it make sense to talk of the time and place of a sentence?

5. Does it make sense to talk of the time and place of an utterance?
6. Can we have a loud sentence?
7. Can we have a slow utterance?
8. Does it make sense to ask what language (for example, English, French, Chinese) a sentence belongs to?
9. What languages do the following sentences belong to?
 - (a) Je suis ravi de vous rencontrer.
 - (b) Nett, Sie kennen zu lernen.
10. Are these two sentences the same?
 - (a) Ellen rolled up the carpet. / Ellen rolled the carpet up.
 - (b) The dog may frighten the baby. / The baby may be frightened by the dog.
11. Are the following sentences?
 - (a) I would like a cup of coffee.
 - (b) Coffee, please.
 - (c) In the kitchen.
 - (d) Please put it in the kitchen.
12. Which of the utterances below are examples of whole sentences and which are not?
 - (a) "John."
 - (b) "It's mine."
 - (c) "Who is there?"
 - (d) "Where shall I ... ?"
 - (e) "Mine."
13. Below are some sample conversations. In each case the second utterance is not an example of a sentence. Write out a full sentence expressing the intended meaning more fully.
 - (a) Grant: "When did Goethe die?"
Fred: "In 1832." _____
 - (b) Server: "Would you like tea or coffee?"
Guest: "Coffee, please." _____
 - (c) Claire: "Who won the battle of Waterloo?"
Jim: "Wellington." _____

14. Look at the following pairs of sentences and in each case decide whether there are any circumstances where one member of the pair could be true and the other false (assuming in each case that the same name refers to the same person).

- (a) Mark took out the garbage.
Mark took the garbage out.
- (b) Johnny gave Pat a book.
Pat was given a book by Johnny.
- (c) Izzy loves Tom.
Tom loves Izzy.
- (d) George danced with Penny.
George didn't dance with Penny.
- (e) Doctor Cooper killed Peter.
Doctor Cooper caused Peter to die.

15. In the present-day world:

- (a) Is it a fact that there are lions in Africa?
- (b) Is the proposition that there are lions in Africa a true proposition?
- (c) Is it a fact that human beings do not live in the state of Kansas?
- (d) Is the proposition that human beings do not live in the state of Kansas true?

16. In the following utterances, is any proposition asserted by the speaker?

- (a) "Have you seen my toothbrush?"
- (b) "Get out of here this minute!"
- (c) "I'm afraid that I'll have to ask you to leave."

17. Do the members of the following sentence pairs have the same propositional content?

- (1a) Go away, will you?
- (1b) You will go away.
- (2a) Pigs might fly.
- (2b) I'm French.
- (3a) I am an idiot.
- (3b) Am I an idiot?

18. Can the same proposition be expressed by different sentences?
Can the same sentence be realized by different utterances?

19. Fill in the chart with + or /, as appropriate.

	Utterances	Sentences	Propositions
Can be loud or quiet			
Can be grammatical or not			
Can be true or false			
Can be in a particular regional accent			
Can be in a particular language			

20. Which functions of language are present in the following text?

“This text you gave me to correct is a bunch of rubbish! Listen to this, you’ve got several verbs with no subject, you state the obvious (‘a day lasts 24 hours’), then – are you still following me? – you use unclear metaphors (‘work is the drop hammer of life’) and stupid malapropisms (‘You are the suntan of my life’).”

21. How does society affect language, and how does language affect communication?

22. According to your feelings and emotions at this moment, write a sentence about each of the function of languages.

23. Figure out and list which words/messages may be destructive in your relations and social environment.

Chapter 3

Introduction to the study of meaning

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- what is meaning?
- systematic study of meaning
- classification of meaning
- theories of meaning

Key concepts: connotation, denotation, grammatical meaning, lexical meaning, speaker meaning, word/sentence meaning

What is meaning?

As we have noted so far, *meaning* is the focus of study of semantics, and though it appears to be a fairly simple concept at first glance, there is no one universally accepted definition for it, as it can be interpreted in different ways and from different perspectives. *Meaning* is very closely related to the human capacity to think logically and to understand, and as language users, it goes without saying that when we use words, we need to understand their meaning correctly, thus, we need to have grammatical, syntactic, morphological, and semantic knowledge.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains *meaning* simply as “the sense of a linguistic expression.” The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, among its other explanations, notes the following: a) the logical *connotation* of a word or phrase; and b) the logical *denotation* or extension of a word or phrase, where the former refers to an implication; something suggested by a word or thing, while the latter has to do with the direct specific meaning as distinct from the implied or associated idea. The *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* defines *meaning* as “the thing or idea that a sound, word, sign, etc. represents”, with a note directing users to the entry of *lexical meaning*, which is then defined as “the meaning of a word, without paying attention to the way that it is used or to the words that occur with it”.

Lexical meaning is also known as *semantic meaning*, in line with what is studied within *lexical semantics* = the study of word meaning, with the main

topics being either the internal semantic structure of words, or the semantic relations that occur within the vocabulary. It refers to the *sense* (or meaning) of a *word* (or *lexeme*) as it appears in a dictionary, and, as such, it may also be known as *denotative* and *central meaning*. This contrasts with *grammatical* or *structural meaning*, which is the meaning conveyed in a sentence by word order and other grammatical signals. *Grammatical*, i.e. *structural meaning* is the focus of *structural semantics*, which looks at the relationships between the meanings of terms within a sentence, and how meaning can be composed from smaller elements. Thus, linguists distinguish *grammatical/structural meaning* (*connotation* – the implied meaning of a word) and *lexical/semantic meaning* (*denotation* – the dictionary meaning of an individual word).

However, we need to bear in mind that there are no clear-cut distinctions, and that in *semantics*, as well as in philosophy of language, metaphysics, and metasemantics, *meaning* can be defined as “a relationship between two sorts of things: signs and the kinds of things they intend, express, or signify.” The types of meanings vary according to the types of the thing that is being represented. In addition to this, in semantics, as well as pragmatics, *meaning* is the message conveyed by words, sentences, and symbols in a context (*lexical* or *semantic meaning*). Thus, another distinction becomes evident where *meaning* is concerned, this time between *semantic meaning* and *pragmatic meaning*, as explained in the following way: “It has been generally assumed that we have to understand two types of meaning to understand what the speaker means by uttering a sentence...A sentence expresses a more or less complete propositional content, which is *semantic meaning*, and extra *pragmatic meaning* comes from a particular context in which the sentence is uttered.” As such, *pragmatic meaning* can also be seen as *contextual meaning*, or meaning in context.

Again, we would not be able to say which definition of *meaning* is the best one, or even the right one, since the concept is defined and discussed from different points of view, and, as such, they are all complementary in a way, adding different perspectives to a deceptively simple concept.

Systematic study of meaning

In addition to the different types of meaning that may be differentiated, and the various ways in which the concept may be classified, we may also make a distinction between *word/sentence meaning* and *speaker meaning*.

Two main types of *word meaning* are *lexical* and *grammatical*. Bearing in mind that *lexical meaning* is dominant in *content words*, whereas *grammatical meaning* is dominant in *function words*, the explanations for the said

concepts are unsurprising. Namely, according to the *Collins English Dictionary*, the *lexical meaning* of a word is “its meaning in relation to the physical world or to abstract concepts, without reference to any sentence in which the word may occur”, whereas the *grammatical meaning* of a word is “its meaning with reference to its function within a sentence rather than to a world outside the sentence.”

In addition, we may note the distinction between *grammatical / function words*, which include *prepositions, modals and auxiliary verbs, pronouns, articles, conjunctions, some adverbs, and lexical/content words*, which include *nouns, verbs, and adjectives*.

Along these lines, we will reiterate the two main types of *sentence meaning* as: 1) *grammatical/structural meaning*, the meaning conveyed in a sentence by word order and other grammatical signals, and 2) *lexical meaning*, also known as *semantic, denotative, central meaning*, which refers to the sense of a word as it appears in a dictionary.

Speaker meaning is yet another distinction that ought to be mentioned in our discussion of meaning, and especially as compared to *word / sentence meaning*. Namely, *speaker meaning* refers to what a speaker means, that is, *intends to convey*, when they use a piece of language. Conversely, *word / sentence meaning* is what a word/sentence actually means, and is applied to words and sentences in the sense of *to be equivalent to*. There is often a divergence between the meaning of the linguistic expression a speaker uses and the meaning they intend to communicate by using it. What listeners are interested in is what the speaker means, and that leads them to ignore the fact that the speaker’s words may (often) mean something else.

The same combinations of words/sentences may be used by different speakers on different occasions to mean different things (= *speaker meaning*). However, once a person has mastered the stable meanings of words and sentences, as defined by the language system, they can quickly grasp the different conversational and social uses that those can be put to. Both *word/sentence meaning* and *speaker meaning* are important, though it goes without saying that we learn the former first, before we can move on to grasp the latter. The gap between them is such that it is possible for a speaker to convey quite an intelligible intention by using a sentence whose literal meaning is contradictory or even non-sensical.

Speakers can convey meaning quite vividly by using sentences whose meanings are in some way ‘problematic’. Thus, it is necessary to analyze at two levels to account for this – first, to show what is ‘wrong’ with such sentences, i.e. why they cannot be literally true, and second, how speakers, nevertheless, manage to communicate by means of them.

Classification of meaning

As we have seen so far, semantics deals with meaning without reference to the context of the situation. Geoffrey Leech, a prominent linguist, classifies meaning in semantics into seven categories, such as: *conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic*.

1. *Conceptual meaning* has to do with the literal or core sense of a word. This type of meaning is also known as *logical, cognitive, or denotative content*. It refers to the *literal, dictionary meaning*, which indicates the concepts as breaking the word into different constituents. Conceptual meaning aims to provide an appropriate semantic representation of a sentence, and it is the base for all the other types of meaning.

If a speaker wants to relate one particular meaning of any word with another particular meaning, they need to first know the concept of the word. For example, the meaning of the word *woman* can be specified as: *is a human, not a male, is an adult*, i.e. *+human, -male, +adult*; the word *boy* can be specified as: *is a human, is a male, not an adult*, or *+human, +male, -adult*.

2. *Connotative meaning* refers to the concept of *connotation*, which points to a meaning that uses a particular word beyond its conceptual meaning. It is a type of associated meaning in that certain characteristics are associated with a particular word. Thus, when a word has more than one meaning, it is called *connotative meaning*.

These meanings may vary from society to society, culture to culture, or person to person, and they include not only physical characteristics, but also psychological and social properties. This type of meaning is open-ended, comparatively unstable, and variable. For example, some people say *women are soft-hearted, submissive*, while others say *women are frauds, cheaters*, etc. As such, *women* are defined with their psychological perspectives. In addition, we may say that this type of meaning is unstable, since in the past, for example, *women* were described as *frail, cowardly, irrational, inconsistent*, while now they are seen as *strong-willed, hard workers*, etc. In the future, they will probably be treated differently.

Furthermore, the conceptual meaning of the word *rose* is *a flower*, but the connotative meaning is *freshness*; the connotative meanings of the word *night* are *evil, danger*; of *lamb* they are *innocence, naïveté*, and many other such examples.

As regards the two concepts connected with *conceptual meaning* and *connotative meaning*, *denotation* and *connotation*, respectively, we can say that the former - *denotation* - refers to the exact, literal meaning of a word; the dictionary definition, while the latter - *connotation* - has to do with the feelings and emotions associated with a word; it paints a picture and it invokes a feeling.

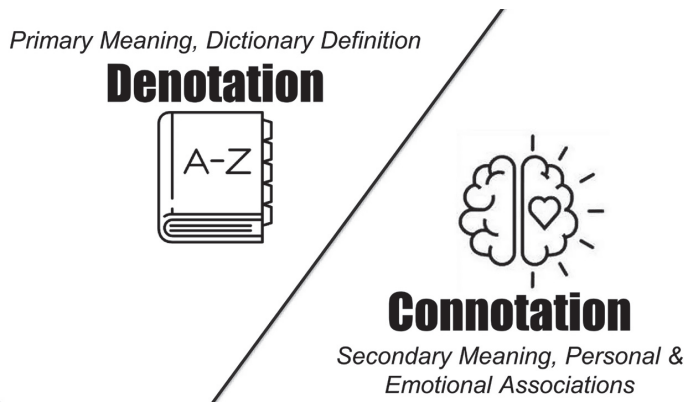


Figure 1. Denotation versus connotation

Essentially, then, the boundary between *conceptual meaning* and *connotative meaning* may be said to be related, though the former is seen as primary, and the latter as secondary.

3. *Social meaning*, also known as *stylistic meaning*, is a type of meaning based on the aspects of society; it is created specifically by the use of language. As such, when people from a particular society define language in their way, we have *social meaning*. Stylistic variation represents social variation, or, in the words of American linguist Charles F. Hockett “two utterances in the same language which convey approximately the same meaning, but which are different in their linguistic structure can be said to differ in style.”

This meaning is based on several distinctions, such as *dialect*, as for example, the dialect of London differs from the dialect of the US in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar; *time*, as, for example, the language of the 16th century differs from the language of the 19th century; *province*, as for example, the language of English literature like *simile*, *metaphor*, *irony*, etc. differs from the language of science and law.

The *conceptual meaning* and the *social meaning* of any piece of language would invariably be different, as, for example, the words *domicile*, *residence*, *abode*, and *home* all refer to the same thing, but each word belongs to a particular situation of use, where *domicile* = very formal register, *residence* = formal register, *abode* = poetic register, and *home* = neutral register.

In addition, we may say *He puked* or *He threw up* or *He vomited*, with the difference being that the first sentence is informal in register, the second is neutral, and the last one is formal.

4. *Affective meaning*, also known as *emotive meaning*, refers to the speaker's feelings, emotions, and attitude toward the ongoing context. We rely on the use of the other types of meaning – *conceptual*, *connotative*, or *social* – to

express our emotions, as this type of meaning is explicitly conveyed through the conceptual or connotative content of the words used.

In addition, the pitch level, intonation, and tone of the speaker changes based on the situation. For example, when we are talking with someone recently bereaved, we may get emotional ourselves, and we will, in all likelihood, talk in a very soft manner. On the other hand, when we become angry, our voices become louder and shrill.

5. *Reflected meaning*, in semantics, is a kind of irony, or a play on meaning; it refers to an event where a particular word or phrase is correlated with multiple senses or meaning. Essentially, it is meaning which arises in cases of multiple conceptual meaning, and it is what is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression. For example, in the following excerpt from William Wordsworth's poem *Daffodils*:

*A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company.*

By using the word *gay*, the poet tries to mean something *joyful, merry*; however, this word is now usually used in reference to *homosexuality*.

6. *Collocative meaning* has at its core the concept of *collocation*, which is a familiar grouping of words, especially words that generally appear together and convey meaning by association. Thus, in this type of meaning, a particular word goes together with another particular word, i.e. it collocates with it, as, for example, with the words *pretty* and *handsome*. These two words share familiar ground in the meaning *good-looking*, but differ in terms of their appropriate use, where *pretty* is appropriate for a *girl, woman*, whereas *handsome* is appropriate for a *boy, man*.

7. *Thematic meaning* refers to a preference between alternative grammatical structures, such as *active-passive, simple to complex, complex-compound*, etc. This means that the meaning of a sentence will remain the same, but the structure will differ. Essentially, thematic meaning deals with how the speaker portrays the message through *word choice, word order, and emphasis*. As such, we may have the following sentences that have different structures, but essentially carry the same meaning:

- He is so weak that he cannot walk. (complex sentence)
- He is too weak to walk. (simple sentence)

Or, we may have a difference in terms of the voice used – active or passive, as in:

- Liz owns the most successful bar in LA. (active voice)
- The most successful bar in LA is owned by Liz. (passive voice)

Obviously, we cannot claim that the sentences are exactly the same, since there are differences between them in terms of register and emphasis.

It is interesting to note that in discussions concerning types of meaning, we may also come across the term *associative meaning*. Leech, however, uses this concept of *associative meaning* as an umbrella term for *connotative*, *social*, *affective*, *reflective* and *collocative meaning*, as all these have more in common with *connotative meaning* than *conceptual meaning*. They all have the same open-ended, variable character, and can be analyzed more in terms of scales or ranges (*more/less*) than in *either/or* contrastive terms. Their meanings contain many invisible and unobservable factors, while conceptual meaning is stable.

In conclusion, we may note that this classification of meaning by Leech sees conceptual meaning as essential, while the other six are peripheral, or non-essential. Leech gives priority to conceptual meaning because it is stylistically neutral and objective, as opposed to the other kinds of associative meanings, which are stylistically marked and subjective. Furthermore, conceptual meaning is seen as an indispensable part of language, where a language basically depends on this type of meaning for communication, and this type of meaning provides the base for all the other types of meaning. The seven types of meaning can be summarized in the following way:

1. *Conceptual meaning* – logical, cognitive or connotative content;
2. *Connotative meaning* – what is communicated by virtue of what language refers to;
3. *Social meaning* – what is communicated by the social circumstances of language;
4. *Affective meaning* – what is communicated by the feelings and attitudes of the speaker through language;
5. *Reflected meaning* – what is communicated through associations with another sense of the same word;
6. *Collocative meaning* – what is communicated through associations with words which co-occur with another word;
7. *Thematic meaning* – what is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis.

Theories of meaning

As we have seen so far, all the concepts we have looked at up to now have had rather flexible definitions in the sense of being open to interpretation, to a variety of classifications, and to further discussion. It is much the

same where the theories of meaning are concerned, as we can find two, three, or even more such distinctions, all depending on how broadly the concept is covered. However, it goes without saying that they all fit into the total complex effect of linguistic communication.

If we start with the most general classification, that would be the classification between *semantic theories of meaning* and *foundational theories of meaning*. However, it would not be wrong to say that there are roughly three theories about meaning: the *denotational theory*, the *conceptualist theory*, and the *pragmatic theory*, at the same time noting that all current theories of meaning are classified into four categories: *philosophical*, *linguistic*, *formal*, and *biological*.

Philosophical, linguistic, formal, and biological theories of meaning

The *philosophical theory of meaning*, also known as the *ideational theory of meaning*, is most commonly associated with the British empiricist John Locke, and it claims that meanings are mental representations provoked by signs. The term *ideas* is used to refer to either mental representations, or to mental activity in general.

The *linguistic theory of meaning* was formed by Noam Chomsky, who described language as having a grammar that is largely independent of language use. This theory argues that language acquisition is governed by universal, underlying grammatical rules that are common to all typically developing humans.

The *formal theory of meaning* supports the notion of an uninterpreted symbolic system whose syntax is precisely defined, and on which a relation of deducibility is defined in purely syntactic terms.

The *biological theory of meaning*, also known as the *nativist theory*, holds that language is innately derived from a series of genetically programmed structures, and a key assumption of this theory is that children are born with certain innate language acquisition structures.

Semantic and foundational theories of meaning

At its simplest, the distinction between the *semantic theories of meaning* and the *foundational theories of meaning* is that the former assigns semantic content to expressions of a language, while the latter offers a systematic

account of the facts through which expressions have the semantic properties that they do.

It is important to remember that before a semantic theorist sets off to explain the meanings of the expressions of a given language, they first need to have a clear idea of what they are supposed to explain the meaning *of*. This might not seem to be a great problem at first glance, if we set out from the notion that the sentences of the relevant language, and their parts, are the bearers of meaning. However, explaining what the semantically significant parts of a sentence are, and how those parts combine to form the sentence, is as complex as semantics itself, and has important consequences for *semantic theory*.

Most discussions about the right semantic treatment of some class of expressions are intertwined with questions about the syntactic form of sentences in which those expressions figure; essentially, discussions of theories which attempt to explain the syntax, or logical form, of natural language sentences. A prominent name in this field is Richard Montague, whose work on syntax and its connection to semantics has been central to the development of semantic theory over the past several decades.

The attempt to explain the main approaches to semantic theory in contemporary philosophy of language faces a stumbling block from the very start. Since no two languages have the same semantics, that is, no two languages consist of the very same words, with the very same meanings, it may seem impossible to see how anything may be said about different views about semantics in general, as opposed to views about the semantics of this or that language. The solution to this problem is a relatively straightforward one. While it is absolutely true that the semantics for English is one thing and the semantics for French something else, the assumption by many is that the various natural languages should all have semantic theories of the same form.

The question which foundational theories of meaning try to answer is a common sort of question in philosophy. But, even if they are common enough, it is not obvious what the limits are on the answers to these sorts of questions, or when we should expect questions of this sort to lead to interesting answers. Accordingly, one sort of approach to foundational theories of meaning is simply to deny that there is any true foundational theory of meaning. We might even be willing to support one of the semantic theories while also holding that facts about the meanings of expressions are primitive in the sense that there is no systematic story to be told about the facts through which expressions have the meanings that they have.

Another reason why the prospects of foundational theories of meaning might be held in question is the fact that while they are obviously distinct from

semantics, they are, nevertheless, bound to semantic theorizing, since without a clear view of the facts about the semantic contents of expressions, we cannot have a clear view of the facts for which we are trying to provide an explanation. We might, then, be skeptical about the prospects of foundational theories of meaning not because of a general primitivist view of semantic facts, but just because one holds that natural language semantics is not yet advanced enough for us to have a clear grip on the semantic facts which foundational theories of meaning aim to analyze.

Many philosophers have, however, attempted to provide foundational theories of meaning, and it would be useful to separate these theories into two groups. According to the first sort of view, linguistic expressions inherit their contents from some other sort of bearer of content. So, for example, one might say that linguistic expressions inherit their contents from the contents of certain mental states with which they are associated. These might be called mentalist theories, which is contrary to what non-mentalist theories offer.

However, all this would be seen as irrelevant if we were to take into consideration that the leading tradition in the philosophy of language denies that there are facts about the meanings of linguistic expressions. Hence, if this sort of skepticism about meaning is correct, then there is neither a true semantic theory nor a true foundational theory of meaning to be found, since the relevant sort of facts are simply not around to be described or analyzed.

Denotational, conceptualist, and pragmatic theories of meaning

The *denotational theory of meaning*, also known as the *referential theory of meaning*, supports the notion that the meaning of each expression is the object or thing it refers to or denotes, characterizing the meaning of an expression in terms of the concepts of *reference* and *truth*. This theory of meaning emphasizes the relationship between language and objects, and the ability of an individual word to specify an object is best seen in proper names, because the given name specifies only one thing.

The *conceptualist theory of meaning* identifies the meaning of an expression with the concepts or ideas associated with the expression, i.e. with a mental representation of the content of that expression, often making use of decomposition of word meaning. It is the backbone of *conceptual semantics*, which is a framework for semantic analysis with the aim to provide a characterization of the conceptual elements by which a person understands words and sentences, and, as such, to provide a semantic representation.

The *pragmatic theory of meaning* is related to *pragmatics*, which is a specialized branch of study focusing on the relationship between natural lan-

guage and the users of that language. The focus of pragmatics is on conversational implicatures, or that which a speaker *implies* and which a listener infers, and, as such, this theory of meaning holds that an ideology or proposition is true if it works satisfactorily, that the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it, and that ideas which are not practical are to be rejected. The theory can be illustrated in the following way: the sentence *I have two sons*, while not necessarily ambiguous, contains an implication that the speaker has no more than two sons. However, it is possible the speaker could have more than two sons and the statement would still be truthful. Thus, we see that pragmatics incorporates the context of an utterance to determine its meaning.

