



# UNIT 5 SEMANTICS

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# SEMANTICS: THE ANALYSIS OF MEANING

The study of meaning in human language



# THE NATURE OF MEANING



## Semantic relations among words

Words and phrases can enter into a variety of semantic relations with each other. Because these relations help identify those aspects of meaning relevant to linguistic analysis, they constitute a good starting point for this chapter.



# Semantic relations among words

## SYNONYMS

are words or expressions that have the same meaning in some or all contexts.

Examples:  
vacation/holidays  
youth/adolescent  
automobile/car

## ANTONYMS

are words or phrases that are opposites with respect to some component of their meaning.

Examples:  
dark/light  
boy/girl  
hot/cold

# Semantic relations among words

## POLYSEMY AND HOMOPHONY

Polysemy occurs where a word has two or more related meanings.

Examples:

bright

Meaning a = 'shining'

Meaning b = 'intelligent'

Homophony exists where a single phonetic form has two or more entirely distinct meanings.

Examples:

light

Meaning a = 'not heavy'

Meaning b = 'illumination'

# Semantic relations involving sentences

## PARAPHRASE

Two sentences that have essentially the same meaning are said to be paraphrases of each other.

Examples:

- a. The police chased the burglar.
- b. The burglar was chased by the police.

## ENTAILMENT

When the truth of one sentence guarantees the truth of another sentence, we say that there is a relation of entailment.

Examples:

- a. The park wardens killed the bear.
- b. The bear is dead.

## CONTRADICTION

Sometimes it turns out that if one sentence is true, then another sentence must be false.

Examples:

- a. Charles is a bachelor.
- b. Charles is married.

# What is the meaning?

## CONNOTATION

One notion that is closely linked with the concept of meaning is connotation, the set of associations that a word's use can evoke.

## DENOTATION

One well-known approach to semantics attempts to equate the meaning of a word or phrase with the entities to which it refers—its denotation or referents.



# What is the meaning?

## EXTENSION AND INTENTION

The impossibility of equating an element's meaning with its referents has led to a distinction between extension and intension.

## COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS

Still another approach to meaning tries to represent a word's intension by breaking it down into smaller semantic components. This approach has often been used to analyze the meaning of certain types of nouns in terms of semantic features.





# What is the meaning?

## VERB MEANING AND SUBCATEGORIZATION

Sometimes, quite surprising features of verb meaning can be relevant to the choice of accompanying phrases.



# THE CONCEPTUAL SYSTEM



## Fuzzy concepts

We tend to think that the concepts expressed by the words and phrases of our language have precise definitions with clear-cut boundaries.

For example, the concept expressed by the phrase Member of Parliament seems to have a clear-cut definition: one is a Member of Parliament if and only if one is duly elected to a particular legislative body; no other person can be truthfully called a Member of Parliament.



# Metaphor

The concepts expressed by language make up a giant network, with many interconnections and associations.

A good example of these interconnections involves metaphor, the understanding of one concept in terms of another.



# The lexicalization of concepts

## LEXICALIZATION ACROSS LANGUAGES

A notorious example of how languages can supposedly differ from each other in the expression of concepts involves the number of words for 'snow' in Inuktitut. Sometimes estimated to be in the hundreds, the number is actually much, much smaller.

## MOTION VERBS

All languages have words that describe motion through space (English has come, go, and move, among many others). However, there are systematic differences in terms of how languages express motion and the concepts related to it.

# Grammatical concepts

Of the indefinitely large set of concepts expressible in human language, a relatively small subset is grammaticalized—that is, they are encoded as affixes and non-lexical (functional) categories that express grammatical contrasts of various sorts.



# SYNTAX AND SENTENCE INTERPRETATION

1

**CONSTRUCTIONAL  
MEANING**

2

**STRUCTURAL  
AMBIGUITY**

3

**THEMATIC ROLES**

- Thematic role assignment
- Deep structure and thematic roles

4

**THE  
INTERPRETATION  
OF PRONOUNS**

- Principles A and B roles



# OTHER FACTORS IN SENTENCE INTERPRETATION

1

## THE ROLE OF BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

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- Presupposition

2

## SETTING

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3

## DISCOURSE

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- Topics

4

## CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS

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- Relevance
- Quality
- Quantity
- Manner

# REFERENCE

Archibald, J., & O'Grady, W. (2008). Contemporary Linguistic Analysis: An Introduction. Toronto: Pearson Longman.