

Semantics and Pragmatics

Linguistic Meaning

Lexical Semantics

Reference: “the act of using language to identify or pick out individuals”

Reference is the relationship between a word or expression and the things in the world represented by those words or expressions.

A **referent** is the specific thing that the word or expression refers to.

Lexical Semantics

Sense: “the linguistic knowledge which allows the act of reference ”

Sense is the place of an expression in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language. The **sense** of an expression is its indispensable core of meaning.

Lexical Semantics

On the relationship between sense and reference: the referent of an expression is often a thing or person in the world; whereas the sense of an expression is not a thing at all. In fact, it is difficult to say what sort of entity the sense of an expression is. It is much easier to say whether or not 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.) The sense of an expression is an abstraction, but it is helpful to note that it is an abstraction that can be entertained in the mind of a language user. When a person understands fully what is said to him, it is reasonable to say that he grasps the sense of the expression he hears.

Semantics: A Coursebook, Hurford & Heasley

Some Sense Relationships

Synonymy: the relationship between two expressions that have the same sense.

Synonyms, therefore, are expressions which share a sense; perfect synonyms would share all their senses.

EXAMPLES: *conceal/hide*

purchase/buy

freedom/liberty

Some Sense Relationships

Hyponymy/hypernymy: the relationship between expressions such that the meaning of one expression is included in the meaning of the other.

Hyponym: A hyponym is the subset

Hypernym: A hypernym is the superset

EXAMPLES: *scarlet/red*

cat/animal

oak/tree

Some Sense Relationships

Opposites: the relationship of being "opposite in meaning". There are several basic types of opposites (or incompatibility of meaning):

Binary or complementary antonyms

Gradable antonyms

Relational opposites or converses

Reverse Antonyms

Non-binary antonyms (incompatible sets)

Some Sense Relationships

Opposites: the relationship of being "opposite in meaning". There are several basic types of opposites (or incompatibility of meaning):

Binary or complementary antonyms

expressions which come in pairs and which, between them, exhaust all the relevant possibilities. Being "not X" automatically means being "Y" and being "not Y" means being "X", if X and Y are complementary antonyms.

EXAMPLES: *dead/alive* *on/off* *married/unmarried*

Some Sense Relationships

Opposites: the relationship of being "opposite in meaning". There are several basic types of opposites (or incompatibility of meaning):

Gradable antonyms

Expressions at opposite ends of a continuous scale of values (a scale which can vary according to the context of use). Thus, with gradable antonyms it is possible to be both "not X" and "not Y", but somewhere in the middle.

EXAMPLES: *hot/cold* *tall/short* *love/hate*

(Note: A test for gradability is to see whether the term can combine with something that quantifies it, like *very* or *very much* or *a little*. So one can be "a little hot", but what does it mean to be "a little dead"?)

Some Sense Relationships

Opposites: the relationship of being "opposite in meaning". There are several basic types of opposites (or incompatibility of meaning):

Relational opposites or converses

expressions which express a relationship between two things such that one of the expressions conveys the relationship in one order and the other expression conveys the relationship in the opposite order.

EXAMPLES: *buy/sell* *husband (of)/wife (of)*

above/below *hotter (than)/colder (than)*

Some Sense Relationships

Opposites: the relationship of being "opposite in meaning". There are several basic types of opposites (or incompatibility of meaning):

Reverse Antonyms

expressions which describe both phases of reversible processes

EXAMPLES: *increase/decrease* *heat/cool*

Some Sense Relationships

Opposites: the relationship of being "opposite in meaning". There are several basic types of opposites (or incompatibility of meaning):

Non-binary antonyms (incompatible sets)

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.