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. Read the excerpt below taken from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* and underline all the instances of the word *mean* (or *means* or *meant*). Line numbers are provided in the margin for convenience.

1 “... that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days
when you might get un-birthday presents.”
 “Certainly,” said Alice.
 “And only one for birthday presents, you know. There’s glory for
5 you!”
 “I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.
 Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t —
till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knockdown argument for you.’”
 “But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knockdown argument,’” Alice
10 objected.
 “When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful
tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.”
 “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean
so many different things.”
15 “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master —
that’s all.”

- (a) What word is the subject of the verb *mean* in line 6?
- (b) What is the subject of the verb *mean* in line 9?
- (c) What is understood as the subject of the verb *mean* in line 12?

(d) Note all the instances where *mean*, *means* or *meant* has a personal subject, for example, *I* or *you*.

(e) Note all the instances where *mean* or *means* or *meant* is understood as having as subject something linguistic, for example, a word, or words.

2. Read the following conversation between Sheila and Ted at a bus stop one morning, and then answer the questions that follow. The lines are numbered for reference.

line 1. *Sheila*: "Nice day."

line 2. *Ted*: "Yes, a bit warmer than yesterday, isn't it?"

line 3. *Sheila*: "That's right - one day fine, the next cooler."

line 4. *Ted*: "I expect it might get cooler again tomorrow."

line 5. *Sheila*: "Maybe; you never know what to expect, do you?"

line 6. *Ted*: "No. Have you been away on holiday?"

line 7. *Sheila*: "Yes, we went to Portugal."

line 8. *Ted*: "Did you? We're going to Italy next month."

line 9. *Sheila*: "Oh. Are you? That'll be nice for the family. Do they speak Italian?"

line 10. *Ted*: "Sandra's quite good at it, and we're hoping Martin will improve."

line 11. *Sheila*: "I expect he will. I do hope you have a good time."

line 12. *Ted*: "Thanks. By the way, has the 42 bus gone by yet? It seems to be late."

line 13. *Sheila*: "No. I've been here since eight o'clock and I haven't seen it."

line 14. *Ted*: "Good. I don't want to be late for work. What time is it now?"

line 15. *Sheila*: "Twenty-five past eight."

(a) Does Sheila tell Ted anything he does not already know in lines 1, 3, 5?

(b) Does Sheila's statement in line 7 give Ted any new information?

(c) When Ted says "Did you?" in line 8, is he really asking Sheila to tell him whether she went to Portugal?

(d) Is there any indication that Sheila needs to know the information that Ted gives her about travelling to Italy?

(e) Does Sheila's "That'll be nice for the family" in line 9 give Ted any information?

(f) Do Sheila's statements in lines 13 and 15 give Ted any information that he needs?

(g) At what point does this conversation switch from an exchange of uninformative statements to an exchange of informative statements?

(h) At what point does the information exchanged begin to be the kind that one of the speakers actually needs for some purpose in going about their everyday business?

3. Read the following exchange between a husband and wife, and then answer the questions that follow.

Husband: "When I go away next week, I'm taking the car."

Wife: "Oh. Are you? I need the car here to take the kids to school."

Husband: "I'm sorry, but I must have it. You'll have to send them on the bus."

Wife: "That'll be nice for the family. Up at the crack of dawn, (ironically) and not home till mid-evening! Sometimes you're very inconsiderate."

Husband: "Nice day."

(a) This conversation includes three utterances which were also used in the polite bus stop conversation between Sheila and Ted. Identify these three utterances.

(b) When the wife in the above exchange says "Oh. Are you?" is she in some way expressing opposition to what her husband has said?

(c) In the bus stop conversation, when Sheila says "Oh. Are you?" (line 9), is she in any way expressing opposition to what Ted has said?

(d) When the wife, above, says "That'll be nice for the family", is she being sincere that her husband's absence with the car will be nice for the family?

(e) When Sheila says to Ted at the bus stop "That'll be nice for the family" (line 9), is she being sincere that going to Italy will be nice for the family?

(f) Is Sheila's remark at the bus stop "Nice day" a deliberate change of subject with the aim of ending a conversation?

(g) What is the function of this remark of Sheila's?

(h) What is the function of the husband's use of the same remark about the weather?

4. Can two people hold an ordinary conversation without knowing the meanings of the words they are using?

5. Would it be reasonable to say that if I use the English words *table* and *chair* in the normal way in my conversation, that I know the meanings of the words *table* and *chair*?

6. If a speaker knows the meaning of a word, can we assume that they are also able to produce a clear and precise definition of its meaning?

7. Conversely, if several speakers can agree on the correct definition of a word, do they know its meaning?

8. Do you happen to know the meaning of the word *fem* in Swedish?

9. Would a sensible way to find out the meaning of *fem* be to ask a speaker of Swedish?

10. The word *fem* in Swedish means *five*, so it is not a very rare or technical word. As such, would it be unusual to approach any normal speaker of Swedish and ask them the meaning of the word?

11. If a native Swedish speaker insists that the word *fem* means *five* (however they express it), while a linguist and renowned semanticist who does not speak Swedish insists that *fem* means *ten* (however they translate it), who would you believe, the Swedish-speaker or the linguist?

12. *Jerry*:

i) "I'll be back later."

ii) "I will return after some time."

(a) Do the two sentences mean approximately the same thing?

(b) Would this be obvious to a normal speaker of English?

(c) If I ask – *What did Jerry mean when he said that he'd be back later* – and you answer me – *He meant he would return after some time* – would you be giving me a helpful answer?

(d) What am I primarily asking with the previous question?

i) What the sentence *I'll be back later* means, or

ii) What Jerry meant in saying it.

13. How would these sentences be understood?

(a) *Traveler*: "This suitcase is killing me."

(b) *Doctor*: "We regularly do the impossible; miracles take a bit longer."

(c) (during a staff meeting): "It's a dog-eat-dog situation."

14. *Do you understand this question?*

15. Explain the following situations/sentences in terms of their *conceptual* and *connotative meaning*:

(a) *Customer*: "I'd like to buy a bagel with cream cheese."

Me: "Sorry, we only take cash."

Manager: "Can I talk to you?"

(b) (at a funeral): *I'm sorry* as opposed to *I apologize*.

(c) *Have a good day* as opposed to *Enjoy the next 24 hours*.

Chapter 4

Aspects of meaning (1): on reference

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- reference and sense
- reference and denotation
- reference and connotation
- reference-related concepts

Key concepts: generic sentence, reference, referent, referring expression, sense

Reference and sense

Among the vital concepts in the study of meaning that is known as semantics are the concepts of *reference* and *sense*. Essentially, we can say that out of the two, the concept of *reference* is the more concrete and tangible one, as it represents the relationship between parts of a language and things outside the language, in the world. In fact, it is by means of *reference* that a speaker indicates which things in the world (including persons) are being talked about.

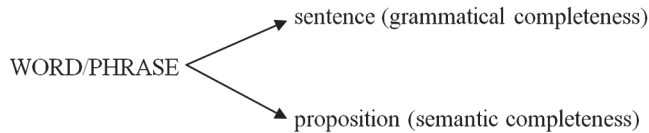
Sense, on the other hand, deals with the relationships inside the language. The sense of an expression is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language; it is an abstraction. In line with this, we can talk about similarity (sameness) of sense, i.e. meaning (synonymy and paraphrase), and dissimilarity (oppositeness) of sense, i.e. meaning (antonymy and contradiction). These concepts will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, which will focus on various semantic roles and relations, and will take a closer look at the various senses of words and expressions in context.

In this context, though, it is important that we return once again to the concept of the *word*, which was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, as in semantics, the term *word* is used in the sense of *word-form*, i.e. anything spelled with the same sequence of letters and pronounced with the same sequence of sounds in a standard dialect is treated as being the same word, as

for example, *tail*, which is treated as *one word*, with a number of *different senses*.

On the other hand, compilers of dictionaries, for example, would regard *tail* as several different words, and in a dictionary, there would be several different entries for the word *tail*, such as *tail*, *tail*₂, etc. The same can be said for the words *bark*, *bank*, *pupil*, and *man*, among others.

Thus, we can visualize the distinction in the following way:



Concerning the relationship between *reference* and *sense*, we may note that the *referent* of an expression is often a thing or a person in the world, whereas the *sense* of an expression is not a thing at all. It would be difficult to say what entity the sense of an expression is, and, in fact, it would be easier to say whether two expressions have the same sense (like being able to say that two people are in the same place without being able to say where they are). Thus, the *sense* of an expression is an abstraction, but one that can be entertained in the mind of a language user. When a person fully understands what is said to them, it is reasonable to say that they grasp the sense of the expression they hear.

Reference and denotation

In terms of the dimensions of meaning, we may distinguish the concepts of *reference*, *denotation*, *connotation*, and *sense relations*, the first three of which are the focus of this Chapter, and the last which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Essentially, *denotation* refers to the straightforward dictionary definition of a word; it is the actual, literal definition or meaning of a word or term. The concept of the *referent* has to do with the actual entity, or entities, that a word signifies, while *reference* is the relationship that exists between a word and its referent(s).

At its simplest, we may set out from the premise that a language consists of a great number of words, and that each of these words has a direct link with something outside of language, which is its meaning. Thus, if we communicate with one another through language, then it must follow that we all have the same 'idea' or 'concept' associated with each word. Ogden and

Richards illustrate this view with the ‘triangle of reference’ model, where they attempt to explain meaning in terms of what is in people’s minds. This is shown in the diagram below, where the *word* = sign or symbol, *concept* (*thought*) = reference, and *thing* (*object*) = referent:

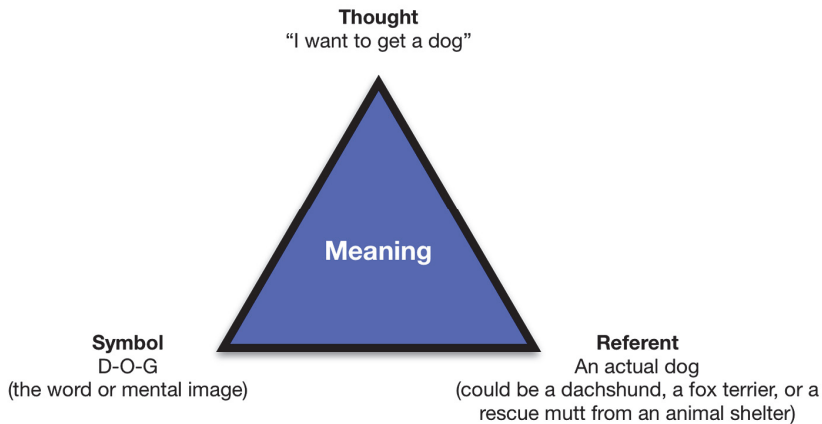


Figure 1. The triangle of reference

Ogden and Richards call the link between *word* and *concept* an ‘association,’ the link between *concept* and *object* ‘reference,’ and the link between object and word ‘meaning.’

When we hear or read a word, we often form a mental picture of what the word represents, and so we are able to equate a ‘concept’ with a mental picture. Certainly, it is easier to form a mental picture for some words than for others, but our knowledge of these words is much more than the ability to relate them to single objects. We can use these words successfully in numerous situations because we have the knowledge that makes this possible.

Just as we make a distinction between the concept of *utterance* and *sentence*, a distinction also needs to be made between the concepts of *reference* and *denotation*. As such, we may say that *reference* is the relation between a language expression and whatever the expression refers to in a particular situation of language use, including what a speaker may imagine, and *denotation* is the potential of a word to enter into such language expressions. *Reference* is the way speakers and listeners use an expression successfully; *denotation* is the knowledge they have that makes their use successful.

However, some problems may arise here, such as that not all words can be associated with mental images, and that some words have a range of meaning greater than any single association. In addition, a bigger problem is that we have no access to other people’s minds. We cannot ever know that we all have the same mental images. If semantics is a science, it cannot operate

scientifically by dealing with things that are not observable and not comparable.

Furthermore, words are not the only semantic elements, as meanings may be expressed by units smaller than words (morphemes), as well as by units larger than words (sentences). For example, the sentences *The dog bit a man* and *The man bit a dog* contain the same words but they do not express the same meaning.

Furthermore, meaning is more than denotation. People talk and write not only to describe things, events and characteristics, but to also express their opinions, favorable and unfavorable. Language facilitates the possibility of expressing a wide range of attitudes, and this aspect of meaning is called *connotation*, which will be looked at in the section that follows below.

Reference and connotation

While *denotation* identifies the central aspect of word meaning, which everybody generally agrees about, *connotation* refers to the personal aspect of meaning, the emotional associations that the word arouses. Thus, part of a word's meaning is its connotation, the affective or emotional associations it elicits, which clearly do need not to be the same for all people who know and use the word. Connotations vary according to the experience of individuals but, because people do have common experiences, some words have shared connotations.

Languages allow their users to express different attitudes. The referring expressions *that violin* and *that fiddle*, for example, can have the same referent, i.e. they can refer to the same object on a particular occasion, but they do not have the same meaning; they differ in connotation. *Violin* is the commonly used term, the neutral one, while *fiddle* is used for humor, to express affection, or lack of esteem. A similar set of relations can be noted with *automobile* and *car*, *building* and *edifice*, *fire* and *conflagration*, among others, the members of which (can) have the same denotation, but differ in terms of the context in which they are used and, as such, differ in the degree of formality, or the style, essentially, in the connotation. The expression of attitudes can be quite subtle, and we choose which word to use over another. We might, for example, say that Paula is *thin*, or *slender*, or *svelte*, or *skinny*, or that Jim is *thrifty*, or *economical*, or *frugal*, or *cheap*, or *tight-fisted*, depending on the connotation we may wish to convey.

Reference-related concepts

In the context of *reference*, the relationship between parts of a language and things outside the language, a *referring expression* is any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or somebody, or a clearly delimited collection of things or people, i.e. it is used with a particular referent in mind; it is an expression (a word or a phrase) used to indicate which thing, or person, is being talked about. The same referring expression can be used to refer to different things (*variable reference*); different referring expressions can be used to refer to the same thing; some referring expressions may have no referent; some expressions may have a constant referent; some expressions can be used as referring expressions, some never can, and some expressions can be used to refer or not, depending on the kind of sentence they occur in. Whether an expression is a referring expression or not, i.e. whether it has referring interpretation or not, is heavily dependent on the linguistic context, as well as on the circumstances of the utterance.

Referent refers to the object, or person, in the world, being referred to by a certain linguistic (referring) expression. In line with this, if we have a sentence that does not refer to a particular object, or person, in the world, we are dealing with a *generic sentence*, which is looked at in greater detail below, in this section.

Variable reference is when one and the same expression has a different referent on different occasions; many expressions in a language can have variable reference, as there tends to be very little consistency of reference in language. In everyday discourse, almost all of the fixing of reference comes from the context in which the expressions are used.

An example where two different expressions have the same referent is the one below:

the morning star	}	(the planet) Venus
the evening star		

There are cases of expressions which in normal, everyday conversation never refer to different things, i.e. in most everyday situations have *constant reference*. Such is the example with *the Sun*, *the Moon*, *the Nile*, *the Alps*, among others. No matter when they are mentioned, or where, or by whom, these expressions always refer to the same thing.

In line with the concept of variable reference, and as opposed to the concept of constant reference, we may also encounter *different expressions* that have *one and the same referent*, as, for example:

the owner of Twitter	}	Elon Musk (referent)
the founder of SpaceX		
the CEO of Tesla		
the founder of PayPal		
the president of the Musk Foundation		
Maye's son		
Tosca and Kimbal's brother		

Zero reference

When talking about and differentiating the concepts of *sense* and *reference*, one point which must be remembered is that *every expression that has meaning has sense, but not every expression has reference*. Thus, we may encounter words and expressions that have sense, i.e. meaning, yet have no reference in real life, i.e. do not have a physical referent that we can distinguish from a sensory point of view - we cannot see it, feel it, smell it, and so on. This can be illustrated with the function words, for example *and*, *or*, *but*, *if*, all of which have meaning, but no referent, or with various abstract nouns, such as *love*, *fear*, *hunger*, *electricity*, among others.

Generic reference

In the context of reference, and specifically of referring expressions, it should be noted that not all sentences contain one, as is the case with the generic sentences, and here we are making the distinction between *generic* versus *non-generic reference*. Generally speaking, a *generic sentence* is a sentence in which a statement is made about a whole unrestricted class of individuals, as opposed to any particular individual.

Generic sentences can be introduced by either *a/an* or *the* (it depends on the linguistic context whether the said NP has referring interpretation or not). In addition, what appears to be the same referring expression may have different kinds of reference, as is the case in the following sentences:

- (1a) *A dog* makes a fine pet.
- (1b) Dogs make fine pets.
- (2a) *A dog* is lying in the middle of the street.
- (2b) Dogs are lying in the middle of the street.

In sentence (1a) *a dog* has generic reference; the sentence is not about a particular dog but about the class of dogs as a whole, dogs in general. The

same meaning can be expressed with sentence (1b), which is also a generalization, and neither sentence is an answer to a question ‘Which dog(s)?’, since the question is not relevant.

A *dog* in sentence (2a) does not have generic reference; it clearly does not refer to the whole class of dogs, and a change to what we have in sentence (2b) produces quite a different message. Sentences (1a) and (1b) are equivalent, whereas (2a) and (2b) are not, as they do not answer the question ‘Which dog(s)?’ but the question is relevant.

We may also note that some semanticists would prefer to say that reference can only be specific. Then, rather than the expression *generic reference*, they would prefer the expression *generic use of referring expressions*. *Generic reference* in English can be expressed in several ways, which are more or less interchangeable, as in:

(3a) *The dog* was *man’s* first domestic animal.

(3b) *Dogs* were *man’s* first domestic animal.

We know that these have generic reference because the change from singular to plural, or vice versa, does not make a difference. Also, we should note that *man* also has generic reference here; it is equivalent to *humans*, a general class.

Definite and indefinite reference

Demonstrative, possessive, and quantitative determiners all help to identify a referent in a fairly precise way. The definite determiner *the* appears in a referring expression when the speaker assumes that the listener can identify the referent, as in the sentence *I’ve got the books*, or when identification is made part of the referring expression, as in *I’ve got the books that you wanted*. Indefinite determiners, *a(n)*, *some* and *zero*, indicate that the referent is part of a larger entity.

When the referring expression is definite, the speaker assumes that the referent can be identified by the addressee; otherwise, the speaker provides the identification through some complement or modifier in the referring expression, with the assumption that the complement or modifier makes the referent clear to the addressee. When the referring expression is indefinite, the listener has to decide which of all possible referents is intended. Often times, in discourse a topic is introduced as an indefinite referring expression (new information) and following mention of the topic is made with one or more definite referring expressions (given information).

A definite noun phrase assumes the existence of its referent, while an indefinite noun phrase assumes the existence of more than its referent, a class of referents to which this one belongs. However, we need to bear in mind that the definite and indefinite articles are not always equivalent to referring or non-referring expression, respectively, as in:

- a) I am looking for a friend / car.
- b) A Mr. Jones called this morning.
- c) The lion is the king of the jungle.
- d) He was killed by the bombs.

Whether a referring expression has a specific referent or not cannot be determined from the expression itself; it is determined by the larger context.

To conclude, semantics is concerned with the meaning of words and sentences; it has no intention of getting involved in discussions as to what exists and what does not. This is why it offers such a broad interpretation in connection to the notion of the referring expression. It is important to note that we can only let our imagination stretch to cases where the things in the world are different – we do not allow our imagination to stretch to cases where the principles of the structure and use of language are different.

Language is used for talking about things in the real world, like *parrots*, *paper-clips*, *balloons*; all of these things exist. However, all the things we can talk about and all the things that exist are not exactly the same. Language can be used to create unreal worlds and it allows us to talk about non-existent things.

It is quite straightforward and easy to understand when we stick to examples of reference to physical objects, such as *John*, *my chair*, *the cat*, *Spain*, etc. However, we need to be aware that there are also expressions that could not possibly be said to refer to physical objects, such as *tomorrow*, *the Canadian national anthem*, *152*, *the distance between the Earth and the Sun*, etc. These expressions can also be called referring expressions because language uses them in many of the same ways that it uses the other, clear cases of referring expressions; language treats them in a way parallel to referring expressions.

So, we can say that *the Canadian national anthem* refers to a particular song; *152* refers to a particular number; *tomorrow* refers to a particular time; *the distance between the Earth and the Sun* refers to a particular distance, etc.

Language can be used to talk about the real world, and it can also be used to talk about an infinite number of abstractions, and even entities in imaginary, unreal worlds. Semantics is not concerned with the factual status of things in the world, but with the meaning in language. The notion of *universe of discourse* (explored in more detail in Chapter 6) accounts for the way in which language allows us to refer to non-existent things. Speakers use referring expressions to refer to entities that may be concrete or abstract, real or fictitious.

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. Carry out the following instruction: *touch your left shoulder*.

(a) Underline the last three words in the above instruction.

(b) Is what you touched a part of the world or a part of the language?

(c) Is your answer to (1a) a part of the language?

(d) If you say to your mother *There's a spider on your left shoulder* does *your left shoulder* here refer to the thing you touched in response to the instruction above?

2. What would be the referent of the phrase *the present President of the US*:

(a) in 1962?

(b) in 2015?

(c) in 2022?

3. Thus, we can say that the phrase *the present President of the US* has

4. What does the reference of an expression vary according to?

(a) the circumstances (time, place, etc.) in which the expression is used;

(b) the topic of the conversation in which the expression is used;

(c) both (a) and (b).

5. Imagine two different everyday situations in which different people are having separate conversations about what they refer to with the phrase *the moon*. Would they be talking about the same object?

6. Does *Italy* normally have constant reference?

7. Does *New York* normally have constant reference?

8. Does *Halley's Comet* normally have constant reference?

9. In a conversation about the UK in 2020, can *the Prime Minister* and *the Leader of the Conservative Party* have the same referent?

10. If we are talking about a situation in which Jason is standing alone in the corner, can *Jason* have the same referent as *the person in the corner*?

11. Do the pairs of words in the curly brackets in the sentences below have the same meaning or a different meaning?

(a) I {almost / nearly} fell over.

(b) It is {likely / probable} Ray will be here tomorrow.

(c) Your gatepost doesn't seem to be quite {vertical / upright}.

(d) He painted the fireplace {aquamarine / fuchsia}.

(e) I'll see you on {Wednesday / Thursday}.

12. Do the following pairs of sentences mean the same thing?

(a) Andy took off his jacket.

(b) Andy took his jacket off.

(c) Harold wrote the answer down.

(d) Harold wrote down the answer.

(e) Bachelors prefer redheads.

(f) Girls with red hair are preferred by unmarried men.

13. Does the word *bank* have the same meaning in the following sentence pairs?

(a) I have an account at the *Bank* of Scotland.

(b) We steered the raft to the other *bank* of the river.

(c) The DC-10 *banked* sharply to avoid a crash.

(d) The rain *banked* the soil up behind the gate.

14. Write down two sentences to clearly distinguish the two different senses of the following sentences:

(a) The chicken is ready to eat.

(b) He greeted the girl with a smile.

(c) I saw her duck.

15. Do the following words refer to things in the world?

(a) almost

(b) and

(c) probable

(d) if

16. When we look up the meaning of a word in a dictionary, what do we find there, its referent, or an expression with the same sense?

17. Is a dictionary full of words or full of things, like a box or a sack?

18. How would a foreigner best learn the meanings of their very first words of English - (a) by having their typical referents pointed out to them, or (b) by looking them up in an English dictionary?

19. Do the following expressions below express a proposition?

(a) Johnny bought a new car.

(b) A new car. (not understood as an elliptical sentence fragment)

(c) Johnny. (not understood as an elliptical sentence fragment)

(d) This is the house that Jack built.

20. Do the sentences *C'est lundi aujourd'hui* and *It's Monday today* express the same proposition?

21. Do the two previous sentences above, in (20), have the same sense?

22. In the sentences above, in (20), do the expressions *aujourd'hui* and *today* have the same sense?

23. In the sentences above, in (20), do the expressions *C'est lundi* and *It's Monday* have the same sense?

24. Do *autumn* in British English and *fall* in American English have the same sense; do *mate* (BrE) and *pal* (AmE) have the same sense?

25. Can expressions with entirely different social connotations have the same sense? For example, do the following sentences have the same sense?

(a) People walking in close spatio-temporal proximity.

(b) People walking near each other.

26. How do the following words in each pair differ in connotation?

(a) bossy, authoritative (d) inquisitive, nosey

(b) cautious, timid (e) bargain, haggle

(c) persistent, stubborn (f) unpredictable, spontaneous

27. It might seem that any name would be appropriate as a label for a commercial product as long as it is easy to remember. However, companies with products to sell spend a lot of time, talent and money to select brand names which will project the preferred 'image' for cars, cosmetics, detergents, etc., but names (and words) are often chosen for their connotation rather than for what they denote.

(a) Why would *Caterpillar* be a good name for a tractor but not for a sports car?

(b) How would you rank the following as possible names for a sports car? Why?

Butterfly / Cheetah / Dolphin / Owl / Rattler / XL4

(c) Can you think of other (suitable/unsuitable) names for a given product?

(d) Think of a possible name for a men's cologne (which, of course, is never called perfume), and an example of a name which is very unlikely. Explain your choice.

(e) In line with the question above, (27d), we may say that women *perspire*, while men *sweat*. How would you explain the difference between the two words?

28. Imagine that a friend of yours says to you: *Brian is putting on weight these days*, and imagine that a friend of mine happens to utter the same sentence to me one day.

(a) Would this be a case of one utterance or two?

(b) Would the Brian referred to be the same Brian or two different Brians?

29. What do the words *mean*, *meaning*, etc. express in the following examples, *reference* or *sense*?

(a) When he said 'the fruit cake', he meant that rock-hard object on the table.

(b) When Alan talks about 'his former friend', he means me.

(c) Miss Adams, what does *unique* mean?

(d) *Purchase* has the same meaning as *buy*.

(e) Look up the meaning of *obsequious* in your dictionary.

(f) If you look out of the window now, you'll see who I mean.

30. Could the following possibly be used as referring expressions?

(a) John

(b) a man

(c) my uncle

(d) my parents

(e) and

(f) send

(g) under

(h) the girl sitting on the wall by the bus stop

31. When a speaker says *A man was in here looking for you last night*, does *a man* refer to any particular man?

32. In that case, in the above example, (31), is *a man* a referring expression?

33. When a speaker says *The first sign of the tornado is a cloud on the horizon no bigger than a man's hand*, does *a man* refer to any particular man?

34. Is *a man* in the example above, (33), a referring expression?

35. Is *forty horses*, used in *Forty horses have been injured in the race*, a referring expression?

36. Is *forty horses*, used in *This engine has the power of forty horses*, a referring expression?

37. Under normal circumstances, would the following be referring expressions?

(a) *a Canadian*, used in *Vicky married a Canadian*.

(b) *a Canadian*, used in *Vicky wants to marry a Canadian*.

(c) *a car*, used in *Mark is looking for a car*.

(d) *a man with glasses*, used in *Phil believes that a man with glasses killed Tim*.

(e) *a man with glasses*, used in *A man with glasses killed Tim*.

(f) *a swan*, used in *Every evening at sunset a swan flew over the house*.

38. Under normal circumstances, would the following be referring expressions?

(a) *Steve*, in *Steve is my best friend*.

(b) *He*, in *He's a very polite man*, said by a husband to his wife in a conversation about their bank manager.

(c) *It*, in *It's sinking!* used in a conversation about a battleship which has just been attacked.

(d) *The man who shot Ronald Reagan*, in *The man who shot Ronald Reagan was found not guilty by reason of insanity*.

39. Are the following expressions referring expressions?

(a) *he*, in *If anyone ever marries Fiona, he's in for a bad time*, meaning that whoever marries Fiona is in for a bad time.

(b) *it*, in *Everyone who owns a dog spends a lot of time looking after it*.

(c) *the person who did this*, in *The person who did this must be crazy*, spoken by someone on discovering a horrific crime, where the speaker has no idea who committed the crime.

(d) *Donald's murderer*, in *Donald's murderer must be crazy*, uttered in circumstances where the speaker has no idea who committed the murder.

40. In *The whale is the largest mammal* (interpreted in the most usual way), does *the whale* refer to any particular whale?

41. In that case, is *The whale* in the sentence above, (40), a referring expression?

42. Are there any referring expressions in the sentence *The whale is the largest mammal*?

43. Are the following generic sentences?

- (a) Gentlemen prefer blondes.
- (b) Harry is an idiot.
- (c) The male of the species guards the eggs.
- (d) A wasp makes its nest in a hole in a tree.
- (e) A bee just stung me on the nose.

44. Which of the underlined expressions have specific reference and which do not?

- (a) We have a dog.
- (b) We'd like to have a dog.
- (c) I'm sure there are answers to all your questions.
- (d) I trust we can find answers to all your questions.

Chapter 5

Aspects of meaning (2): on sense

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- similarity of sense
- dissimilarity of sense
- ambiguity
- semantic relations

Key concepts: ambiguity, antonymy, contradiction, homonymy, hypernymy, hyponymy, paraphrase, polysemy, synonymy

Similarity of sense

As noted in Chapter 4 previously, the concept of *sense* is an abstraction and it deals with the relationships inside the language. At its simplest, *sense* in semantic analysis refers to *the meaning of a lexical unit*, with the term *lexical unit* referring not only to words but also to sub-words or sub-units such as affixes and even compound words and phrases. Though it is difficult to say what entity the sense of an expression is, sense can, nevertheless, be entertained in the mind of a language user, as when a person fully understands what is said to them, it is reasonable to say that they grasp the sense of the expression they hear. In addition, we can also reiterate the statement that though reference is the more concrete of the two, *every expression that has meaning has sense, but not every expression has reference*. The *reference* of a sentence is its *truth value*, whereas its *sense* is *the thought that it expresses*.

In terms of the dimensions of meaning, previously we noted that we distinguish the concepts of *reference*, *denotation*, *connotation*, and *sense relations*. The first three, namely, reference, denotation, and connotation, were discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, whereas the last dimension, that of *sense relations*, is the focus of this Chapter. It goes without saying that any expression varies with context, what other expressions it occurs with, and what expressions it contrasts with. Thus, it would be helpful to remember that the term *sense relations* inherently underlies how the meanings of one expression, such as a word, a phrase, or a sentence, relate to the meanings of other expressions.

In line with the fact that the sense of an expression is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language, we may talk about *similarity (sameness) of meaning*, synonymy and paraphrase, and *dissimilarity (oppositeness) of meaning*, antonymy and contradiction. In this context, we may distinguish two major groups of sense relations (also known as *lexical relations*), where the first group is connected to the concept of *sameness and inclusion*, such as *synonymy* and *hyponymy*, respectively, and the second one is related to *oppositeness and exclusion*, such as *complementarity* and *antonymy*, both of which are examples of *incompatibility*.

At its simplest, *similarity of sense* can occur at two levels: 1) at a predicate (word) level > *synonymy*, and 2) at a proposition (sentence) level > *paraphrase*. Thus, the notions of *synonymy/paraphrase* and *similarity of sense* are interdependent. Two, or more, predicates that have the same, i.e. a similar meaning are known as *synonyms*, while a sentence that expresses the same, i.e. a similar proposition as another sentence is a *paraphrase*.

Synonymy

In this context, it would be useful to note that when we talk about two, or more, predicates (words) having the same meaning, we, in fact, mean that they are similar in meaning, as *complete (perfect, absolute) synonymy* does not often occur in language. This is because the said notion refers to words having identical meaning components; words are considered *complete (perfect, absolute) synonyms* only if they share all traits and characteristics with one another and, as such, are mutually interchangeable in *all* contexts. This implies that these synonyms can all be used in the same context without changing the truth-conditions of a sentence. However, there are no perfect, i.e. absolute synonyms because the distribution is not the same for all of those lexemes.

In addition, we can further expand and link this explanation to the notion and the theory of the *economy of language*, which states that fewer words lead to greater clarity. In other words, there is no need to have two, or more, words that express the exact same thing when one would be enough to do the job. Thus, *synonyms*, essentially, are words that are *similar in meaning*, but that do differ in some aspect, whether in terms of *register* (formal, informal, colloquial, slang, etc.), *dialect* (American English, British English, Australian English, Canadian English, etc.), *connotation* (positive or negative), and so on.

Absolute synonymy is seen as the complete identity of all meanings of two or more lexemes in all contexts, and it is taken as unnatural for a language

to have absolute synonyms, i.e. lexemes with exactly the same meaning. As such, it is generally accepted that absolute synonymy is impossible or non-existent. Or, as Lyons notes, “Complete synonymy is rare, and absolute synonymy hardly exists.” Fromkin et al. share the same opinion, stating that “no two words ever have exactly the same meaning.”

Synonymy can be explained as a relation between individual senses of words, so that a single word typically has different sets of synonyms for each of its senses. Though it would be unlikely to find absolute synonyms in a language, near-synonyms are easy to find, such as *danger* and *risk*, *rich* and *wealthy*, *smart* and *intelligent*, *curious* and *nosy*, *pavement* and *sidewalk*, among others. Synonymy represents a *paradigmatic relation*, which is achieved between elements of the same category, i.e. elements that can be substituted for each other.

Paraphrase

The most important types of semantic relations among sentences are *paraphrase*, *entailment*, and *contradiction*. As we are now dealing with similarity of meaning, we shall focus on the notion of *paraphrase* in this section, and discuss the notion of *contradiction* in the upcoming section, when dealing with dissimilarity of sense. *Entailment* will not be discussed in great detail at this point, apart from the brief explanation that it can also be called strict implication, logical consequence, and semantic consequence, and it has to do with the principle that under certain conditions the truth of one statement ensures the truth of a second statement.

Sentences that have the same (similar) meaning are called *paraphrases* of each other, i.e. these are sentences or phrases that convey the same (similar) meaning using different wording. Thus, at the sentence level, paraphrases are the equivalent of synonyms at the lexical level. Just like with synonyms, no matter how close the paraphrase may get to conveying the meaning of the original sentence, it only provides a similar meaning, not an identical one, as it is, essentially, an alternative way of expressing the content of a sentence. The differences that exist between the paraphrases may differ in nature, as was the case with synonyms - differences in register, style, dialect, connotation, etc.

Thus, we may have *Josh broke the door* versus *The door was broken by Josh*, where the difference is syntactic, that is, an active voice sentence as opposed to a passive voice sentence, respectively, and all the various nuances of meaning that the use of these constructions carry. Another example would be *Willy Wonka was famous for his delicious candy. Children and adults loved to*

eat it, as opposed to *Willy Wonka was known throughout the world because people of all ages loved eating the tasty sweets he made*. Here we see that there are changes both at a syntactic and lexical level, which is perfectly acceptable. Or, in the example with the following pair of sentences, as in *It is a pleasure to meet you* and *It's nice to meet you*, where they are clearly paraphrases of each other, though they differ in the register, the former being formal, and the latter - informal.

Dissimilarity of sense

Just like the notion *similarity of sense* functions both at a predicate level (synonymy) and at a sentence level (paraphrase), *dissimilarity of sense*, or *oppositeness*, can also be found at a predicate and sentence level, known as *antonymy* and *contradiction*, respectively. In addition, like synonymy, antonymy, too, represents a paradigmatic relation, where substitution of lexical items is involved.

Antonymy

The notion of antonymy is not as straightforward as that of synonymy in that it is classified into several sub-groups, depending on how the words are antonyms of each other. For example, we may say that *alive* is an antonym of *dead*, and we may automatically offer that *man* is an antonym of *woman*, that *hate* is an antonym of *love*, or that *mother* is an antonym of *father*, but we cannot lump them all together into one group simply as antonyms, as there are obvious differences that exist in the noted examples. In addition, with the exception of the first example, the other pairs pose a dilemma as to why those exact words have been offered as antonyms and not, for example, *girl* instead of *woman*, *dislike* instead of *hate*, and *son* instead of *mother*, respectively. In addition, we may think about what we might offer as the antonym of *black*, or of *winter*, or of *rose*, among other such examples. It is obvious, then, that words may be opposite in different ways, and some words may not even have real opposites, i.e. antonyms.

In this context, antonyms, and antonymy, also known as *semantic incompatibility*, can be classified (generally) into five main groups, such as *binary (complementary) antonymy*, *non-binary antonymy (multiple incompatibility)*, *gradable (graded) antonymy*, *relational antonymy (converseness)*, and *auto-antonymy*.

Binary (complementary) antonymy has to do with predicates (words) that come in pairs and between them they exhaust all the relevant possibilities; this type of antonymy represents an *either/or* relationship in that if one predicate is applicable, then the other cannot be, and vice versa. The antonyms that belong to this group are also known as *direct* or *contradictory antonyms*, i.e. related words that are absolute opposites, such as the examples *dead / alive, true / false, pass / fail, and on / off*.

Non-binary antonymy (multiple incompatibility) is where the two predicates are mutually incompatible, and, in this case, there are large numbers of open-ended systems. Thus, here we have expressions in sets of more than two members which are incompatible in talking about the same thing. All the terms in the given set are incompatible and together all the members of the set cover the entire semantic area. The words that belong to this category can also be known as *taxonomic sisters*, such as *the seasons, the days of the week, the months of the year, and the suits of cards*, among others.

Gradable (graded) antonymy also involves two predicates, but this time they are gradable because they appear at opposite ends of a continuous scale of values. A good test for gradability is to check whether the predicate can combine with *very, very much, how, how much*. Examples of gradable antonyms are *happy / sad, cold / hot, rich / poor, and smart / stupid*.

Relational antonymy (converseness) is when one predicate describes a relationship between two things/people and some other predicate describes the same relationship when the two things/people are mentioned in the opposite order; thus, these two predicates are said to be *converses* of each other. This type of antonymy represents an *all or nothing* relationship, as relational antonyms (converses) would not exist without the other. Examples of relational antonyms are *front/back, parent/child, above/below, and buy/sell*.

Auto-antonymy is when a word has two meanings, including one with an opposite meaning, and the words that belong to this group may also be known as *contronyms* and *Janus words*, after the Roman god Janus, who is usually depicted with two faces. Examples of auto-antonyms include *cleave*, meaning 'to cut apart' or 'to bind together', *clip*, meaning 'to attach' or 'to cut off', *sanction*, meaning 'to approve' or 'to penalize', and *peruse*, meaning 'to consider with attention and in detail' or 'to look over or through in a casual or cursory manner'.

The division is such that the five groups above tend to be mentioned as a general classification in the context of dissimilarity of sense at a predicate level, though they are not, by any means, fixed and exclusive.

Contradiction

Another term in connection with dissimilarity of sense is that of *contradictoriness*, and it represents dissimilarity of sense at a sentence, i.e. proposition level. Essentially, a proposition is considered to be contradictory of another proposition if it is impossible for them both to be true at the same time and under the same circumstances. In other words, a sentence expressing one proposition is a contradiction of another sentence expressing another proposition if it is impossible for both propositions to be true at the same time and under the same circumstances.

The notion of *entailment* was mentioned earlier in this Chapter, in the *Paraphrase* section, and it makes a brief reappearance in this section as well, in connection with the notion of contradiction, as it is related to the sentence, i.e. proposition. At its simplest, *entailment* can be defined as a deduction or implication; something that follows logically from or is implied by something else. It represents the relationship between two statements when for one to be true, the other must also be true, too. Basically, it is the principle that under certain conditions the truth of one statement ensures the truth of a second statement. This may be illustrated in the following manner: if sentence A entails sentence B, then sentence A cannot be true without sentence B being true as well. Or, using a practical example, the sentence *Polly is a pretty parrot* entails the sentence *Polly is a parrot* since one cannot be *a pretty parrot* without being *a parrot*. On the other hand, this sentence does not entail *Polly loves crackers* since it is possible (though not very likely) for a parrot to not love crackers.

The difference between the two notions, *contradiction* and *entailment*, is that the former represents a symmetrical relation between two sentences that cannot be true at the same time, while the latter represents a directional relation between two sentences in which the information of the premise entails the information of the hypothesis. Along those lines, we may also note the difference between the notions of *paraphrase* and *entailment*, in that while paraphrases have the same truth conditions and always entail each other (symmetrical entailment), entailment is when one sentence entails that the other sentence is true, but the reverse does not hold.

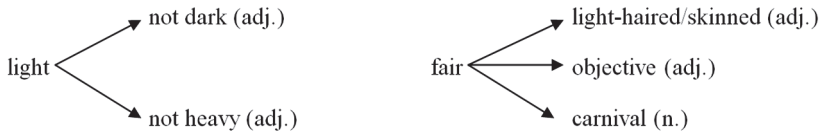
Thus, we may conclude that *contradiction* represents a type of semantic relation between sentences, occurring when sentences cannot be true at the same time, as in, for example, in the sentence pair *Charles became king when he was 73 years old* and *Charles did not become king when he was 73 years old* (bearing in mind the circumstances and the referent in both sentences are the same). Another sentence pair illustrating the notion of contradiction is *The young man denied that he had committed the crime* and *The young man*

admitted that he had committed the crime (again, bearing in mind the circumstances and the referents in both sentences are the same). Thus, as seen from the previous examples, if two sentences are contradictory, then one must be true and the other must be false.

Ambiguity

The notion of *ambiguity* can be explained as the quality of being open to more than one interpretation, and it may be caused by a number of factors, such as phonetics, grammar, semantics, syntax, as well as punctuation and intonation. Thus, ambiguity may be classified into different types, such as *phonetic*, *lexical*, *syntactic*, *semantic*, *pragmatic*, and *anaphoric ambiguity*, with the main distinction being made between *ambiguous words* and *ambiguous sentences*, i.e. *lexical* and *syntactic ambiguity*, respectively.

Lexical ambiguity occurs when a word is considered to be ambiguous, and that is when it has two, or more, synonyms which are not themselves synonyms of each other. It is important to remember that a word may have many different senses, and that each distinct sense of a word is a *predicate*. Some examples of lexical ambiguity are the following:



Syntactic ambiguity, also known as *grammatical* or *structural ambiguity*, occurs when a sentence is considered to be ambiguous, and that is when it has two, or more, paraphrases which are not themselves paraphrases of each other. Some examples of syntactic ambiguity are the following: *Marcy got the room ready for her daughter wearing a pink tutu* (who was wearing the tutu - Marcy or her daughter?); *I saw a man on a hill with a telescope* (was a telescope used to see the man on the hill or did the man on the hill have a telescope with him?); *I saw her duck* (did she show me her (pet) duck or did she lower her head (duck) so as to avoid getting hit by a flying object?), and *The cat chased the mouse until it stumbled and fell* (who fell - the cat or the mouse?).

The picture below further illustrates syntactic ambiguity and how people might be, unintentionally or otherwise, misunderstood, as seen in this ad where Penny Mordaunt, a British politician, was campaigning to become leader of the Conservative Party in the UK:



Picture 1. Syntactic ambiguity

Semantic relations

Linguist Peter H. Matthews defines the notion of *semantic relation*, that is, *sense relation* as “any relation between lexical units within the semantic system of a language.” In line with ambiguity, we may note that in the case of *ambiguous words* there is a further distinction made between the notions of *homonymy* and *polysemy*.

Homonymy

Homonymy occurs when an ambiguous word has different senses that are far apart from each other and not obviously related, and there is no obvious conceptual connection between the two meanings of the word. Broadly speaking, *homonyms* can be defined as any two words that share the same spelling or the same pronunciation, such as *bark* (1. the sound a dog makes; 2. the outer layer of a tree); *bank* (1. the land sloping down to a river or lake; 2. a financial institution where people deposit, withdraw, and/or borrow money; 3. a storage place for a reserve supply); *pupil* (1. a child or young person in school who is taught by someone; 2. the circular black area in the center of the eye through which light enters); *they're* (contracted form of ‘they are’) and *their* (possessive pronoun); *road* (street) and *rode* (past tense of ‘ride’); and *creak* (to make a harsh, high-pitched sound when moved) and *creek* (a stream), among others.

Some grammarians argue that *true homonyms* are only those words which have both the same spelling and the same pronunciation, which would

eliminate some of the examples mentioned previously, such as *they're* and *their*, *road* and *rode*, and *creak* and *creek*. Based on the more general definition, though, homonyms can be generally classified into several types, the main two of which individually incorporate the characteristics of 'true homonyms', namely, *homophones* and *homographs*, as well as *heteronyms*, *capitonyms*, and *polysemes*.

Homophones are homonyms that sound the same but are often spelled differently, such as *ate* (past tense of 'eat') and *eight* (number); *buy* (to purchase), *by* (preposition), and *bye* (exclamation); *chili* (a small, spicy pepper) and *chilly* (cold).

Homographs are homonyms that have the same spelling but do not necessarily sound the same, such as *down* (a lower place; soft fluff on a bird); *bat* (the animal; an implement used for hitting); *fine* (of good quality; a penalty; to punish).

Heteronyms can be defined in the context of both homophones and homographs in that a *heteronym* is a word that has a different pronunciation and meaning from another word but the same spelling. Essentially, these are homographs that are not homophones. Thus, *lead*, used as a noun, a material, and *lead*, used as a verb, are heteronyms (same spelling, different pronunciation); *entrance*, used as a noun, and *entrance*, used as a verb, to delight; *minute*, used as an adjective, very small, and *minute*, used as a noun, a unit of time, among others.