EXAMPLES: *seasons* *liquid/solid/gas* *suits of cards*

Some Sense Relationships

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Non-binary antonyms (incompatible sets)

In this kind of system of X, Y, Z, being "X" means being "not Y" and "not Z"; however, unlike the binary opposition of **complementary antonyms**, being "not X" does not imply "Y", it implies "Y" or "Z". In other words, something which has a physical state must be either a *liquid*, a *solid*, or a *gas*; if it is a *solid*, it is neither a *liquid* nor a *gas*. If it is not a *solid*, you know it must be either a *liquid* or a *gas*; however, you do not know which one it is merely from knowing it is "not a *solid*".)

Sentence Meaning

Construal: Perspective a speaker uses in describing situation

Static vs. Dynamic Situations:

Static: situations presented as unchanging in the time presented

Dynamic: situations presented as change

Sentence Meaning

Aspect: Marker of how situation is distributed over time

Lexical aspect: Properties of verbs which imply how the situations they convey distribute over time (e.g., durative vs. punctual)

Tense: Marker of the time of situation with respect to a particular point in time; temporal deixis

Sentence Meaning

Semantic/Participant/Thematic Roles

AGENT: initiator of some action, typically capable of acting with volition

PATIENT: entity undergoing the effect of some action, typically undergoing a change of state

THEME: entity which is moved by an action or whose location is described

EXPERIENCER: entity aware of the action or state described by the predicate but not in control of it

BENEFICIARY: entity benefitting from some action

INSTRUMENT: means by which an AGENT causes something to come about

LOCATION: place in which something is situated or takes place

GOAL: entity toward which something moves

SOURCE: entity from which something moves

STIMULUS: entity causing an effect in the EXPERIENCER

Sentence Meaning

Meaning Relationships of and between Sentences

Tautology: A sentence which is inherently true

Cats are mammals.

Contradiction: A sentences which is inherently false

Cats are plants.

Synthetic sentence: A sentence whose truth value can only be judged by considering extra-linguistic information

That cat likes to eat grass.

Contradict: Sentences which cannot both be true.

That cat is huge. That cat is tiny.

Entailment: A relationship such that the truth of one of the sentences means that the other must be true.

Oscar bought that car from Bill. Bill sold that car to Oscar.

Mary has three children. Mary has children.

Presupposition: Information whose truth is assumed, rather than asserted in a sentence

Bill knows/believes that everyone dislikes him.

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Sentence Meaning

Non-Literal Meaning

Metaphor: “strategy of coping with new or difficult areas of knowledge by relating them to existing, and more accessible knowledge...metaphor is the linguistic reflection of analogical reasoning” (*ELL: 188*)

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) *Love as journey; Time as space*

Hyperbole: Exaggeration *I am starving for I'm hungry*

Metonymy: referring to something by using terms related to that thing

Some people blame everything on Washington

Pragmatics

Context affects meaning

Q: Did you like that movie?

A: Well, the music was good.

or

A: I can't stand Tom Cruize.

or

A: I love being scared.

or

A: The academy only likes really trite films.

Pragmatics

Context affects meaning

Deixis (adjective = deictic)

I am going there now. Who is *I*? Where is *there*?
When is *now*?

Pragmatics

Grice's Maxims (Grice 1975: 45-7)

1. The Maxim of Quantity

a. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. The Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true.

a. Do not say what you believe to be false.

b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. The Maxim of Relevance: Be relevant.

4. The Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous.

a. Avoid obscurity of expression.

b. Avoid ambiguity.

c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

d. Be orderly.

Pragmatics

Speech Acts

Performatives

JL Austin (*How to Do Things with Words* 1962, 1975): Not all utterances have truth conditions, i.e. assert something. Many linguistic expressions perform actions, i.e., change the world by virtue of being made under the correct felicity conditions.

Explicit Performatives

I hereby declare you husband and wife.

I warn you that you will fail this class if you cheat on the final exam.

Implicit Performatives

You'll fail this class if you cheat on the final exam.

Felicity Conditions:

- (i) There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect.
- (ii) The circumstances and persons must be appropriate, as specified in the procedure.
- (iii) The procedure must be executed correctly and completely.