The above notions may be illustrated as in the diagram below:

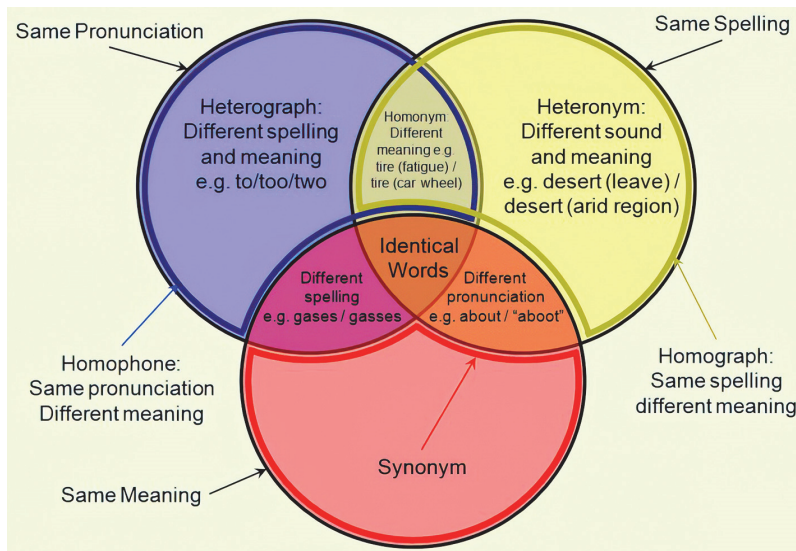


Figure 1. Words differing in pronunciation, spelling and/or meaning

Capitonyms are words that change their meaning, and sometimes their pronunciation, when capitalized, with the capitalization usually appearing due to one form being a proper noun. Capitonyms can include nouns, verbs, or adjectives, such as *Turkey* (the country) and *turkey* (the bird), *China* (the country) and *china* (porcelain), *March* (the month) and *march* (to walk). Capitonym pairs usually feature one word as a proper noun, where the first letter is capitalized, and the other as a common noun, where the first letter is lower case. In addition, sometimes a capitonym does not change just in meaning, but also in pronunciation, as, for example, *Polish* (used as an adjective, from Poland) and *polish* (used as a verb, to make a surface smooth by rubbing it), and *Mobile* (a proper noun, a city in Alabama, USA, which is pronounced differently, with emphasis on the second syllable) and *mobile* (a common noun, a phone; or an adjective, capable of moving or being easily moved, with emphasis on the first syllable).

Polysemy

Polysemy is when one word has several very closely related senses, which are connected by some concept, i.e. a word that has different meanings which derive from a common origin, such as *mouth* (1. of a river, and 2. of an animal / human = an opening), *fork* (1. a tool with two or more prongs used for picking up, as in eating, and 2. a place where a road or river divides into two parts = the shape), and *tail* (1. the back part of an animal, as in the flexible extension of the backbone, the feathers at the back of a bird, etc., and 2. a thing resembling an animal's tail in its shape or position = the position and the shape).

It is important to note that the main distinction that can be made among the different types of homonyms can be summed up as a distinction between *unrelated meanings* (*homonymy*) versus *related meanings* (*polysemy*).

Hyponymy and hypernymy

Hyponymy, like synonymy and antonymy, represents a paradigmatic relation where lexical items can be substituted with other lexical items. Like synonymy and antonymy, it is also classified as a sense relation, in the context of the inclusion of meaning, and it is inevitably paired up with *hyponymy*.

Hyponymy represents the relationship between a generic term, known as a *hyponym*, and a specific instance of it, known as a *hyponym*. A *hyponym*, then, is a word or phrase whose semantic field is more specific than

its *hypernym*; it is the most generic term that comes to mind upon hearing a particular category of objects. The semantic field of a *hypernym*, also known as a *superordinate*, is broader than that of a *hyponym*.

The *hypernym-hyponym* relationship may be illustrated in the following way:

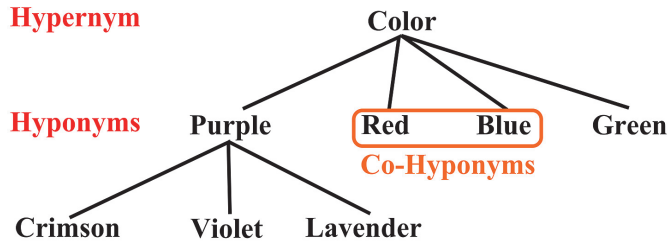


Figure 2. The hypernym-hyponym relationship of *color*

In conclusion, this Chapter takes a closer look at the other dimension of meaning, that is, it focused on the concept of *sense*, and specifically, on the various semantic (lexical) roles and relations.

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. In the following sentences, do the pairs of words in italics have the same sense?

- The thief tried to *conceal*/*hide* the evidence.
- I'm going to *purchase*/*buy* a new coat.
- These bananas are *large*/*ripe*.
- This is a very *loose*/*short* definition.
- You have my *profound*/*deep* sympathy.
- It is a very *wide*/*broad* street.

2. In the following sentences, do the pairs of words in italics have the same or a different sense? Bear in mind that they do differ in their dialectal, stylistic, or social associations.

- He comes to see us every *fall*/*autumn*.
- Nothing is more valuable to us than our *freedom*/*liberty*.
- The box was found in the *boot*/*trunk* of the car.
- We've just bought a new *house*/*apartment*.
- John took a bullet in the *head*/*guts*.
- A *guy*/*chap* I know has pickled onions for breakfast.

3. For each pair of words provide:

- (i) a sentence in which the two words can be used interchangeably without changing the sense of the sentence; and
- (ii) a sentence using one of the words where a different sense is involved.

Use the following example to help you:

deep/profound

(i) You have my *deep/profound* sympathy.

(ii) This river is very *deep*. (*This river is very profound.)

- (a) ripe/mature (b) broad/wide
- (c) earth/soil (d) side/edge

4. Are the following sentences paraphrases of each other, assuming that the referents of the names and other referring expressions remain the same?

- (1a) John is the parent of James.
- (1b) James is the child of John.
- (2a) John is the parent of James.
- (2b) James is the parent of John.
- (3a) My father owns this car.
- (3b) This car belongs to my father.
- (4a) The fly was on the wall.
- (4b) The wall was under the fly.
- (5a) Some countries have no coastline.
- (5b) Not all countries have a coastline.

5. Are the following pairs of predicates *binary antonyms*?

- (a) chalk - cheese (b) dead - alive
- (c) same - different (d) married - unmarried
- (e) copper - tin (f) love - hate

6. Are the following pairs of expressions *converses*?

- (a) below - above (b) grandparent - grandchild
- (c) borrow - lend (d) conceal - reveal
- (e) greater than - less than (f) own - belong to
- (g) buy - sell (h) give - take
- (i) come - go

7. If John bought a car from Fred, is it the case that Fred sold a car to John?

8. (a) What is the system of oppositions to which the words *spring* and *summer* belong?

(b) How many members does this system have?

(c) What is the system called to which *solid* and *gas* belong?

(d) How many members does this system have?

(e) Can you think of an example of a seven-member system?

(f) Four-member systems are quite common. How many can you think of?

9. Are the following pairs *gradable antonyms*?

(a) tall - short

(b) top - bottom

(c) love - hate

(d) clever - stupid

10. Are the following words *gradable*? (Use the test to help you decide.)

(a) near

(b) electrical

(c) cheap

(d) triangular

(e) beautiful

11. Classify the following pairs as *binary antonyms*, *multiple incompatibles*, *converses*, or *gradable antonyms*.

(a) cat - dog

(b) easy - difficult

(c) good - bad

(d) urban - rural

(e) pass - fail

(f) better than - worse than

(g) deciduous - evergreen

12. Decide whether the following pairs are *contradictions*, assuming that the referents of the names and other referring expressions remain the same:

(1a) John murdered Bill.

(1b) Bill was murdered by John.

(2a) John murdered Bill.

(2b) John did not kill Bill.

(3a) Bill died.

(3b) James can't swim.

(4a) Brenda is Anna's parent.

(4b) Brenda is Anna's child.

(5a) Apartment 36 is below this one.

(5b) Apartment 36 is next to this one.

(6a) This vase is stained glass.

(6b) This vase is crystal.

13. The following are all polysemous words. For each one, two closely related senses have been provided. Explain in your own words how these senses are related, i.e. what they have in common.

Use the following example to help you:

chimney (pipe or funnel-like structure on a building for smoke to escape through, as opposed to a narrow vertical space between rocks up which a climber can wriggle by pressing against the sides) > *Both senses contain the concept of a narrow vertical shaft in some solid material.*

- (a) guard (a person who guards as opposed to a solid protective shield)
- (b) ceiling (the top inner surface of a room as opposed to an upper limit)
- (c) Earth/earth (our planet as opposed to soil)
- (d) drive (to drive a nail as opposed to drive a car)

14. Decide whether the following words are examples of *homonymy* or *polysemy*.

- (a) bark (that of a dog as opposed to that of a tree)
- (b) fork (in a road as opposed to an instrument for eating)
- (c) tail (that of a coat as opposed to that of an animal)
- (d) steer (to guide as opposed to a young bull)
- (e) lip (that of a jug as opposed to that of a person)
- (f) punch (a blow with a fist as opposed to a kind of fruity alcoholic drink)

15. For each of the following words provide two full sentences which include them and which bring out the distinct senses of the word.

- (a) rock
- (b) hard
- (c) file

16. Disambiguate the following ambiguous words by noting two or more parts of speech in which they can be used, and then use them in a sentence to illustrate their meaning.

- (a) sack
- (b) fast
- (c) flat

17. Rephrase the following ambiguous sentences to disambiguate them:

- (a) Look at the dog with one eye.
- (b) I have never tasted a cake quite like that one before!
- (c) Did you see her dress?
- (d) Who did Alex want to leave?
- (e) We fly over a million people.
- (f) The child hid the toy he found under the bed.
- (g) Ted and Lisa are married.
- (h) Let's stop controlling people.

- (i) My mother never made chocolate cake, which we all hated.
- (j) Let's eat, Grandma. / Let's eat Grandma.
- (k) Melanie invited Susan for a visit, and she gave her a good lunch.

18. Identify the *superordinate term* in each set:

- (a) house, bungalow, building, cottage, hut
- (b) plate, saucer, cup, soup bowl, serving bowl
- (c) stream, river, creek, brook, tributary
- (d) glance, peep, stare, view, watch
- (e) hurricane, tornado, gale, storm, typhoon
- (f) lily, chrysanthemum, rose, daisy, carnation
- (g) trumpet, harp, flute, clarinet, tuba
- (h) pen, stapler, notebook, pencil, eraser
- (i) doll, yo-yo, rubber duck, teddy bear, puppet
- (j) robin, swallow, parrot, dove, eagle
- (k) sweater, cardigan, sari, dress, pants

Chapter 6

Semantic descriptions

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- semantic analysis
- lexical categories of predicators
- semantic barriers
- universe of discourse

Key concepts: argument, degree, predicate, predicator, semantic barrier, universe of discourse

Semantic analysis

In linguistics we can carry out different types of analyses, on a variety of linguistic elements. Namely, analyzing the lexical and grammatical features of various linguistic items is known as *morphological analysis*. Thus, we may say that the word *dog* contains only one morpheme, which has the meaning of a four-legged creature that has a tail and barks. The word *dogs* contains two morphemes - the first is *dog*, which is the root of the word, and the second is the plural marker *-s*. Simply put, the term *morphological analysis* refers to the analysis of a word based on the meaningful parts contained within that word.

Undoubtedly, some words cannot be broken down into multiple meaningful parts, but many words are composed of more than one meaningful unit. In that context, we may also talk about *syntactic analysis*, or analyzing the relationship between words so as to understand the logical meaning of sentences or of parts of sentences, such as clauses. Syntactic analysis also pays attention to the order of the words in a sentence, and it can be carried out in several stages, such as identifying clause and word boundaries, determining the parts of speech, identifying constituents, determining their syntactic categories, as well as determining their grammatical functions, and, lastly, drawing the syntactic structure.

Semantic analysis analyzes an instance of the language in terms of its meaning and whether or not it 'makes sense', as opposed to syntactic analysis, which analyzes its grammatical structure, and which determines whether or not an instance of the language is 'well formed'. Thus, semantic analysis depends on the meaning of the words, while syntactic analysis depends on the

types of words, the main focus of the former being to get to the proper meaning of the sentence.

At its simplest, the semantic analysis of a simple declarative sentence is identifying the *predicator* and the *argument(s)*. The *predicator* of a simple declarative sentence is the word (sometimes a group of words) which does not belong to any of the referring expressions and which, of the remainder, makes the most semantic contribution to the meaning of the sentence. This ‘remainder’ can be quite a varied set, and one word (or part of a word) needs to be picked out, which ‘carries more meaning’ than the others. When we strip away the less meaningful elements, we are left with a sequence of words, which, though ungrammatical and inelegant, can still be understood as expressing a *proposition* (= part of the meaning of the utterance of a declarative sentence which describes some state of affairs), the result being similar to ‘Tarzan jungle talk’.

In the context of the predicator, we may note that the same distinction arises as we came across previously, with *word* and *word form*. Namely, the *predicator* = *word*, in that it may have more than one sense, and, as such, there is room for ambiguity. *Predicate* = *word form*, in that it can only have one sense; there is no room for ambiguity. Thus, *bank* has at least two senses, i.e. predicates: *bank*₁, and *bank*₂, *man* has at least three senses, i.e. predicates: *man*₁, *man*₂, and *man*₃.

The *predicator*, then, identifies the semantic role played by a particular word (or a group of words) in a particular sentence, and it is similar to the grammatical term *subject*; we can talk about the subject of a sentence, but it makes no sense to talk about a ‘list of subjects in English’. Similarly, we can talk about the predicator of a sentence, but it would make no sense to talk about a ‘list of predicators in English’. Consequently, semantically speaking, we may say that a *predicate* is any word (or sequence of words) which (in a given sense) can function as the *predicator* of a sentence. It identifies elements in a language system, independently of particular example sentences, and it would make sense to imagine a list of predicates in English, as included, for example, in a dictionary.

While we may identify one predicator, i.e. predicate in a simple declarative sentence, we may have one or more *referring expression(s)*, which are also known as the *argument(s)*; in other words, any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or somebody, and used when the speaker has a particular referent in mind. Since the number of arguments is not fixed, that is, it may vary, we can use the concept of *degree of a predicate*, which is essentially a number indicating the number of arguments (referring expressions) it is normally understood to have in a simple declarative sentence.

Thus, *asleep* = predicate of degree one (a one-place predicate), as in the simple declarative sentence *He is asleep*; *love* = predicate of degree two (a two-place predicate), in the simple declarative sentence *I love you*; *give* = predicate of degree three (a three-place predicate), as in the simple declarative sentence *She gave me a dictionary*.

We may note that *verbs* can be used with one, two or three arguments, i.e. they can be one-place, two-place or three-place predicates. This applies to *nouns* as well, as they can also be used with one, two or three arguments, i.e. they can be one-place, two-place or three-place predicates. In the majority of cases, however, most nouns are one-place predicates, which does not apply to the *inherently relational nouns*, such as *father, son, brother, mother, daughter, sister, neighbor*. Most *adjectives*, too, are one-place predicates.

Sometimes two predicates may have nearly identical sense, but may be of different grammatical parts of speech, such as the sentence pairs below:

Robin (arg./r.e.) is foolish (pred.; adj.) and *Robin (arg./r.e.) is a fool (pred.; n.)*;

Tim (arg./r.e.) is afraid of (pred.; adj.) my dog and *Tim (arg.) fears (pred.; v.) my dog*;

My parrot (arg./r.e.) talks (pred.; v.) and *My parrot (arg./r.e.) is a talker (pred.; n.)*

To conclude this section, we may note that the predicators, i.e. predicates of a language have a completely different function from the referring expressions, i.e. arguments. The roles of these two elements (predicates/arguments) in the semantic analysis of a simple declarative sentence are not interchangeable.

Lexical categories of predicators

The term *lexical categories* refers to classes of words, such as *nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions*, which have similar grammatical properties. They differ in how other words can be formed out of them, as, for example, if a word belongs to the lexical category *verb*, other words can be formed by adding the suffix *-ing* to it to make other words.

A distinction can be made between *lexical categories* and *functional categories*, where the former have descriptive content, mainly describing non-linguistic things, states, or events, while the latter often have purely grammatical meanings or uses, such as *determiners (the, a/an), conjunctions (and), complementizers (if), and auxiliaries (be, can)*. As such, words that belong to *lexical categories* are known as *lexical/content words*, and they belong to an *open class/set of words*, where new words are commonly accepted; words that

belong to *functional categories* are known as *functional/grammatical words*, and they belong to a *closed class/set of words*, where new items are rarely added. It should be noted that though *prepositions* are classified as a closed class of words, they have, nevertheless, been accepted as belonging to one of the five major lexical categories, together with nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

The *predicator* of a simple declarative sentence can be of various lexical categories, i.e. parts of speech, such as: *adjectives* (*red, asleep, hungry*); *verbs* (*write, love, eat*); *prepositions* (*in, between, behind*); and *nouns* (*crook, genius*). On the other hand, the *predicator* of a simple declarative sentence can *never* be found in the verb *to be* (in its various forms - *is, am, are, was, were*); *conjunctions* (*and, or, but*); and *articles* (*the, a/an*).

Semantic barriers

Semantic analysis helps us to get to the proper meaning of the sentence. However, despite all we know about the properties of the constituents of the sentence, and their role in it, misunderstanding are, nevertheless, possible, for many reasons. These misunderstandings in communication occur when the sender and the receiver have different understandings of the message being sent.

Semantic barriers represent obstacles in communication that distort the meaning of a message being sent, that is, they are the root of the various misunderstandings that may arise between the sender and the receiver as a result of the different meanings of words and other symbols used in the act of communication. These situations may be language, education, cultural differences, body language, differences in dialect, spelling errors, symbols with different meaning, a word having different meaning in different contexts, wrong perceptions, and badly expressed messages, among others. An example of a semantic barrier due to a symbol with different meanings can be illustrated with the following image below:



Figure 1. Semantic barrier due to a symbol carrying different meanings

Semantic barriers are concerned with problems and obstructions in the process of encoding and decoding messages into words or impressions. The main reasons for semantic barriers are shown in the illustration below, and will be discussed in greater detail in the paragraphs that follow:

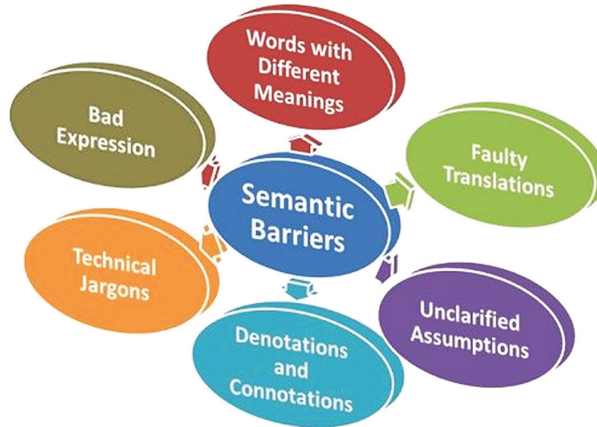


Figure 2. Reasons for semantic barriers

Words with different meanings may act as a semantic barrier as sometimes people get confused with their interpretation for a variety of reasons. *Homonyms*, for example, as we have already noted, are words that sound the same but have different meanings and are spelled differently. When used in spoken language, however, this can easily cause confusion. For example, the words *write* and *right* sound the same, but they mean different things. One way the confusion can be avoided in this case is by choosing a different word, such as *correct* instead of *right*.

Another problem that might arise here is connected to the use of *idioms*, i.e. phrases that have a figurative, non-literal meaning, which is different from the literal meaning of the words they are made up of. Thus, in the idioms *Can you give me a hand?* or *We need to tighten our belt*, the figurative meaning differs from the literal meaning. These phrases and figures of speech are regularly used in daily interactions; however, if the receiver of the message is unfamiliar with the expression, they will be left confused.

Miscommunication due to *faulty translations* occurs in situations when the translator is not proficient with both the source and the target languages, and, as a result, mistakes may appear resulting in different meanings. For example, if the translator does not know that a *bridal shower* refers to a gift-giving party held for a bride-to-be in anticipation of her wedding and in celebration of the upcoming marriage, they may well translate it literally as a

bride taking a shower, or a bride being given a shower. Another example may be illustrated with a courtroom situation where a judge addresses a jury to ask whether they have reached a decision regarding a case they have been involved in, addressing the elected representative of the group by using the words *Mr. foreman, have you reached a verdict?* If the translator does not know that a *foreman* is a person who is elected by the jury or judge of a case and who acts as the jury's representative, they may well translate it (wrongly) by using *Foreman* as the person's last name.

Unclearified assumptions are seen as a semantic barrier when the sender creates assumptions about certain things, which are vague and unknown to the receiver, resulting in the communication becoming negatively impacted. People interpret communication in different ways, and, as such, unclearified assumptions might create a communication barrier, leading to confusion and misunderstanding. For example, an employer might instruct one of their employees to *take care of our client*, with the employer and the employee having different ideas as to what that would involve, hence resulting in miscommunication.

Denotation and *connotation*, two notions that have been previously mentioned, play an important role in semantics, and for this reason, we shall look at them in this context in greater detail. *Denotation* refers to the exact, literal meaning of a word; it is the dictionary definition of a word. *Connotation*, on the other hand, has to do with the feelings and emotions associated with a word; it paints a picture or invokes a feeling. Thus, the *denotative meaning* of a word is basically its literal meaning, while its *connotative meaning* is based on implication, or a shared emotional association with a word. Often there are many words that denote approximately the same thing, but their connotations are very different. For example, *innocent* and *genuine* both denote *an absence of corruption*, but the connotations of the two words are different: *innocent* is often associated with a lack of experience, whereas *genuine* is not.

Connotation and denotation are not two separate things; rather, they are two aspects of a *sign*, and the connotative meanings of a word exist together with the denotative meanings. We may say, for example, *You may live in a house, but we live in a home*. Looking up the definitions of the words *house* and *home* in a dictionary will show us that they mean the same thing, more or less, *a dwelling place*. However, the implication is that the word *home* has another meaning. Aside from its literal dictionary meaning, or denotation, the word *home* is also associated with things such as *comfort, affection, protection, or privacy*, which does not really apply to the word *house*.

Furthermore, looking up the word *snake* in the dictionary will lead us to one of its denotative meanings as “any of numerous scaly, legless, someti-

mes venomous reptiles having a long, tapering, cylindrical body and found in most tropical and temperate regions.” The connotative meanings of the word, however, are *danger* and *evil*, among others.

A word's denotation is understood in contrast with its connotation. If we take the word *blue*, for example, we shall see that its denotation is the *color* it stands for, whereas its connotation is *sad*. Thus, we have the sentence *The sky is very blue*, where it is absolutely clear that the denotative meaning of the word is used, it describes the literal color of the sky. This is in contrast with the sentence *Ben is so blue*, where if we take the word's denotative meaning, we would understand it that Ben is literally the color of sky - blue. However, if we understand the sentence using the connotative meaning of the word *blue*, as we should, we would understand that *Ben is sad*.

The greatest problem when it comes to connotative versus denotative barriers is that in most cases the connotative meaning behind a particular word can be offending or misleading at times. For example, if we have *This clothing is affordable* as opposed to *This clothing is cheap*, it is obvious that *affordable* sounds much better than *cheap* because the word *cheap* also implies *low quality*.

Technical jargon might appear as a semantic barrier and result in miscommunication sometimes when specialists use it when communicating with non-specialists in the field. Therefore, the latter may not understand the actual meaning of many words. This occurs quite often for people working in technical fields, such as engineers, production managers, IT managers, when they use very specific vocabulary connected to their field of work, which is difficult for others, who are not in that particular field, to understand.

Bad expression occurs when the message is not formulated properly and the language used is so difficult and/or unnatural to the listener that it can easily be misinterpreted by the recipient. The message is said to be *badly expressed* if the wrong words are chosen, the sentences are not sequenced properly, and there is frequent repetition of words or sentences. The badly expressed messages require a lot of time as they need corrections and clarifications. In addition, the impact of the message decreases. One such example would be with the sentence *Watching from the airplane window, the volcano erupted*, which should be rephrased as *Watching from the airplane window, I saw the volcano erupt*.

Semantics is the study of meaning and how it affects communication. *Semantic barriers* can appear in different areas, such as interpersonal communication, social interaction and workplace issues. When this type of barrier arises, people are not able to understand one another; they do not know what the other person is referring to or talking about.

As language is, without a doubt, one of the most important means of communication, it goes without saying that we must choose our words very carefully, especially in situations where we are with people from different backgrounds and cultures. Being clear, specific and straightforward are sometimes the easiest ways to overcome semantic barriers, though there are others, as well, such as being explicit, using appropriate body language, and being aware of cross-cultural differences.

Universe of discourse

The relationship between *language* (part of an utterance) and (a thing in) *the world*, as noted previously, is known as *reference*. It can be used for any expression that is used to refer to any entity in the real world, or in any imaginary world. Speakers refer to things in the course of utterances by means of *referring expressions*, and the words in a referring expression offer clues to the listener to identify the referent.

Language can be used to talk about the real world, and it can be used to talk about an infinite variety of abstractions, and even entities in imaginary, unreal worlds. Language is used for talking about things in the real world, like *trees*, *birds*, and *horses*, all of which exist. However, all the things we can talk about and all the things that exist are not exactly the same, and language can be used to create unreal worlds, allowing us to talk about non-existent things.

Semantics, as we have seen so far, is concerned with the meaning of words and sentences; it does not get involved in discussions as to what exists and what does not. This is why it offers such a broad interpretation in connection to the notion of the referring expression. However, we need to be aware that we can only let our imagination stretch to cases where the things in the world are different – we do not allow our imagination to stretch to cases where the principles of the structure and use of language are different.

Universe of discourse, for any utterance, refers to the particular world, real or imaginary, or part real, part imaginary, that the speaker assumes they are talking about at the time. The *Collins English Dictionary* defines the concept as “the complete range of objects, events, attributes, relations, ideas, etc., that are expressed, assumed, or implied in a discussion”, while the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* explains it as “an inclusive class of entities that is tacitly implied or explicitly delineated as the subject of a statement, discourse, or theory.”

In this context, when an astronomy lecturer, in a series of lectures, states that the Earth revolves around the Sun, the universe of discourse is, we

all assume, the real world, or universe. However, when a parent tells their child a bedtime story and they say *The dragon set fire to the forest with his hot breath*, the universe of discourse is not the real world, but rather it is a fictitious world. We may note that no universe of discourse is a totally fictitious world; there has to be interaction between the real world and imaginary worlds. Thus, when two people are arguing at cross-purposes, they could be said to be working within partially different universes of discourse.

Language, then, can be used to talk about the real world, and it can be also used to talk about an infinite number of abstractions, and even entities in imaginary, unreal worlds. Semantics is not concerned with the factual status of things in the world, but with the meaning in language. The notion of *universe of discourse* accounts for the way in which language allows us to refer to non-existent things, and *communicating in the same universe of discourse is essential for successful communication*.

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. In the following sentences, cross out the referring expressions and write down the remainder (i.e. what has not been crossed out).

Use the following example to help you:

- (a) ~~My dog~~ bit ~~the postman~~. *bit*
- (b) Janet is writing the Mayor's speech.
- (c) Cairo is in Africa.
- (d) Mississauga is between Hamilton and Toronto.
- (e) This place stinks.
- (f) John's car is red.
- (g) Einstein was a genius.

2. Below are the remainders from the examples above. For each, write down the single word (or part of a word) which carries the most specific information. Use the following example from (1b) above to help you:

is writing *write*

- (c) is in
- (d) is between, and
- (e) stinks
- (f) is red
- (g) was a genius

3. Remove the referring expressions and the verb *to be* (and any other elements) to identify the predicators in the following sentences:

- (a) I am tired.
- (b) Freddie is in Dallas.
- (c) The magician is a cheat.
- (d) The lady who lives on Concession Street is rich.
- (e) McMaster University is behind Juravinski Hospital.

4. Underline the predicators and circle the arguments in the following sentences:

- (a) Dennis is a dentist.
- (b) Henry showed Mark his tattoo.
- (c) David is proud of his family.
- (d) The hospital is outside the city.

5. Are the following predicates?

- (a) dusty (b) drink (c) woman
- (d) you (e) Fred (f) about

6. Are the following sentences acceptable?

- (a) Thomas coughed.
- (b) Thomas coughed a handful of candy.
- (c) Thomas coughed his wife a handful of candy.
- (d) In that case, of what degree is the predicate *cough*?

7. Are the following sentences acceptable?

- (a) Nicole kicked.
- (b) Nicole kicked the wall.
- (c) Nicole kicked George the wall.
- (d) In that case, of what degree is the predicate *kick*?

8. Of what degree is the predicate *die*?

9. Of what degree is the predicate *come*?

10. Of what degree is the predicate *murder* (verb)?

11. Of what degree is the predicate *see*?

12. Are the following sentences acceptable?

- (a) Kenny made.
- (b) Kenny made this toy car.
- (c) Kenny made this toy car his sister.
- (d) In that case, of what degree is the predicate *make*?

13. For each of the following sentences decide whether it sounds like something has been omitted.

- (a) Ed gave.
- (b) Ed gave Kellie.
- (c) Ed gave a nice present.
- (d) Ed gave Kellie a nice present.
- (e) How many referring expressions are there in the sentence (d) above?

14. Are the following sentences acceptable?

- (a) Your marble is under.
- (b) Your marble is under my bed the carpet.
- (c) Your marble is under my bed.
- (d) How many referring expressions are there in the sentence *Your marble is under my bed*, and of what degree is the predicate *under*?

15. Of what degree is the predicate *near*?

16. Are the following sentences acceptable?

- (a) Colorado is between Utah.
- (b) Colorado is between Utah and Kansas.
- (c) Of what degree is the predicate *between*?

17. How many referring expressions are there in the sentence *Philip is handsome*?

- (a) Is *Philip is handsome John* (not used when addressing John) acceptable?
- (b) Of what degree is the predicate *handsome*?

18. Of what degree is the predicate *rotten*?

19. Of what degree is the predicate *tasty*?

20. How many referring expressions are there in *Shane is an accountant*?

- (a) Is *Shane is an accountant the office* acceptable?
- (b) Of what degree is the predicate *accountant*?

21. Of what degree is the predicate *hero*?

22. Of what degree is the predicate *crook*?

23. How many referring expressions are there in *This object is a potato peeler*, and as such, of what degree is the predicate *potato peeler*?

24. Does the sentence *Todd is a brother* sound complete and acceptable?

- (a) Is *Todd is a brother of the Mayor of Hamilton* acceptable?
- (b) Could *brother* be called a two-place predicate?
- (c) Could *sister* be called a two-place predicate?

25. Provide a semantic analysis of the following simple sentences, also noting down the degree of the predicate:

- (a) She spilled the coffee on the carpet.
- (b) Laura presented the award to Clive.
- (c) I love my family.
- (d) Joyce bought a new car.
- (e) The doctor is outside.

26. Explain the differences in terms of *denotative* versus *connotative* meaning of the following phrases, sentences and situations:

- (a) *Forgive me father for I have sinned.*
as opposed to
Sorry Daddy, I've been naughty.
- (b) *inviting somebody to your cottage in the forest*
as opposed to
inviting somebody to your cabin in the woods
- (c) *fun in the sun*
as opposed to
afternoon delight
- (d) *father figure*
as opposed to
dad bod
- (e) *a well-fed donkey*
as opposed to
a stuffed ass

27. Do unicorns exist in the real world?

28. In which of the following contexts are unicorns most frequently mentioned?

- (a) in fairy stories
- (b) in philosophical discussions about reference
- (c) in news broadcasts
- (d) in scientific text books

29. Is it possible to imagine worlds different in some ways from the world we actually know?

(a) In fairy tale and science fiction worlds is everything different from the world we know?

(b) In the majority of fairy tales and science fiction stories that you know, do the fictional characters communicate with each other according to the same principles that apply in real life?

(c) Do fairy tale princes, witches, etc. seem to refer in their utterances to things in the world?

30. Is the universe of discourse in each of the following cases the real world or a (partly) fictitious world?

(a) *NASA on Oct. 6, 2022*: “The newly-discovered asteroid 2022 RM₄ will pass Earth less than 6 lunar distances on November 1.”

(b) *Mother to child*: “Don’t pet the dog. It could bite you.”

(c) *Mother to child*: “If you’re good, Santa might bring you a new phone.”

(d) *Patient in psychiatric ward*: “As your King, I order you to defeat the Martians!”

(e) *Doctor to Joe*: “You cannot expect to live longer than another two months.”

Joe (joking): “When I die, I’ll walk to the cemetery so I don’t pay for a hearse.”

31. In the following situations, are the participants working with the same universe of discourse or with a different universe of discourse?

(a) *Speaker 1*: “Did Leslie’s son come in this morning?”

Speaker 2: “I didn’t know Leslie had a son.”

Speaker 1: “Then who’s that tall guy who was here yesterday?”

Speaker 2: “I don’t know, but I’m pretty sure Leslie doesn’t have kids.”

Speaker 1: “I’m sure Leslie’s son was here yesterday.”

(b) *Time traveler from 1717*: “Are the King of France and the Tsar of Russia on good terms?”

Somebody in 2022: “Huh?”

(c) *Optician*: “Please read the letters on the bottom line of the card.”

Patient: “E G D Z Q N B A”

Optician: “Correct. Well done.”

Chapter 7

Fundamentals of communication, context and information

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- reason and purpose of communication
- deixis
- context and inference
- inference and implication

Key concepts: context, deixis, implication, inference, information, relevance

Reason and purpose of communication

Communication is the act of transferring information from one place, person or group to another. Every communication involves (at least) one sender, a message and a recipient. It is the act of giving, receiving, and sharing information, that is, talking or writing, and listening or reading. Though simple at first glance, the process of communication is quite complex. Communication is vital because it is at the root of what makes us human, and it is a core part of our society. In our daily life, communication helps us build relationships by allowing us to share our experiences and needs, and it helps us connect to others. It is the essence of life, allowing us to express feelings, pass on information, and share thoughts.

Why and what do speakers communicate?

There are few human activities that do not involve communication. We communicate with friends, and with strangers, at work and during our free time, in public and in private. We communicate our knowledge and our ignorance, our anger and our pleasure, our needs and our intentions.

Just as communication serves a variety of purposes, it also takes on a variety of forms. We may communicate by writing a book or by making a speech, with a number of words or with one, with a grunt or with silence, by waving our arms or by raising our eyebrows. In some cases, our means of communication is chosen with great deliberation and care, while in others the

choice is spontaneous and not at all conscious. Bearing in mind this diversity, the possibility of a theory of human communication might seem, understandably, remote.

Different people are interested in communication for different reasons. For example, some writers are interested in communication for what it indicates about the structure of social interaction and the dynamics of social relationships. Accordingly, their accounts focus on such things as the distribution of talk across participants, the ways that conversations are opened and closed, the lengths that the participants go to in order to maintain agreement, and the means by which speakers and listeners attempt to avoid appearing foolish.

Other writers, however, are interested in communication for what it indicates about human psychology. That is, they proceed from the assumption that what is communicated is something that can be mentally represented, for example, a thought or desire, and they aim to explain the mental processes by which the listener discovers what is being communicated.

The traditional answer to this question is that speakers communicate meanings. But then another question arises, that of *what is meaning?* and, as have seen so far, there is no generally accepted answer to this. For a start, it is clear that we need to distinguish between what the speaker means and what their words mean, that is, between *speaker meaning* and *sentence* or *word meaning*. What listeners are interested in, of course, is what the speaker means. Indeed, the listener's interest in what the speaker means will often lead them to ignore the fact that their words (may) mean something else.

Relevance and standards in communication

A speaker will be assumed to be communicating if they are thought to be rational, that is, if they are thought to be conforming to certain norms or standards. This raises a number of questions, such as what is thought to be genuinely informative; when is a discourse coherent; what are the procedures by which a listener judges a speaker's contribution to be in accordance with their existing assumptions, among others.

The idea that communication is governed by norms which have their basis in human rationality is in great part founded by the philosopher H. P. Grice, who introduced the term *conversational implicature*, whereby he proposed an approach to the speaker's and the listener's cooperative use of inference. He noted that in conversations what is meant, that is, what is conveyed, often goes beyond what is said and that this additional meaning is *inferred* and predictable. Essentially, in conversational implicature, the speaker says

one thing but means another, as in, for example, a speaker may say *It's hot in here*, but will actually mean *Can you open the window?*

Grice, investigating the gap between what a speaker explicitly says and what their intended meaning is understood to be suggested that the success of this type of communication could be explained by creating a *cooperative principle*, which became known as *Grice's cooperative principle*. This principle is a kind of an unspoken agreement by speakers and listeners to recognize and participate in events of interactive communication. The principle allows participants to make assumptions about each other's goals and conversational strategies. In this view, it supports the use of inferences for communication, such as the inference communicated in the following examples, which illustrate the concept of *conversational implicature*:

1) Susan: I left early. I had a train to catch.

inference: Susan left *because* of having to catch the train.

2) A: Did you give Beatrice the money?

B: I'm waiting for her now.

inference: B did not give Beatrice the money

Grice developed this principle, the *cooperative principle*, into a number of maxims, such as *maxims of quantity*: make your contribution as informative as required; do not make your contribution more informative than it is required; *maxims of quality*: do not say what you believe to be false; do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence; *maxim of relation*: be relevant; and *maxims of manner*: avoid obscurity of expression; avoid ambiguity; be brief; be orderly.

Types of information

When an item of information has a contextual effect in a given context, we may say it is relevant in that context. In each case establishing the relevance of a new assumption involves inference. And in each case it involves the interaction of existing assumptions with new assumptions. The relevance of an assumption depends on the context in which it is processed.

Communication cannot be explained simply as the transmission of information - at least not if by *information* we refer only to the representation of facts. On one hand, *communicative* means *meaningful for the sender*; however, there is another sense of *meaningful*, and that can be expressed by the term *informative*, and the related expressions *information* and *inform*. Thus, a signal is *informative* if, regardless of the intentions of the sender, it makes the

receiver aware of something of which they were not previously aware. *Informative*, therefore, means *meaningful to the receiver*. If the signal tells them something they knew already, it tells them nothing, hence, it is uninformative. The communicative component in the use of language, important though it may be, should not be overemphasized at the expense of the non-communicative but, nevertheless, informative component, which is of vital importance in social interaction.

Many semanticists see language as used primarily for the communication of factual information. Others feel that making statements descriptive of states-of-affairs is just one of the functions of language; that language also serves to establish and maintain social relationships, as well as to allow us to express our attitudes and personality. In that context, we may note three more or less distinguishable functions of information: *descriptive*, *social*, and *expressive*.

Descriptive information, or descriptive meaning, is factual in the sense that it can be explicitly asserted or denied and, in the best case scenario, it can be objectively verified. An example of an utterance with descriptive meaning is the statement *It is raining here in Hamilton at the moment*. Other terms that have been used in the literature for this aspect of meaning include *referential*, *cognitive*, *propositional*, *ideational*, and *designative*.

The distinction between *social information* and *expressive information* is not very clear-cut, and, as such, a number of authors have merged both under a single term, such as *emotive*, *attitudinal*, *interpersonal*, *expressive*, among others. It is only in part of our membership of social groups that we are able to interact with others, and in doing so to establish our individual identity and personality. According to British linguist Michael Halliday, the most appropriate term for what is common to the social and expressive functions of language is *interpersonal*.

Deixis

The notion of *deixis* comes from the Greek word for ‘pointing’ and it refers to the use of general words and phrases to refer to a specific time, place, or person in context. Most words mean what they mean regardless of who uses them, and when and where they are used. Only once we have assigned a fairly constant interpretation to a word can we have a coherent conversation. However, all languages contain a small set of words whose meanings vary systematically according to who uses them, and when and where they are used, and these words are called *deictic words*, i.e. words that take some elements of their meaning from the *context/situation* (i.e. the speaker, the addressee, the time, and the place) of the utterance in which they are used.

Deictic words tend to be *referring expressions* as they help the listener identify the referent of a referring expression through its spatial or temporal relationship with the situation of the utterance. *Personal pronouns* (*I, you, me*), *adverbs of time* (*yesterday, tomorrow*), *adverbs of place* (*here, there*), *modifiers* (*this, that*), as well as certain grammatical devices for indicating past, present and future time can all be classified as *deictic words*. In addition, there are cases where *predicates* can also be used as deictic words, such as *come, go, bring, take*, which is connected to the notion of *psychological shifting*, defined by American academic Erwin Segal as the *deictic shift theory*, where “the reader often takes a cognitive attitude within the world of narrative and interprets the text from that perspective.”

Languages need to have deictic terms because without them they would not be able to serve the communicative needs of their users. All real, human languages have deictic terms, as they make the language a much more ‘portable’ tool than it would otherwise be – we can use the same words on different occasions, at different times and places. When we consider individual sentences from the point of view of their truth, we cannot, in many cases, consider them abstractedly, i.e. we do not see them simply as strings of words made available by the language system.

Types of deixis

Generally speaking, there are several types of deixis, with *person deixis*, *place deixis*, and *time deixis* classified as the main ones, and *social deixis* and *discourse deixis* as the minor ones.

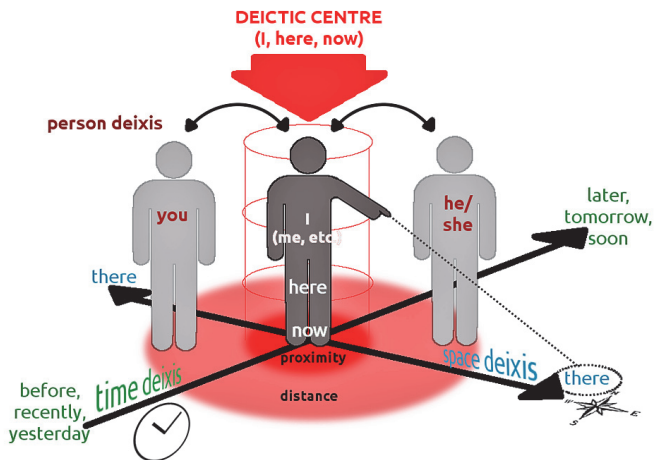


Figure 1. Main types of deixis

Person deixis

Person deixis represents a deictic reference to the participant role of a referent, such as the speaker, the addressee, and referents that are neither the speaker nor the addressee. Person deixis is commonly expressed by the following types of elements: *pronouns*, *possessive affixes of nouns*, and *agreement affixes of verbs*. There are three kinds of person deixis - *first person deixis*, *second person deixis*, and *third person deixis*.

First person deixis refers to the speaker, or both the speaker and the referents grouped with the speaker. The term *speaker* refers to the utterer of a message, while the term *deictic center* is a reference point in relation to which a deictic expression is to be interpreted (usually the present time), location, participant role, etc. of the speaker.

For example, in the sentence *I'm over here now*, the speaker, the actual location and the actual time of the utterance are, respectively, the deictic centers for the interpretation of *I*, *here*, and *now*.

First person deixis can be further sub-divided into *exclusive first person deixis*, which refers to a group not including the addressee(s), and *inclusive first person deixis*, which refers to a group including the addressee(s). First person deixis can be exemplified with the singular pronouns: *I*, *me*, *myself*; *my*, *mine*; the plural pronouns: *we*, *us*, *ourselves*, *our*, *ours*; and *am*, the first person form of the verb *be*.

Second person deixis refers to a person(s) identified as the addressee - any of the immediate intended recipients of the speaker's communication. Examples of second person deixis are *you*, *yourself*, *yourselves*, *your*, and *yours*.

Third person deixis refers to a referent(s) not identified as the speaker or addressee. Examples of third person deixis are *he*, *she*, *they*, and the third person singular verb suffix *-s*. Third person deixis can be further sub-classified as *obviative person deixis* and *proximate person deixis*, where the former distinguishes a less important referent in the present stage of the discourse from a referent that is more important, while the latter distinguishes a referent that is more important at the present stage of the discourse from a referent that is less important.

Place deixis

Place deixis, also known as *spatial/space deixis*, is deictic reference to a location relative to the location of a participant in the speech event, typically the speaker, as exemplified by *this (way)*, *that (direction)*, *here*, and *there*. It is further connected to the notion of *boundedness*, which has to do with the

presence or absence of a component of meaning indicative of a border at the location indicated in an expression of place deixis, and can be further sub-divided into *bounded deixis*: place deixis that has a component of meaning indicative of a border, as, for example, *out there* and *in there*, and *unbounded deixis*: a distinction in place deixis that indicates a lack of a defined border, where the use of the word *there* in contrast to *in there* and *out there* indicates unbounded deixis.

Time deixis

Time deixis, also known as *temporal deixis*, is reference to time relative to a temporal reference point. Typically, this point is the moment of the utterance, and it can be exemplified with *temporal adverbs*, such as *now*, *then*, *yesterday*, *today*, *tomorrow*, as well as by distinctions in tense.

Social deixis

Social deixis is reference to the social characteristics of or distinctions between the participants or referents in a speech event. An expression of social deixis is exemplified by the distinction, present in many Indo-European languages, between familiar and polite second person pronouns. Social deixis can be further sub-divided into *absolute social deixis* and *relational social deixis*.

Absolute social deixis is deictic reference to some social characteristic of a referent, especially a person, apart from any relative ranking of referents. Often this type of social deixis is expressed in certain forms of address. The form of address will include no comparison of the ranking of the speaker and addressee; there will be only a simple reference to the absolute status of the addressee, such as *Mr. President*, and *Your Honor*.

Relational social deixis is deictic reference to a social relationship between the speaker and an addressee, bystander, or other referent in the extralinguistic context. Although there are no examples of this in English, we may find examples in other languages, such as French, in the distinctions between the French second person pronouns *tu* and *vous*.

Discourse deixis

Discourse deixis is deictic reference to a portion of a discourse relative to the speaker's current 'location' in the discourse, as for example, in the use of *this* to refer to a story we are about to tell in the sentence *I bet you haven't heard this story*, or reference to *this Chapter* (Chapter 7), for instance, of a book as *in the next chapter* or *in the previous chapter*, depending on whether the

reference is made from Chapter 6 or 8, respectively, as well as the use of *this* in a creaky-voiced utterance of *This is what we call a creaky voice*. Discourse deixis can be further sub-classified into *switch reference* and *token-reflexive deixis*.

Switch reference is a grammatical category which signals the identity or non-identity of the referent of an argument of one clause, usually its subject, with an argument of another clause, which is, also, usually the subject. It is used to avoid ambiguity of reference; for example, it may distinguish between two referents that are third person and that may not be otherwise distinguished by the verb, and it relates clauses, usually adjacent, that may be subordinate or coordinate to one another. It is expressed usually by inflectional affixes on the verb, sometimes by the same affixes that express subject-verb agreement within the clause, and rarely by a morpheme independent of the verb.

Token-reflexive deixis is discourse deixis in which the deictic expression refers to the expression or speech act in which it occurs, as, for example, in the sentence *This is what we call a creaky voice*, where the utterance itself is spoken with creaky voice, or *I hereby apologize*.

Context and inference

In connection with communication, we may note that speakers and listeners rely on context in constructing and interpreting the meaning of utterances. *Assumed* or *background knowledge*, also known as *non-linguistic knowledge*, *common sense knowledge*, *encyclopedic knowledge*, *sociocultural knowledge*, and *real-world knowledge* are all terms that essentially refer to the knowledge a speaker might assume others would have before a particular conversation, simply as a result of being a member of a community. All of us are members of numerous communities that overlap, such as speakers of our native language, citizens of the same state, city or neighborhood, members of the same sports teams or political groups, fellow university students, co-workers, and so on. Each community implies certain types of knowledge which might be shared with other members and which speakers and listeners attempt to work out as they interact.

For example, if we look at the brief exchange between A and B below:

A: I'm hungry.

B: I'll lend you some money.

We shall see that it acquires coherence from the knowledge that money can be exchanged for food, which is cultural knowledge that will not be found

in a dictionary entry for the words *food* or *money*. The meaning of an utterance is greatly clarified through inference that relies on this kind of background knowledge.

If we take a look at the sentences *It'll take more than a leather jacket to make you into James Dean*, or *Her mistake was to hire an Elvis impersonator*, we shall see that their understanding depends to a great extent on this kind of assumed or background knowledge, as knowing who James Dean or Elvis is does not form part of one's knowledge of English in the same way as knowing the meaning of *jacket* or *mistake*. Knowledge about film stars or music personalities is not restricted to speakers of any single language in the way that knowledge of the meaning of a particular noun or verb is. This non-linguistic knowledge about the world plays an important role in the understanding of utterances.

In the following exchange below:

A: Shall we go and get some ice cream?

B: I'm on a diet.

Speaker A might reasonably infer that speaker B's reply is a refusal, that B's reply implies 'No.' However, what should be noted here is that the *implication* and *inference* both rely on cultural knowledge about diets and ice cream. The fact that it is cultural knowledge which is providing the basis for the inference can be shown by using an example that might be less familiar to English speakers, like the exchange below:

A: Come over next week for lunch.

B: It's Ramadan.

If speaker A knows that speaker B is a Muslim, then speaker A will probably infer that speaker B's reply means 'No.'

Context

Context is very important in semantics because communication can only be completed if the parties involved in the process know and understand the language. The context is given by the interconnection of the different words used in a sentence for which the semantic properties must be known. In communication, context refers to the words and sentences that surround any part of a discourse, and that helps to determine its meaning; it is also called *linguistic context*.

Context is vital in communication because it tells us, the receiver, what importance to place on something, what assumptions to make (or not) about what is being communicated, and most importantly, it puts meaning

into the message. The link that exists between *context* and *language* is known as *social context*, and this recognizes that people use language, and that language is a part of society. *Social context* tries to describe and account for the different ways that different people use language; it looks at relationships between language and society, and it looks at language as people use it.

Inference

Inference may be defined as the process of drawing conclusions based on evidence and reasoning. It lies at the heart of the scientific method as it covers the principles and methods by which we use data to learn about observable phenomena. Inferences serve a variety of functions in text comprehension, such as being used to identify an unclearly pronounced word, to resolve a lexical ambiguity, to determine the referent of a pronoun, and to distinguish an intended message from a literal meaning.

Listeners actively participate in the construction of meaning, especially by using inferences to fill out the text so as to interpret the speaker meaning. The term *inference* can be linked with that of *anaphora*, a rhetorical device that consists of repeating a sequence of words at the beginnings of neighboring clauses, a special sub-type of *co-reference*, a referential relation between expressions where they both refer to the same entity. There are many types of co-reference: a nominal may be repeated, as in the sentence *I fell down a hole yesterday. The hole was very deep*; there may be an independent nominal used as an epithet, as in the sentence *I saw your brother this morning. The old fool still doesn't recognize me*, or very commonly, an anaphoric pronoun may be used, as in *I stepped on a snail this morning. It died*. Anaphoric pronouns differ from full nominals in that they have no independent reference and must rely on an antecedent. Interpreting anaphora across sentences involves inference, as for example, in the sentence *The plane was late, the hotel wasn't fully built, there were crowds everywhere she went. I think it really disappointed her*.

In order to understand an utterance, listeners have to access and use contextual information of different types. A listener has to be able to perform various interpretative tasks, such as to fill in the deictic expressions, to fix the reference of nominals, to access background knowledge, and to make inferences. Each of these tasks involves calculation. Listeners have to create meaning by combining linguistic and contextual information, and in doing so, they make inferences. These tasks need different types of knowledge, which can be classified as the *language used*, for example, English, French, Arabic; the *local contextual information*, for example, when and where it is uttered, and by whom; the *background knowledge*, such as the cultural practices. For the first

type of knowledge, the language used, the listener needs to know the linguistic facts.

A question that arises at this point is whether the first type of knowledge is solely a part of semantics, while the second and the third types are left to pragmatics, with another related issue being what to call this first type of knowledge. If we call it 'meaning,' then what shall we call the result of combining it with contextual information to get the final message? One possible answer would be to distinguish between three types of meaning: the conventional meaning of words and sentences in the language, the speaker's intended meaning, and the listener's constructed meaning. Another possibility is to call the linguistically-encoded sentence simply *meaning*; the speaker meaning - *content*; and the listener meaning - *interpretation*.

If we use the latter terms, then the basic notion would be that meaning underlies content, and that the listener must enrich meaning to get an interpretation. The extent to which this interpretation corresponds to content will determine the success of the communication. As pointed out by American linguist W. D. Whitney over one hundred years ago, *communication is a process of interpretation*. The balance in spoken communication between learned, conventional meaning, and contextual inference is an object of discussion in current semantic and pragmatic theories.

Inference and implication

The notions of *inference* and *implication* play an important role in semantics, and especially in pragmatics. Essentially, an *inference* is a conclusion, whereas an *implication* is a statement, or, in other words, when we *infer*, we read between the lines, we suppose or conclude, we make a well-informed guess, while when we *imply*, we suggest or express something indirectly. Thus, if I see my mother's bag on the table, I might (reasonably) *infer* that she is home, whereas a friend's harsh manner would *imply* that she is in a bad mood.

Inference

An *inference* is a logical conclusion based on an analysis of objects, sensations, events, facts, and ideas that seems likely in light of what is known. We can reach *factual inferences* (those which can be verified) from factual information. It is important to note that an inference does not always have to be true, if a false conclusion is drawn from the observation, which may itself be true. There are two types of inference - *inductive* and *deductive*, where the former, *inductive inference*, is based on a generalization from a finite set of

past observations, extending the observed pattern or relation to other future instances or instances occurring elsewhere, while the latter, *deductive inference*, deductive reasoning, or deduction, is making an inference based on accepted facts or premises.

An *inductive inference* can be illustrated with the following examples - I see fireflies in my backyard every summer, thus, my hypothesis is that this summer I will probably see fireflies in my backyard; or, every dog I meet is friendly, thus, my hypothesis is that most dogs are usually friendly. A *deductive inference*, on the other hand, can be illustrated with the example that if a beverage is defined as 'drinkable through a straw,' we could deduce that soup as a beverage; or, the example that all spiders have eight legs, which leads to the conclusion, i.e. deduction, that a tarantula is a spider, and thus, tarantulas have eight legs. For deductive reasoning to be valid, the hypothesis must be correct; the assumption is that the statements 'all spiders have eight legs' and 'a tarantula is a spider' are true.

Implication (and entailment)

The term *implication* has a number of different senses. In the context of semantics, the term *semantic implication* states that the set A of sentences semantically entails the set B of sentences, with the formal definition being that the set A entails the set B if and only if, in every model in which all sentences in A are true, all sentences in B are also true. *Entailment* and *implication* operate at different levels, however, in that an *implication* is something that may be true or false, depending on which truth assignment is being considered at the moment, whereas an *entailment* is a statement about all truth assignments. We can illustrate the term *implication* with the example *When you left the gate open and the dog escaped, you were guilty by implication*.

Entailment, on the other hand, is the relationship between two sentences where the truth of one (A) requires the truth of the other (B). For example, the sentence (A) *The president was assassinated* entails the sentence (B) *The president is dead*. It is the principle that under certain conditions the truth of one statement ensures the truth of a second statement, and it is also called *strict implication*, *logical consequence*, and *semantic consequence*.

Thus, *to imply* means *to hint* or *to insinuate* rather than to explicitly connect a result with an action, as in the example *The way the boss was talking to me implied that I should not go on leave*. Using *entail* means conveying a sense that something will necessarily happen as a result of an action. Entailment, when the truth of a sentence depends on the truth of another sentence, can be *one-way* (or *strict entailment*, where if one sentence is true, the other

sentence must also be true; when one sentence is false, the other is also false); *two-way*, (or *mutual entailment*, when in a given context A is related in a characteristic way to B, and as a result B is now related in another characteristic way to A); *negative*; *unilateral* (when proposition A entails B, but proposition B does not entail A, as in *Jim hit Jack*; *Jack is injured*); *truth conditional*; or *illo-cutionary*.

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. If Wyatt Earp meets Doc Holliday in Dodge City and says, “This town ain’t big enough for the both of us”, what does *this town* refer to?

2. If a television news reporter, speaking in Mendocino, California, says, “This town was shaken by a major earthquake at 5 a.m. today”, what does *this town* refer to?

3. In general, what clue to the identity of the referent of a referring expression is given by the inclusion of the demonstrative word *this*?

4. If, on November 3, 1983, Andrew says, “Everything seemed to go wrong yesterday”, what day is Andrew picking out by the word *yesterday*?

5. If, on May 4, 1983, my sister says to me, “Yesterday wasn’t my birthday”, what day is being picked out by the word *yesterday*?

6. Thus, generally speaking, what day does *yesterday* refer to?

7. Underline the *deictic expressions* in the following sentences and describe which type of deixis is involved:

- (a) She is sitting over there.
- (b) This is the biggest room in the house.
- (c) Bring him in whenever you’re ready.
- (d) I’ll see you tomorrow.
- (e) They were here, looking at this painting.

8. The examples below consist of a sentence followed by several possibilities for a continuing sentence. In each case the possibilities describe the same basic situation but have the information packaged differently. Choose the continuation sentences (there may be more than one) which best fit the previous sentence, and discuss the reasons for your choice.

- (i) Was it Henry who brought in the groceries?
 - a. No, Fred brought the groceries in.
 - b. No, it was the groceries that Fred brought in.
 - c. No, what Fred brought in was the groceries.
 - d. No, it was Fred who brought the groceries in.
- (ii) Watching the house, Mack saw a car arrive.
 - a. The car turned into the driveway.
 - b. It was the driveway the car turned into.
 - c. What turned into the driveway was the car.
 - d. It was the car that turned into the driveway.
- (iii) I just want to know who made this coffee.
 - a. I made the coffee.
 - b. The coffee was made by me.
 - c. What was made by me was the coffee.
 - d. What I made was the coffee.
- (iv) Kelly picked up her jacket and walked out of the kitchen.
 - a. The hall was dark.
 - b. What was dark was the hall.
 - c. It was the hall that was dark.
 - d. It was dark, the hall.

9. For the following utterances decide whether the speaker provides any indication of their location, and if so, where they are (or are not):

- (a) "Go to the hospital."
- (b) "The astronauts are going back to Earth."
- (c) "Please don't bring food into the classroom."
- (d) "Can you take this plate into the kitchen for me?"

10. If I say to you, "Come over there, please!" while pointing to a far corner of the room (i.e. far from both of us), could you reasonably assume that I intend to move to that corner of the room as well?

11. If I say to you, over the telephone, "Can I come and see you some time?" do I probably have in mind a movement to the place where I am, or to the place where you are?

12. If Matthew said: "Mummy, Rosie hit me", when did Rosie hit Matthew, before, at, or after the time of Matthew's utterance?

13. If Rosie says: "Mummy, Matthew is writing on the living room wall", when is Matthew committing this deed, before, at, or after the time of Rosie's utterance?

14. If I say: "I'm going to call the Manager", when do I call the Manager?

15. Read the series of exchanges below and provide for each a likely implicature of B's reply. Discuss the contextual information and the reasons B might have for using an implicature rather than a simple statement.

- (i) A: Are you coming out for a drink tonight?
B: My in-laws are coming over for dinner.
- (ii) A: How did Liverpool play this afternoon?
B: Well, eleven guys wearing Liverpool shirts ran out onto the field.
- (iii) A: I'm going to tell those brats to stop jumping on the benches.
B: Do you have life insurance?
- (iv) A: Are you going to wear those jeans?
B: They're brand new. I just bought them.
- (v) A: A lot of people's jobs depend on your performance today.
B: Thanks, that really takes the pressure off.
- (vi) A: Does my smoking bother you?
B: I can't say that it doesn't.
- (vii) A: Where are you going?
B: Out.
- (viii) A: Would you like a beer?
B: Is the Pope Catholic?

Chapter 8

Miscellaneous concepts in semantics

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- figurative language in semantics
- extensional and intensional contexts: tense, aspect, modality
- perspective-sensitivity in semantics
- lexical and semantic fields

Key concepts: aspect, figurative language, modality, perspective-sensitivity, semantic field, tense

Figurative language in semantics

The concept of *figurative language* essentially refers to using words in a non-literal way; that is, in a way that moves away from the conventional order and meaning so as to convey a more complicated meaning, colorful writing, clarity, or comparison. Understanding figurative language is crucial for effective communication, and it overlaps with other concepts and ideas mentioned so far, such as the distinction between speaker meaning and word / sentence meaning, and connotation versus denotation, for example.

Figurative language can be contrasted with *literal language*, which describes something explicitly rather than by reference to something else. In that context, *figurative meaning* can be defined as the metaphorical, idiomatic, or ironic sense of a word or expression in contrast to its literal meaning.

Its importance lies in the fact that it can transform ordinary descriptions into evocative events, enhance the emotional significance of passages, and turn prose into a form of poetry. It can also help us to understand the underlying symbolism of a given scene or more fully recognize a particular literary theme. It compares things in order to give them more detail, and ultimately it helps us better understand what is being described.

One way to better understand figurative language is by studying semantics, the branch of linguistics focused on the study of meaning at the levels of words, phrases, sentences, and even larger units of discourse - texts. Collie and Slater (1987) note that there are four main reasons for the use of

figurative and metaphorical language, such as that it offers valuable authentic material, for cultural enrichment, for language enrichment, as well as for personal involvement, which can be sub-categorized under the cultural model, the language model and the personal growth development model, respectively.

Types of figurative language

Figurative language comes in many forms, and each is classed as a *figure of speech*, such as *simile*, *metaphor*, *personification*, *idiom*, *metonymy*, *synecdoche*, *hyperbole*, *irony*, *oxymoron*, *symbolism*, *alliteration*, *assonance*, *cliché*, *onomatopoeia*, among others. Some of these are more common than others, frequently appearing both in literature and in everyday conversation.

Linguistic analysis, especially of words and expressions, reveals underlying concepts, beliefs, and values. Thus, the analysis of figurative expression in language can expose underlying concepts as well as the culture of its speakers. There has been a movement from seeing figurative language as *figures of speech* to the broader term *figures of thought*. Though we would not be able to say that one figure of speech is more important than another, the section that follows will take a closer look at selected figures of speech, which are considered more significant from a semantic point of view.

Metaphor

A *metaphor* is a type of figurative language that makes a comparison between two things, which do not necessarily have to be alike, though they should make a link in the mind of the language user. It is formed when a word or phrase is used in a way that conflicts with its usual, i.e. literal meaning, so that part of its meaning is applied to a different semantic domain. In historical linguistics, a *metaphor* is defined as a semantic change based on a similarity in form or function between the original concept and the target concept named by a word. The semantic change involves *extensions*, i.e. expansions in the meaning of a word that suggest a semantic similarity or connection between the new sense and the original one.

Etymologically speaking, the origin of the term goes back to the 15th century, though there is no single root. *Metaphor* in English comes from the Old French *métaphore*, which, in turn, comes from the Latin *metaphora*, with the meaning *carrying over*. Furthermore, the Latin word comes from *metaphorá* in Greek, which means *to transfer*. Thus, the meaning of *metaphor* in all three of these languages is almost the same - *carrying over* and *transferring*

suggest taking the characteristic of an idea or an object and placing it on another by way of comparison.

In their *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson illustrated that everyday metaphors in a language are culturally as well as perceptually based.

Types of metaphors

Metaphors can be divided into four main types, with an additional two classifications, one of which is a combination of two commonly used ones, and the other is the result of overuse:

1. the *standard metaphor* states one idea is another, making a direct comparison as if the two ideas were synonyms, as in the example *Anna is my sunshine*, where Anna is directly called sunshine. Of course, Anna cannot be sunshine, so the reader has to deduce that Anna is as important to the writer's life as sunshine is;

2. the *implied metaphor* makes an implied comparison without ever making a direct comparison between two ideas, as in the example *The commander barked an order to the troops to stand alert*, where the commander's order is compared to that of a bark, suggesting it as harsh;

3. the *visual metaphor* compares something to a visual image of another, and is quite common in advertising where a product is visualized with another object, as for example, spicy Doritos being compared to fire. Visual metaphors can also compare something to another to give it a visual identity, such as, for example, *hope* being identified with the visual image of a *bird*;

4. the *extended metaphor* uses descriptive language to elaborate a comparison. It is the type of metaphor that may be found referenced throughout a stanza, a full poem, a couple of paragraphs, or an entire blog post. For example, *A post that explains how to use the Swiss cheese productivity method to get things done references food items throughout the piece: you start by taking a snack-able piece from your cheese block (the overwhelming project); you poke holes in the cheese chunk by continuously doing small tasks one at a time throughout your work day; you create so many holes in the cheese block that you finish it;*

5. the *mixed metaphor* is a combination of two commonly used metaphors, as in the example *Let's get all our ducks on the same page*, which combines *get on the same page* and *get our ducks in a row*;

6. the *dead metaphor*, which has been overused to the point that it has become a cliché. Since this type of metaphor has lost much of its impact due

to overuse, it is better to avoid using it. This can be exemplified with the metaphors *to have a heart of gold* and *there are plenty more fish in the sea*.

Metaphors can often be mixed up with some other figures of speech, namely with *simile* and with *analogy* because they are all literary terms that compare ideas and settings. A *metaphor* and a *simile*, a figure of speech that compares two objects or ideas using the words *like* and *as*, giving literal meaning of how they compare, can be differentiated from the prepositions found in the simile, which are not present in a metaphor.

In addition, metaphors and analogies both have to do with comparison. However, while a *metaphor* is a figure of speech, an *analogy* is a logical argument that elaborates on the resemblance between two things. They can be told apart by noting how much explanation surrounds the comparison. An *analogy*, on one hand, is word-friendly; it explains exactly what it is comparing. A *metaphor*, on the other hand, is concise and allows room for thinking about potential point(s) of comparison between two ideas or concepts.

Metonymy

Metonymy comes from the Greek word *metōnymía*, which translates to ‘change of name.’ It is a figure of speech in which an object or idea is referred to by the name of something closely associated with it, as opposed to by its own name.

Metonymy is used frequently in writing. A common example is when a building is used metonymically to stand for the people who work in it, as in *The White House is worried about* In fact, it is not the building that is worried about anything, but rather the people in it. This is an example of a *conventional type of metonymy*, whose meaning can be easily understood. *Unconventional metonymy*, on the other hand, is usually more vague and can only be understood with reference to the context, as, for example, in the sentence *Ferraris never have any trouble finding romantic partners*, which means that the type of person who owns a Ferrari will always be in demand as a romantic partner. In one definition *metonymy* is explained as an aspect of something that stands for or comes to represent that thing as a whole.

In addition, the phrase *the pen is mightier than the sword* contains two examples of metonymy - *pen* and *sword* are everyday words, but when substituted for *written words* and *military force*, respectively, their meaning becomes much more symbolic. This analysis, in fact, may illustrate why the concepts of metonymy and metaphor may be easily confused, as both are non-literal and are found through the discovery of some aspect shared by the source and the target.

The difference between the two concepts essentially lies in that a *metaphor* is considered a substitution of one concept with another, while *metonymy* associates one concept with another. As such, we can make the following summary in connection with the two terms: a *metaphor substitutes*, while *metonymy associates*; a metaphor can be taken to indicate condensation and metonymy can be taken to indicate displacement; both metaphor and metonymy suppress and combine ideas respectively, and the former is based on similarity, while the latter is based on juxtaposition.

We may conclude the metaphor and metonymy sections above by noting that both concepts are figures of speech used in analogy. A *metaphor* is an expression which shows similarity between two things, while *metonymy* is a figure of speech which refers to a thing not by name but by an associated word. It is a relationship based on continuity. While a metaphor is a conceptual view which presents ideas as objects, metonymy presents a notable connection between two concepts.

Irony

The concept of *irony* is central in the study of meaning in language. It may be analyzed from different theoretical perspectives, and it may be encountered in a range of disciplines such as semantics, pragmatics, philosophy, and literary studies. In addition, the concept of irony opens up a number of directions of study, as for example, the cross-cultural misunderstandings it may result in, as well as debates on such issues as to whether irony is always negative, or funny; the reasons why speakers communicate via irony, and which strategies they usually use; and how irony and sarcasm differ, among others.

Broadly set, *irony* can be defined as a characterization of a situation which reveals that what on the surface appears to be the case contrasts substantially with what is actually the case. Basically, this refers to, as the *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines it, “a situation in which something which was intended to have a particular result has the opposite or a very different result.” The most common purpose of irony is to create humor and/or point out the absurdity of life; it is used for humorous or emphatic effect, and it essentially plays with the listener’s expectations.

Types of irony

Generally speaking, there are three main types of irony, such as *verbal*, *situational*, and *dramatic*.

Verbal irony refers to the use of words to mean something different than what they appear to mean, and it may be found in a variety of situations, such as in general conversation, in the media, and in literature. Verbal irony may be used to make a situation more light-hearted, to express a double entendre, that is, a phrase that can be understood in two different ways, or to poke fun at a situation. It is interesting to note that though verbal irony is often thought to be synonymous with sarcasm, this is not the case, as *sarcasm* is only one of the common types of verbal irony.

As such, *verbal irony* can appear in four basic forms: 1. *sarcasm*, for example, saying “Oh, fantastic!” when the situation is actually very bad; 2. *Socratic irony*, for example, pretending to be ignorant to show that someone else is ignorant, as in “I’m confused, I thought your curfew was at 11pm. Isn’t it past midnight now?”; 3. *understatement*, for example, “We don’t get along” after having a huge fight with someone; and 4. *overstatement*, for example, “I’ll die if I can’t go to the concert!”

Situational irony expresses the difference between what is expected to happen and what actually happens; it occurs when something happens that is completely different from what was expected. Usually these instances incorporate some type of contradiction and a certain level of surprise or shock. Some examples of situational irony are, for example, in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, when Dorothy and her friends look for external forces to help them get what they need, but discover that they have always had what they needed; or when a person works hard for decades, spending very little in order to save money for retirement and then the week before retiring, the person unexpectedly dies.

Dramatic irony is a frequently used literary technique, especially with an omniscient narrator, and it is when the audience is more aware of what is happening than a character. As such, it can create suspense, as the audience waits to see if the character will realize what is happening before it is too late. It serves to heighten the audience’s anticipation, hopes or fears, and as readers wait to see when the main character will ‘catch on’, suspense is building up and the pages are turning. Some examples of dramatic irony are, for example, when a novel’s heroine visits her favorite café every day from 11am to 1pm. Her brother’s best friend knows this and is trying to find a way to ask her out on a date. The day he gets up the courage to go to the café, she is not there. The reader knows that she is ill, but her brother’s best friend does not. Another example is when a woman thinks her boyfriend is about to break up with her because he has been acting distracted and distant. The readers know that he has bought her an engagement ring and is nervous that she will not accept his marriage proposal. He calls her one afternoon and simply says, “I need to

see you. Meet me at Columbus Square at six.” She is sure that he is going to break up with her, but when she arrives, she sees that he has set up a romantic proposal with dozens of roses, and a huge diamond ring.

In the context of *dramatic irony*, we may note that it is, in fact, a specific form of *structural irony*, which occurs when the structure of something shows the incompatibility between what people think has occurred and what has actually occurred. This is clear when writers use unreliable narrators or when narrators are particularly naive. An example of structural irony can be seen in JD Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* or in F Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.

In this section, we can also mention two more types of irony in addition to the main types noted above, and they are *Socratic irony* and *cosmic irony*.

Socratic irony, which can be seen as a sub-type of verbal irony, is related to the Socratic method used in teaching, where the goal of questioning students in education is to encourage them to engage in critical thinking. In this case, however, the goal is pretending to be ignorant on a topic and asking someone questions as a way to get them to expose their own ignorance or flaws in reasoning. This technique is commonly used in satire, and is illustrated, for example, when Sacha Baron Cohen’s satirical characters such as Ali G and Borat act stupid to highlight the ignorance and stupidity of those they talk to; or when parents pretend not to know that their child has dented the car, so they ask them a series of seemingly innocent questions that eventually lead to their child confessing.

Cosmic irony can be attributed to misfortune associated with fate or chance. The outcomes do not result from the characters’ actions, so it seems that an outside force has played a part in the situation, as for example when a classroom bully who picks on overweight classmates throughout childhood ends up obese in later life, or when the most introverted girl is convinced that boys will not be interested in her and will prefer her more outgoing friends, and then becomes the first in her group to get invited to a big dance. This type of irony is often seen in situations that can be described as *karma*, in which a person is seen as getting their due, i.e. there is a positive outcome as a result of previous difficulties, or a negative outcome related to previous negative actions.

The diagram that follows can be used when analyzing whether a given text is ironic, and the type of irony used.

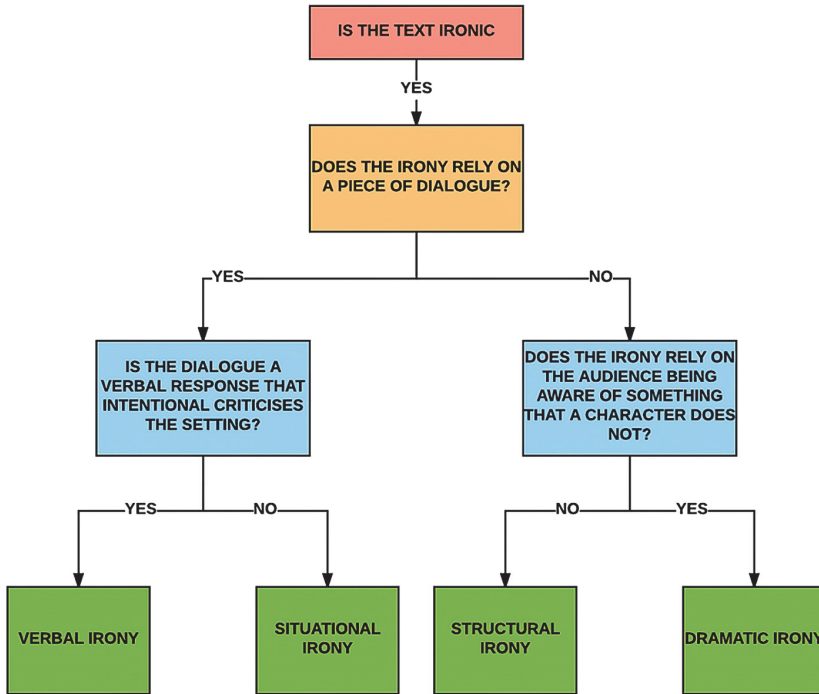


Figure 1. How to analyze irony

Irony versus sarcasm

As mentioned earlier, *sarcasm* is a type of *verbal irony*. However, the two concepts are rather similar and, as a result, it is easy to get them confused. There is one distinct difference between *irony* and *sarcasm* that can help us differentiate them, and that is *negativity*. Sarcasm is typically witty mockery, and therefore it has a negative connotation, whereas verbal irony does not. Thus, we can compare the two in the following example:

Verbal irony: a mother saying, “I quite enjoy muddy paw prints on my new white carpet.”

Sarcasm: a mother-in-law saying to that same mother, “White was a fabulous choice for your new carpet. It goes great with two kids and three dogs.”

Thus, with verbal irony, it is ironic because muddy paw prints are never enjoyed on a white carpet. Instead the opposite is true, they are frustrating and a mess. However, sarcasm is making a cutting or sneering remark about buying a white carpet with children and pets. Essentially, *irony* is the opposite of what would be expected, whereas *sarcasm* carries a condescending tone meant to embarrass or insult someone.

Extensional and intensional contexts: tense, aspect, modality

Tense, aspect, and modality are considered to be *semantic categories* rather than morphological ones, as they are connected more to the meaning of the sentence than the morphology of it, which has to do with linguistic forms. Essentially, *tense* and *aspect* are about how situations - events and states - are placed in time, and *modality* has to do with whether something is possible or necessary.

Tense

Tense is a relationship between the interval of time being talked about and the time of speaking. A crucial notion in this context would be *reference time* (RT), i.e. the interval of time being talked about, which can be before, during, or after *speech time* (ST), and these correspond to past, present, and future. Past tense, for example, would mean that there is an interval of time we are talking about (RT) that precedes the time of speaking (ST).

For example, the question *Did John turn off the light?* is not asking whether there was any point in the past that John turned off the light, but rather, it is asking whether John turned off the light at a specific time in the past, whatever time we might happen to be discussing (or referring to) in the context. Thus, *tense* is a relationship between the speech time and the time we are discussing, i.e. the reference time, and not a relationship between the speech time and the *event time* (ET).

The question above assumes there is a specific time, the RT, prior to the ST that we are discussing. If we are talking about what happened this past Tuesday before John left the house, we cannot respond with *Yes, he turned off the light in 2012*. Though, if tense were a simple relationship between the ST and the ET, we actually could truthfully respond with such an answer since all we would need would be one instance of John turning off the light, the ET, prior to the ST rather than how we actually understand the sentence - as whether that event took place within a specific RT we are discussing, in this case last Tuesday.

Aspect

Aspect has to do with how the event relates to the time we are discussing. In other words, it is the relationship between the RT and the ET. This is often described as how the speaker chooses to portray the event, since they may choose to discuss only part of the event or the entire event, for

example. There are three main aspects often discussed: *perfective*, *imperfective*, and *perfect*.

Perfective aspect is when the speaker is referring to the entire event; that is, both the beginning and end of the event are included within the time being discussed. An example of this is the sentence *John ate dinner*, which normally means that John both started and ended his dinner in the time we are discussing.

Imperfective aspect is when the speaker is referring to part of the event, which is usually formed with *be + -ing*, as in *John was eating dinner*. Thus, the speaker might be discussing what happened between 5:15 pm and 5:30 pm, where they might say *John was eating dinner*, but this way of describing the event suggests that John started before 5:15 pm and ended after 5:30 pm; he might have actually been eating between 5:10 pm and 5:40 pm. As such, the speaker is only discussing a part of John's mealtime.

Perfect aspect is usually described as a prior situation with some kind of current relevance. Just like perfective and imperfective aspect, it can be described in temporal terms. Since the relevance of the event comes after the time of the event, the perfect simply means that the RT follows the ET. This would be expressed with the use of *have + past participle*, as in *John has eaten*. This means that the prior event of John eating is relevant in some way to the current discussion, since the RT is in the present.

Aspect can also be distinguished into *grammatical aspect*, which has to do with how temporal relations are seen in the grammar, usually through things like suffixes, and *lexical aspect*, which involves temporal and qualitative characteristics of events themselves that verbs refer to.

Modality

Modality has to do with what is possible or necessary and not the 'here and now'. It is a semantic category that is not unique to verbs. *Adjectives* like *imaginary*, for example, are also modal since the word deals with something that is possible. *Auxiliary verbs* like *might* and *must* are modal as well, the former expressing that something is possible and the latter that something is necessary, as in *John might be washing the dishes* as opposed to *John must finish his homework*. The category of modality is used to analyze things like habituais, future, and the subjunctive within verbal systems.

Mood is another concept that may be found within this category, and though it may be used in a variety of different ways in the literature, the most important for the semantics of verbs is what is termed *verbal mood*. This category refers to moods like the *subjunctive*, *imperative*, and *optative*.

Perspective-sensitivity in semantics

Many kinds of linguistic expressions in language are *perspective-sensitive* in the sense that their meanings refer to the perspectives under which they are used. These expressions are known as *perspective-sensitive items* (PSIs), that is, items or expressions that depend on the mental and spatial perspectives of certain individuals, such as relative locative and socio-cultural expressions (*to/on the left, to/on the right, leftward, rightward, forward, backward, in front, in back, behind, across, nearby, close by, distant, remote, local, regional, clockwise, up, down, upstream, downstream, uphill, downhill, upwind, downwind, around the corner, within reach, outbound, inbound, come, go, approach*), subjective predicates, which include vague predicates (gradable adjectives in the positive form: *tall, long, short, wide, narrow, old, young, clean, dirty*) and predicates of personal tastes (PPTs) (*interesting, boring, fun, tasty, beautiful*), epistemic modals and evidentials (*might, may, possibly, likely*), among others.

Words whose meaning depends on context are classified as *context-dependent items*, and *perspective-sensitivity* is seen as a sub-type of *context-dependence*. In everyday communication, we are constantly confronted with perspective, whether it is by *spatial expressions* such as *left* or *right*, *socio-cultural nouns* such as *foreigner* or *alien*, or *subjective predicates* such as *tasty, fun, pretty*. What these expressions have in common is the feature that their meaning and interpretation depend on someone's perspective or point of view.

This may be exemplified by looking at the following utterance provided in this context:

Two children, a girl and a boy, are standing on the opposite side of a table. On the table, there are two kittens and the children are trying to decide which one to take home as their pet. The girl says: The kitten on the *left* is *prettier*.

If we were to determine which kitten the girl is referring to, it would be natural to say that *the kitten on the left* means the kitten from the girl's perspective, and, if the boy, from where he is standing, had uttered the same sentence, then he would be referring to the other kitten, i.e. the kitten on the left from his perspective.

In addition to this, but now regarding the adjective *pretty*, let us assume that what the girl said was true. What would happen, again, if the boy uttered the same sentence? Obviously, it would seem logical to assume that he would be referring to the kitten on the left from where he is standing. Basically, both of them would be referring to a different kitten, describing it as the prettier one, which certainly makes their utterances contradict each other.

Thus, we may conclude that the sentence the girl uttered contains two *perspective-sensitive items*: *left* and *prettier*. The former is sensitive to the physical perspective of the speaker, whereas the latter to the aesthetic preferences of the speaker. A dilemma that arises at this point is which utterance should be considered true in this case, since both speakers are expressing something they believe is true from their perspective, although it is clear that the utterances contradict one another.

Given these points, *perspective-sensitive items* (PSIs) can be defined as items whose meaning is sensitive to the mental or physical perspective of a certain individual, and the speakers of the utterance are considered to be the *perspective center* (PC). However, this may not always be the case, and in some cases the PC can shift to someone else other than the speaker.

Lexical and semantic fields

The terms *lexical field* and *semantic field* both refer to the way vocabulary can be organized or classified, and though they are usually used interchangeably, in *Colour and Language: Colour Terms in English* (1992), Siegfried Wyler makes the distinction that a *lexical field* is “a structure formed by lexemes”, while a *semantic field* is “the underlying meaning which finds expression in lexemes.” David Crystal (1995) defines the term *semantic field* as “a named area of meaning in which lexemes interrelate and define each other in specific ways”, while linguist Adrienne Lehrer (1985) defines the concept of *semantic field* more specifically as “a set of lexemes which cover a certain conceptual domain and which bear certain specifiable relations to one another.”

Essentially, the term *lexical field* refers to vocabulary that is related by topic, as, for example, the words *rain*, *windy*, *fog*, *cold*, *clouds*, *umbrella*, *rain*, *sunshine*, *storm* and *stormy* can be grouped in the *lexical field of the weather*.

On the other hand, classification or grouping vocabulary into *semantic fields* has to do with *meaning* rather than *topic*, and here we would typically have synonyms or antonyms, as well as other possible relationships. In this context, the words *big*, *large*, *huge*, *enormous*, *tiny*, *small* would be part of the *semantic field of size*.

There is a great deal of overlapping between the two terms, and this may result in some confusion, especially bearing in mind the fact that the term *semantic field*, since it is closely connected to the concept of *meaning*, is inarguably somewhat elastic. We can even go one step further and say that *animals* and *plants* are two different semantic fields, or we can even group them together into one larger field called *living things*, which can then be subdivided into smaller groups called *lexical sets* or *sub-fields*.

Numerous attempts have been made to classify the words and concepts in language. The most influential and noteworthy work is the *Thesaurus* by Peter Mark Roget, which was first published by Longman in 1892. Roget divided the vocabulary into six main areas, namely *abstract relations*, *space matter*, *intellect*, *volition*, and *affections*, with each area being given a thorough and exhaustive sub-classification, resulting in 1,000 semantic categories in total.

Words can be analyzed in terms of their *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic relationships*, a distinction first made by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. According to this analysis, the use of language has two dimensions which are activated simultaneously. Thus, when forming a sentence, we make choices from existing *paradigms* (signs that can replace each other, typically substituted by another of the same category; for example, a noun is replaced by a noun, and a verb by a verb), and we arrange them in *syntagmatic relationships* (a sequence of signs that create meaning as a whole; for example, words which make up sentences, sentences which make up paragraphs, paragraphs which make up chapters).

The most important *paradigmatic relationships* - synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy - are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

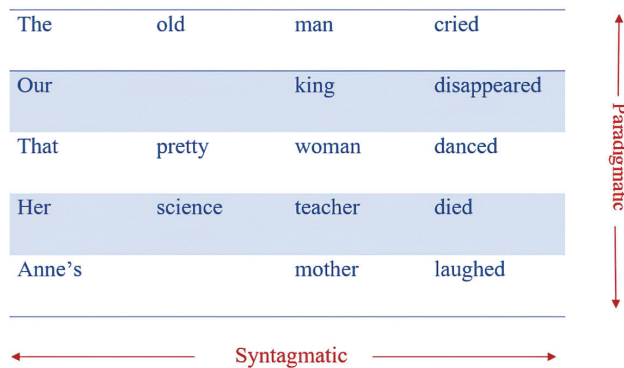


Figure 2. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. Identify the type of *irony* in the examples below, and discuss the reasons for your answer:

(a) A man buys a gun to protect his home. During a break-in, an unarmed intruder wrestles the gun from the homeowner and shoots him with his own gun.

(b) An ambulance driver speeds to the scene of a road accident. The victim is not badly hurt. As the driver arrives at the scene, another car smashes into the ambulance causing it to hit the victim's car and set off the air-bag, which causes more injury to the victim than the first accident.

(c) The *Story of an Hour* by Kate Chopin tells the tale of a wife who learned her husband was dead. She felt a sense of freedom, thinking about her new life out from under his thumb. Suddenly, the husband returns (he was never dead) and she dies of shock.

(d) A writer is working on a comedy. The weather has been depressing, making it difficult to write funny scenes. Upon opening the blinds to see dark clouds outside again, the writer says, "Great. Another rainy day. How wonderful."

(e) A woman's giant dog insists on sitting on her when she relaxes on the sofa. The dog climbs on her and she says, "I'm so glad I have such a *tiny little lap dog*."

(f) A girl finishes a huge meal only to have her friend show up with a pizza for the two of them to share. The girl says, "Wow, *perfect timing*."

(g) "I just love watching the same cartoon 12 times every day. It's such a *delight*."

(h) "Oh no, I *couldn't possibly* eat another piece of cake." That's what my aunt said as she picked up another piece of cake and started eating it.

(i) In *Twilight*, Edward is convinced that he is putting Bella in danger when readers know that she is actually in grave danger from others that only Edward can protect her from.

(j) In *Macbeth*, Macbeth appears to be loyal to Duncan; however, he is actually plotting Duncan's murder. Duncan does not know this, though the audience does.

(k) In *Animal Farm*, the animals believe Boxer was sent to the hospital while the readers know all along that the pigs actually sold him to the slaughter house.

(l) The fire chief's house burning down.

(m) Saying, "It's a great time to go for a swim," during the winter.

(n) A hero shares his undying love for a heroine in a note that falls under a desk. The hero assumes the heroine does not return his feelings.

(o) A hair stylist having a bad haircut.

(p) A group of young men giving their friend, who is afraid of heights, a bungee jumping voucher. The friend says, "Oh, I *can't* wait."

(q) A vet who is afraid of dogs.

2. Distinguish whether the examples below illustrate *irony* or *sarcasm*, and discuss the reasons for your answer:

(a) Dinner rehearsal: “Yes, because we can’t practice eating enough, can we?”

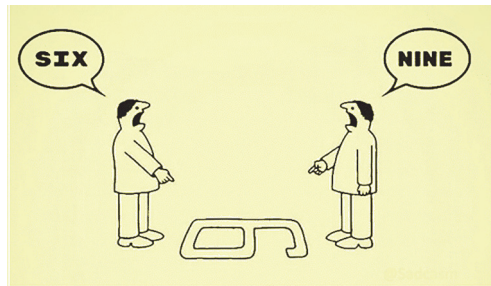
(b) Someone makes an obvious remark: “Really, I never knew you were that clever!”

(c) To a boy with too much body spray: “That’s a lovely scent, did you bathe in it?”

(d) After someone has made a mistake: “You did a brilliant job.”

(e) Self-deprecating: “I bought a boat right before deciding to move to Nevada. I’m a genius.”

3. How would you explain the following situation from a *perspective-sensitivity* aspect?



4. Think of other examples that would illustrate the concept of *perspective-sensitivity*, and explain them.

Chapter 9

New frontiers in semantics

Learning objectives: *after completing this chapter, you will know more about:*

- semantics and other linguistic studies
- interdisciplinary approaches to semantics
- open issues

Key concepts: pragmatics, semantic memory, semantic technology, semiotics, syntax

Semantics and other linguistic studies

Semantics plays a crucial role in understanding how language works. It is an integral part of the study of language, and it works together with other branches to help us get a more complete picture of the phenomenon that is language. We would not be able to say which branch is more important than the others, as they each complement each other, and are inter-related.

Below we shall take a closer look at some of the branches of linguistics that semantics is particularly connected to, and note their similarities and differences.

Semantics and pragmatics

The *semantics-pragmatics interface* studies issues such as anaphora, presuppositions, implicatures, and rhetorical structure, among others.

Both semantics and pragmatics are branches of linguistics that look at meaning within language, where *semantics* studies the meaning of words and sentences, and *pragmatics* studies the same words and meaning but within context. Semantics is limited to the relationship between words, whereas pragmatics covers the relationships between words, people, and contexts.

While they are closely connected in that they both study meaning, there are, nevertheless, some differences that exist between them. *Semantics* studies the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, and larger chunks of discourse, and it also examines how smaller parts of discourse interact to form the meaning of larger expressions. *Pragmatics*, on the other hand, studies the same words and meaning but places an emphasis on social context.

Essentially, semantics looks at the literal meaning of words and the meanings that are created by the relationships between linguistic expressions, while pragmatics, though it examines how meaning is created, pays more attention to context. It recognizes how important context can be when interpreting the meaning of discourse and it also considers things such as *irony*, *metaphors*, *idioms*, and *implied meanings*.

If we were to semantically look at the sentence *I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse*, we would observe the literal meaning created by these words and would assume that this person wants to eat a horse. However, from a pragmatics perspective, we will consider the context and what the speaker is trying to imply. Do they actually want to eat a horse or are they just saying they are very hungry? Is the speaker just making a general comment or are they dropping a hint that they want to be fed?

Thus, analyzing the sentence semantically would be limited more to the relationship between words, while analyzing it pragmatically would cover the relationships between words, interlocutors, i.e. the people engaged in the conversation, and contexts.

Semantics is what gives meaning to idioms and phrases or words that have predetermined connotative meanings that cannot be deduced from their literal meaning. In that context, the literal meaning of the word *white*, for example, is a color without a hue. However, if we were to look at the idiomatic phrases *white lie* and *white noise*, we would see that in neither of these uses does the word *white* refer to color, and yet we all know what they mean. Furthermore, people over a certain age would recognize the symbol # as the *number sign (hash)*, while younger people would probably call this a *hashtag* - a symbol used to group topics on social media. In both of these examples, the meaning is all in the semantics.

Pragmatics looks beyond the literal meaning of words and utterances and focuses on how meaning is constructed within context. When we communicate with other people, there is a constant negotiation of meaning between the listener and the speaker. Pragmatics looks at this negotiation and aims to understand what people mean when they use language, and how they communicate with each other. It looks at the difference between the literal meaning of words and their intended meaning within social contexts, and, as such, we may say that it takes a more practical approach to understanding the construction of meaning within language.

From a pragmatics perspective, we may look at the example below in the following way:

You are late to work, and your boss says: "What time do you call this?!" in an angry voice. By examining the context and your boss's tone of voice, you

can easily infer that your boss does not want to know the time but actually wants to know why you are late.

Another example would be the following:

It is date night for you and your partner. You ask your partner where you are going for dinner, and they say: “Oh, I don't know, McDonalds?” You respond: “How romantic!” From a pragmatics perspective, it can be inferred that you do not actually think a date to McDonalds is romantic - you are being ironic.

Implicature, coined by British philosopher of language H. P. Grice in 1975, is an important concept in the study of pragmatics, though it may also make an appearance in semantics as well. It is an utterance that implies or suggests something without it being explicitly said. It may be illustrated with the following example:

“It's cold in here, isn't it?” (looking toward an open window)

The speaker has not asked for anything to be done, but as the window is wide open, it would be safe to assume that they would like it closed. In this case, the utterance is an example of implicature because the speaker never explicitly asked for the window to be closed; it was implied instead. That same sentence above may be analyzed semantically as well, in which case the speaker would be asking for confirmation that the room is, in fact, cold.

Or, in the situation below, where you pick up the phone and call your favorite restaurant, and have the following dialogue:

You: “Hi, do you have any tables free this Saturday?”

Restaurant manager: “Yes, we do.”

You put down the phone.

What happened here is that semantically you asked if they had any tables, and they gave you a literal answer. However, when we involve pragmatics, it can be inferred that you wanted to reserve a table for this Saturday.

In conclusion, we may say that both semantics and pragmatics are crucial in our study of language and meaning, as, after all, what is the point of language without meaning?

Semantics and semiotics

The term *semantics* derives from the Greek word for *sign*, and *semiotics*, or *semiology*, in general, is the study of signs, symbols and signification. It is all about studying how meaning is created, rather than knowing what it is. The very basic principle of semiotics lies in the assumption that meaning is made by the use of acts and objects which function as ‘signs’ in relation to

other signs. As Roland Barthes explains it in his *Elements of Semiology*, “Semiotics takes in any system of signs, be it images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment.”

Comparing the two - semantics and semiotics - we may say that *semantics* is the part of linguistics that cares about the meaning of utterances, whereas *semiotics* (semiology) is an extension of linguistics that does general research and classification of signs, including but not restricting to, utterances in language.

Semiotics is the language of signs. Signs, not including words, are nonetheless informative and we have become so accustomed to them that we need no accompanying explanations. What is going on around the sign is usually as important for us to know as the sign itself in order to interpret its meaning. Semiotics is a key tool to ensure that the intended meaning of a piece of communication or a new product is clearly and unambiguously understood by the person on the receiving end.

For example, we do not require words to explain these signs; we know what they mean, so this is semiotics at work in our everyday lives:



Picture 1. Signs found in everyday life

Semantics is the branch of linguistics and logic concerned with meaning, and with the analysis of word meanings and the relations between them. *Semiotics* does the same for signs. Semantics involves the deconstruction of words, signals, and sentence structure; it influences our reading comprehension, as well as our comprehension of other people’s words in everyday conversation. Undoubtedly, it plays a large part in our daily communication, understanding, and language learning without us even realizing it. For example, in everyday use, a child might make use of semantics to understand their mother’s instruction to “do your chores” as, “do your chores whenever you feel like it.” However, the mother was probably saying, “do your chores right now.” Thus, semantics studies the meaning of language, and semiotics is much like it, but it also includes non-linguistic symbols (signs) and how their meaning is formed and conveyed.

Essentially, we may note that *semiotics*, i.e. the study or theory of signs, is the general concept, while semantics, as well as syntax and pragmatics are particular aspects of semiotics, where *semantics* refers to relationships between signs and the things they stand for; *syntax* refers to the relationships signs have to other signs; and *pragmatics* refers to the relationships between signs and their users.

Semantics and syntax

Syntax refers to the set of rules that allow language users to create an infinite number of sentences that are grammatically correct and valid, whereas *semantics* is the meaning behind the words that makes many of those sentences significant and relevant. Neither syntax nor semantics is more important than the other, as both work together to create accurate sentences that have meaning. Words become meaningful when syntax and semantics are combined; the syntax of a language provides the rules necessary for the structure, while the semantics of the language provides the meaning. Together, these two terms, syntax and semantics, allow language users to convey and interpret meaning. The English language lexicon has so many words that language users have an infinite number of combinations they can make, but human language requires these combinations to have meaning, hence, the importance of these two studies to work together.

Syntax refers to the set of rules that create sentence structure, and these can also be called *grammar* or *grammatical rules*. These rules state that the subject typically precedes the predicate, and that adverbs describe adjectives, verbs and other adverbs, for example; essentially, the overall grammatical structure of sentences and how words within sentences relate to each other. *Semantics* refers to the study of the meaning of those words, phrases, sentences. Sometimes, grammatically correct words may not make sense, and it is semantics that helps to add the layer of meaning so that words do make sense.

The *syntax-semantics interface* deals with issues such as quantification, anaphora, tense and aspect, and thematic roles, among others.

Because languages are always evolving, semantics can change. The word *sweet*, for example, can mean both a flavor that is the opposite of savory, and something that is amazing or awesome, depending on the context. Thus, semantics is rarely context-free because the surrounding words in the phrase, sentence or paragraph have a direct impact on meaning. Semantics may be a little harder to show because it refers to meaning, but like syntax it does have some rules. For example, we may say *The cat chased the mouse* and *The mouse*

chased the cat, and both sentences would be considered grammatically correct. However, the rules of semantics affect the meaning of the sentence, and, thus, these two sentences create rather different visual images.

Interdisciplinary approaches to semantics

Semantics helps our ability to understand the relationship between things, as well as to analyze and categorize the world around us, giving our knowledge some kind of order. The desire to better understand semantics and meaning has opened an interdisciplinary debate which involves various fields, from psychology to philosophy, linguistics, and others.

Semantics is crucial because of the way it allows linguists and academics to link language to the other disciplines that it is important in. It provides a framework to analyze and understand the use of language even in the context of fields outside the strictly linguistic area of study. Meaning is all around us, and as semantics is the study of meaning, it is inevitable that there are numerous interdisciplinary approaches that it can be paired up with. The section below takes a closer look at various fields, apart from the linguistic ones, that semantics can crop up in and be analyzed in greater detail.

Semantics in literature

Semantics plays a significant role in our ability to understand and interpret literary works, as we need to be able to grasp both the individual meaning of words and their relationship to their context.

Conceptual semantics, for example, focuses on connotative and denotative meaning, and, as such, it allows readers to process literary devices like *figurative language*, *figures of speech*, and various types of *imagery*, such as *metaphor*, *simile* and *personification*.

For example, in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, the sequel to the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice and Humpty Dumpty have the following exchange, which illustrates an interesting aspect of conceptual semantics.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

Humpty Dumpty intends his words to be interpreted for their *denotative meaning* only, while Alice is suggesting alternate interpretations, some of

which may be *connotative*, based on emotions, thoughts, and experiences people may associate with words beyond their strict dictionary definition.

Furthermore, Nikki Giovanni, in her poem “Nikki Rossa”, writes the following:

and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they'll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy

In this excerpt we see an example of *cross-cultural semantics*. Giovanni talks about how someone might misinterpret stories of her childhood and imagine that her life was difficult, rather than understanding that, for Giovanni and her family, they were rich with love.

Lexical semantics enables readers to interpret elements such as tone based on diction, context, and the writer's choice of which symbols they use as markers for punctuation. For example, in Vladimir Nabokov's famous novel *Lolita*, we come across the narrator, Humbert Humbert, describing his mother's death in the following way:

My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three, and, save for a pocket of warmth in the darkest past, nothing of her subsists within the hollows and dells of memory, over which, if you can still stand my style (I am writing under observation), the sun of my infancy had set: surely, you all know those redolent remnants of day suspended, with the midges, about some hedge in bloom or suddenly entered and traversed by the rambler, at the bottom of a hill, in the summer dusk; a furry warmth, golden midges.

Here, lexical semantics allows the reader to notice how curtly Humbert describes the death of his mother, which he isolates as two words only contained within brackets. The novel has already revealed that this narrator is talkative; even the rest of this sentence is lengthy and full of digressions. The fact that Humbert Humbert reveals such an important, and undoubtedly deeply traumatic event in such a brief and concise manner reveals his inability to deal with painful experiences.

Semantics in philosophy

A number of crucial insights into the use of language in communication and reasoning have emerged from work at the interface of *formal semantics* and *philosophy*. It goes without saying that language plays an important role in the quest for truth, the main aim of philosophy, as it serves the purpose of conveying our thoughts to others.

Philosophy is related to semantics because philosophers are interested in foundational issues in semantics, and this is because these refer to the nature of meaning, as it is embedded in our thinking and in our relations to each other and to the world.

Philosophical semantics can be generally divided into two different approaches to the problem of meaning - the *logical empiricist position* and the *ordinary language position*, where the former refers to a philosophical movement that arose in Vienna in the 1920s and was characterized by the view that scientific knowledge is the only kind of factual knowledge and that all traditional metaphysical doctrines are to be rejected as meaningless, and the latter is a philosophical methodology that sees traditional philosophical problems as rooted in misunderstandings philosophers develop by distorting or forgetting how words are ordinarily used to convey meaning in non-philosophical contexts.

Semantics in psychology

Semantics in psychology is important because the study of the way language is used is very important in psychology. Semantics within psychology is the study of how meaning is stored in the mind. *Semantic memory* is a type of long-term declarative memory that refers to facts or ideas which are not immediately drawn from personal experience. It was first theorized in 1972 by W. Donaldson and Endel Tulving.

According to Sanford (2006), *psychological semantics* looks at “how human users of language come to be able to understand what utterances in a language mean. As such, it is also concerned with the question of how the meanings of words are represented in the mind”. The earliest views of word meaning assumed that words were represented as sets of features, and theories based on this idea could explain a number of phenomena of comprehension. When real language in use is considered, it soon becomes clear that such a view has shortcomings, and more recent views attempt to ground the meanings of words in how people interact with the world. Meaning depends not just on how words are defined, but on what words, and the phrases and clauses

in which they appear, reflect about our knowledge of the world and how to interact with it.

Memory is an important concept in psychology, as it refers to the psychological processes of acquiring, storing, retaining, and later retrieving information. Three major processes are involved in memory: encoding, storage, and retrieval, with human memory involving the ability to both preserve and recover information. In that context, the term *semantic memory* refers to the memory of meaning, understanding, general knowledge about the world, and other concept-based knowledge unrelated to specific experiences. It is a category of long-term memory that involves the recollection of ideas, concepts and facts commonly regarded as general knowledge, such as factual information like grammar and algebra, knowing that grass is green, recalling that Paris is the capital of France and that California is a state, knowing how to use scissors, understanding how to put words together to form a sentence, recognizing the names of colors, remembering what a dog is, knowing how to use the phone, and so on.

Semantics and language acquisition

Linguists gain an understanding of how language is learned through an understanding of semantics. Because *semantics* is the study of the meaning of words, the study of this discipline is closely related to *language acquisition*. Students learn language at first by the replication of sounds for verbal speech, and images for written. Eventually, however, those sounds and images need to be assigned meaning, which is where semantics comes in. People learn the meaning of words in a basic fashion at first, but then as facility with a language grows, more complex meanings emerge. Semantics explains the various types of meaning that exist within a language, providing insight into how a person builds ability and understanding with that language.

Semantics is critical to a language because without it there would be no real structure to a language. Without the basic, intrinsic understanding of semantics that comes along with language acquisition, speakers could string words together in any order they wanted, and listeners would have a very hard time deriving meaning from those sentences. Semantics provides speakers with a structure to use when they need to slot words into sentences, creating meaning.

The study of semantics is an important area of word meaning, references, senses, logic, and perlocutions and illocutions. In that context, the study of semantics is important in (foreign) language acquisition as it increases students' understanding and awareness of word meaning, sentence relation-

ships, and discourse and context. It also enables students to create and improve their *semantics maps*, which are basically webs of words that visually display the meaning-based connections between a word or a phrase and a set of related words or concepts. Using these mechanisms of meaning is not only crucial to successful human communication, but the lexical development will help to strengthen the students' understanding of language meaning and sense relations, and ultimately improve their (foreign) language skills.

Semantics and communication

The relationship between *semantics* and *communication* is very important in that it can make a difference between mutual comprehension and understanding, or confusion.

For example, we may have the following situation: one friend of mine believes in God, but not the same concept of God that another friend believes in, and they argue about this continually. The problem is they each have a different concept of God, so their communication never gets anywhere and goes round and round in circles because they are basically talking about two different things. The word *God* in this instance, has a different meaning for each friend, so when they argue, they are not arguing about the same thing. This is semantics at work.

Another crucial point in the *semantics-communication interface* is that of *artificial intelligence* (AI), as it is starting to play an increasingly important role in the evolution from traditional communication technologies to the future. *Semantic communication* is one of the emerging communication paradigms, which works based on its innovative 'semantic-meaning passing' concept. The core of semantic communication is to extract the 'meanings' of sent information at a transmitter, and with the help of a matched knowledge base between a transmitter and a receiver, the semantic information can be 'interpreted' successfully at a receiver. Thus, semantic communication, essentially, is a communication scheme based largely on AI; a set of semantic techniques for conveying meanings understandable by both people and machines so that they can interact.

Semantics is important in communication because it explains the various types of meaning that exist within a language, allowing insight into how a person builds ability and understanding with that language. As enabling communication is one of the primary purposes of language, it is understandable why semantics and communication are so inextricably linked.

Semantic technology supports artificial intelligence in simulating how people understand language and process information. By approaching the

automatic understanding of meanings, semantic technology overcomes the limits of other technologies. *Semantic Artificial Intelligence* is an approach that comes with technical and organizational advantages; it is an AI strategy that is based on technical and organizational measures, which get implemented along the whole data lifecycle. AI's true power to revolutionize industries and determine key business insights lies in its ability to read text and understand the semantics, i.e. the relationship between words, to help organizations further reduce risk and uncover weaknesses.

Semantics and AI is an ever-evolving field which is open to further study because of the possibilities it offers. As people, understanding our everyday language and the meanings of words is easy. However, transferring these same capabilities to a machine is not so simple. In an era where unstructured information accounts for 80% of all information, having a technology that can understand and extract knowledge from this data is fundamental for being competitive in any market, as information is one of the most powerful forces changing the way business is done.

Semantics in advertising

Advertising depends heavily on language, both spoken and unspoken, in order to attract attention to a certain product, as well as to encourage its consumption by customers. The functions and purpose of language may be numerous, the main being that of personal expression, exposition, art, and persuasion.

Semantics is, as we have seen so far, the study of the meaning behind words and phrases, focusing on how words relate to each other and how the recipient understands and decodes the message. It is not simply a study about words, but rather about the way we use them. Advertisers use semantics in order to convey a message to their target market, and they need to be aware how the images and slogans will be interpreted. The emergence of search engines have also facilitated the use of semantics in placing relevant ads in users' search results.

The saying that a picture is worth a thousand words in advertising extends to words, colors, background, and sounds, among others. *Semantic advertising* creates ads based on the meaning and interpretation of the webpage the ads are placed on; in short, it is advertising that uses semantic web technology, and it can be sub-classified into four different types:

1. *Contextual advertising (with semantics)* - this allows marketers to create ads within the context of the viewers' content. These ads on websites enable advertisers to present their message to viewers who read informational

articles on a subject. For example, if a viewer visits a website that details the steps to prevent a home invasion, the contextual advertiser will place ads for burglar alarms and home security systems along the margins to attract potential customers.

2. *Semantic (search) advertising* - while earlier techniques relied on correlating specific words to ad placement, semantic advertising also takes the meaning of those words into account. Semantic search technology improves the accuracy and relevance of search results by interpreting the viewers' intent and the precise meaning of phrases. One example is that a viewer searching for information on a *Dodge Charger* will be presented with ads for parts or mechanics for that car, and not with ads for the *San Diego Chargers* football team.

3. *Dynamic advertising (content)* - the techniques used here employ semantic search technology to build interactive ads that contain real-time information. These ads typically use eye-catching graphics, bold sound and fast-paced animation. When these ads are connected to a database or news feed, they can show content that gives timely updates. An example of dynamic content occurs when a viewer reads an article on a company's stock outlook. The dynamic content can display the company's current stock price and its price-movement trends.

4. *Advertising inside semantic data/advertising within content* - many web sites today contain links to advertisers within the content; the page will display a hyperlinked word within the article. When the user hovers over the word, additional ad text and images appear within a pop-up window. For example, a viewer reading an article on the latest smartphone app will see a link within the article. The user hovers over the link and sees a box displaying text and images for the most recent iPhone or Android.

Semantic advertising uses semantic technology to publish ads that are similar to the content on a webpage. Semantic technology does not simply look at the keywords on a website but also the context that the words are used in. For example, semantic technology can determine if the keyword *monster* is used on a website to talk about a scary movie or the online job board. Advertisements closely related to the content on a site are mostly likely to be clicked by visitors.

Open issues

As with any study, linguistic in nature or otherwise, it would be impossible to say that everything has been said, that all open issues have been resolved, and that there is nothing more that needs to be further researched.

This is especially true where language and meaning are concerned, as these concepts are timeless and always open to interpretation, analysis, study and debate.

Such is the status of semantics, especially bearing in mind that it is a relatively 'new' study, with major contributions to its development having been derived from studies as recently as in the 1980s-1990s. Furthermore, the advances in technology, as well as those in communication have inevitably had an effect on potentially new directions in the sphere of semantics.

Some issues that are open at the moment are connected to the concepts of *intentions*, *coherence relations*, as well as the *scope of semantics*, though, by no means, are they limited to only them. Apart from the interdisciplinary approaches noted in this Chapter, there are numerous others that also deserve to be studied in greater detail, such as the connection between semantics and emotions, fluency, gender, inference, reading, translation, vocabulary, among others.

In conclusion, we may reiterate that semantics is the study of the meaning of words and sentences. The discipline studies the interpretation of individual words, the construction of sentences and the literal interpretation of text the way it is written. Proper understanding of semantics relates to all academic disciplines in all languages, as a clear understanding allows students and teachers to communicate their messages clearly and coherently, without fear of misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

Discussion and revision

Think about and discuss the following:

1. How can semantics lead to misunderstandings?

2. How would you explain the different interpretations in the following situation: A husband comes home with what he labels a 'brand *new*' coffee table. He tells his wife it was a great bargain and a gorgeous new piece for their home. The wife takes one look at it and says, "This isn't *new*. I saw this at the local used goods shop the other day." How is it possible that two people can take one word or expression and use it to mean entirely different things?

3. How would the deliberate use of multiple meanings reshape the meaning of the following sentences:

- A dog gave birth to puppies near the road and was cited for littering.

- "One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know." (Groucho Marx)

- Let's talk about rights and lefts. You're right, so I left.
- Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
- Diet slogan: Are you going the wrong weigh?
- I fired my masseuse today. She just rubbed me the wrong way.
- The best way to communicate with a fish is to drop them a line.
- Two silkworms had a race. They ended up in a tie.

4. How would you explain the 'misunderstanding' illustrated below?



5. Provide more examples to illustrate semantics meeting up with the previously-mentioned interdisciplinary approaches and discuss them in more detail.

6. Provide examples to illustrate semantics meeting up with other interdisciplinary approaches and discuss them in more detail.

7. How can the *semantics-AI* interface be exemplified?

8. What issues might arise as a result of communication barriers in the context of semantics, how might they be resolved, and how might they be avoided in the future?

Appendix:

Discussion and research topics

Learning objectives: *After completing this chapter, you will have acquired a more comprehensive outlook on 140+ potential discussion topics and possible projects that may be researched in greater detail concerning the study of semantics. Bear in mind that this is just a selection of topics, and though extensive, it is by no means complete. Thanks so much for your participation so far, and enjoy the rest of the ride!*

The words *Fire Department* make it sound like they're the ones who are starting fires, doesn't it? It should be called the "Extinguishing Department." We don't call the police the "Crime Department." Also, the "Bomb Squad" sounds like a terrorist gang. The same is true of *wrinkle cream*. Doesn't it sound like it causes wrinkles? And why would a doctor prescribe pain pills? I already *have* pain! I need relief pills!

George Carlin (1997)

- Reasons for ambiguity in language
- Meanings of words and how they relate to each other
- Ways in which different speakers acquire a sense of meaning
- The function of meaning in language analysis and interpretation
- Sentences and the ways in which they relate to one another
- A language is the only way we can use to communicate
- Reasons for sentence and word flow problems
- Semantic ties to discourse and pragmatics
- Verb-phrase semantics
- Adjective semantics
- Approaches to meaning
- Meaning and the dynamics of interpretation
- Making semantics pragmatic
- The semantics of grammatical dependencies
- The semantics of free indirect discourse
- Utterance interpretation and cognitive models
- From words to discourse
- Semantic issues in discourse and dialogue
- Semantics and the flexibility of word meaning

- Contexts of metaphor
- Modality issues in semantics
- Context-dependence in the analysis of linguistic meaning
- Figurative language: cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspectives
- Issues in dynamic semantics
- Multidimensional semantics of evaluative adverbs
- The semantics of implicit quantification
- From words to behavior via semantic networks
- The effects of semantic ambiguity in word recognition
- The structure and dynamics of semantic modelling
- Challenges of semantic fieldwork
- Grammaticalization of semantic structure
- The semantics of metaphor
- The role and significance of context and deixis in verbal communication
- Deixis and subjectivity
- National deixis in the media - what does 'we' mean?
- Deixis in face-to-face interaction
- Deictic categories in the semantic categories of 'come'
- Personal deixis and reported discourse
- Deixis analysis in *novel/song* by *author/singer/group*
- The semantics of 'just'
- The semantics of specificity
- The semantics of measurement
- Contextually-dependent lexical semantics
- Sex, syntax and semantics
- The semantics of singular terms
- Semantics and perspective sensitivity
- Semantics of grading and degree / Semantics of gradability and comparison
- The semantics of positive and comparative adjectives
- The semantics of generic sentences
- The semantics of locative expressions
- Relative vs absolute gradable adjectives
- Ambiguity awareness in SLA
- Ambiguity issues in linguistics and translation
- Semantic barriers to effective communication
- Semantic barriers and translation
- Connotation and denotation: the effect of word choice in writing/speech
- Connotation in semantics/linguistics
- Collocation and connotation
- Lexical semantics in metaphor analysis
- Semantic analysis of metaphors

- A (cognitive) semantics approach to the study of idioms
- The language of metaphors
- A semantic approach to translating metaphors
- A semantic approach to translating idioms
- Metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic structure
- The semantics of death and dying: metaphor and mortality
- The semantics of breaking-up language
- The semantics of fudging-the-truth language
- Lexico-semantic means of creating puns in English
- On the semantics of humor
- Semantic features of puns
- The use of ambiguity in Shakespeare's works
- The use of puns in Shakespeare's works
- A semantic study of antonymy in English texts
- The role of antonymy on semantic change
- Discourse functions of antonymy
- Child acquisition of referring expressions
- The production and comprehension of referring expressions
- Generating referring expressions involving relations
- The role of visual context in the production of referring expressions
- From reference to sense: how the brain encodes meaning
- Reference and the semantics of anaphora
- Sense and meaning in verbal semantics
- Sense relations in language learning
- The semantics of social media streams
- Word sense disambiguation in lexical acquisition
- Semantic changes - factors and consequences
- Semantic vs pragmatic meaning
- Semantic analysis of slogans
- The use and function of semantic contradictions
- Conjunction and contradiction
- The semantics of ambiguity and contradiction
- A semantic approach to homonymy and polysemy
- Processing lexical ambiguity: homonymy and polysemy
- Lexical and semantic issues on translating homonymy
- The role of context in polysemy
- Semantic features in legal/business terminology
- A semantic approach to the acquisition of synonyms
- Word choice and synonymy in context
- Synonymy in translation
- Synonymy in the bilingual context

- The use of synonymy in academic writing
- Semantic relations and the lexicon
- Lexical and semantic features in paraphrase identification
- Approaches to the semantics of space
- Semantic theory and SLA
- Discourse semantics
- Semantic fields and lexical structure
- Semantic fields and ESL/EFL teaching
- Semantic field theory and vocabulary teaching
- Semantic mapping in the acquisition of new vocabulary
- A semantic analysis of figurative language (in lyrics, slogans, ads)
- The role of literal meaning in figurative language
- On the semantics of translating figurative language
- The semantic interpretation of metaphors
- The semantic interpretation of puns
- The semantic interpretation of irony
- Irony in cross-cultural misunderstandings/miscommunication
- A semantic analysis of hyperbole
- A semantic approach to English modality
- The lexical semantics of English modal auxiliaries
- The meaning of modality
- Modality and language
- An analysis of modal verbs expressing possibility
- Modality and negation
- An analysis of the semantic study of modality
- Semantics and epistemic modality
- Semantic restrictions on modal auxiliary combinations
- Semantic aspects of modal adjectives
- Metonymy in the semantic field of verbal communication
- Discourse, semantics and metonymy
- Metaphor and metonymy: a semantic perspective
- Modality and evidentiality
- A semantic description of English lexical evidential markers
- A semantic analysis of the language of advertising
- Semantic and linguistic barriers to communication
- The semantics of poetry
- Semantic analysis of figurative language
- Figurative language in the ESL/EFL classroom
- Figurative language in newspapers/social media
- Relational social deixis in English and their Macedonian equivalents
- The role of context in semantics

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