

Chapter Eleven: Semantics, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics

1. LEXICAL SEMANTICS

1.1. Conceptual vs. Associative Meaning

Conceptual → covers those basic, essential components of meaning.

Associative → has to do with associations or connotations attached to a word.

1.2. Semantic Features

Individual elements of meaning which, when combined, add up to the meaning of a word. For example:

Mother: [+animate, +adult, -male, +pregnant]

Bachelor: [+animate, +adult, +male, -married]

1.3. Semantic Roles

S-selection or selectional restriction is a property of verbs which specifies certain intrinsic 'semantic properties' of their **arguments**.

Agent is the 'animate performer' of an action, e.g. *Sara did the laundry*.

Causative is a (natural) force that brings about a change, e.g. *Hurricane demolished the town*.

Instrument is something inanimate used by an agent, e.g. *They must have used black ink*.

Stimulus is something that causes an experience, e.g. *The movie frightened Sara*.

Experiencer is an animate participant who receives 'sensory input', e.g. *People fear snakes*.

Patient is the entity which undergoes an action or event (and as a result a structural change occurs), e.g. *The wind damaged the window*.

Theme is the person or thing which is transferred or moved by an event but otherwise unchanged, e.g. *Sara opened the door*.

Location is the place most relevant to an event, e.g. *The room has many people in it*.

Source is the starting point or origin of an event, e.g. *Sara left London several years ago*.

Goal is the endpoint of an event, e.g. *He walked upstairs*.

Recipient expresses a change in ownership, e.g. *I sent Betty the letter*.

Beneficiary is the entity who benefits from the action, e.g. *I baked Reggie a cake*.

Role is a person playing a role or part in an action or state, e.g. *We made Sara treasurer of the club*.

Factive is the NP object that comes into existence, e.g. *Carpenter made two round tables*.

- Dummy subjects (*it* in *It is raining*)
- Theta criterion
- θ -grid smile: <agent> lift: <agent, theme>

1.4. Lexical Relations

1.4.1. Polysemy

The form of a word suggests multiple related meanings, e.g. *drive*

1.4.2. Homonymy

A single form has two or more unrelated meanings, e.g. *bank*

1.4.3. Homophony

Different written forms with a single pronunciation, e.g. [raɪt]

1.4.4. Homography

A single spelling with different pronunciations, e.g. *lead*

1.4.5. Synonymy

Two or more words with very closely related meanings are called synonyms.

1.4.6. Antonymy

- Complementary pairs, e.g. *male* and *female*
- Gradable pairs, e.g. *wide* and *narrow*
 - They have comparative forms.
 - The unmarked member is the one used in questions of degree, e.g. *How wide is the screen?*
- Relational opposites, e.g. *buy* and *sell*
- Reversive, e.g. *tie* and *untie*

1.4.7. Meronymy

A constituent part of, or a member of something

1.4.8. Hyponymy

A type of relationship when the meaning of one form is 'included' in the meaning of another.

1.4.9. Prototype

The idea of 'the characteristic instance' of a category is known as the prototype.

1.4.10. Retronymy

An expression that would once have been redundant, but now it is non-redundant, e.g. *silent movie*

2. SENTENTIAL SEMANTICS

2.1. Compositional vs. Non-compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning → the meaning of an expression is built up from the meanings of its basic expressions

- Linear compositionality
- Nonlinear compositionality: discontinuous constituents
 - Wh-fronting: for example, *What did he eat?* originated from *He ate an apple*
 - Extraposition: for example, *A car is next to the building which goes very fast*

Non-compositional meaning → the meaning cannot be built up as the sum of its parts

- Idiom → principle of compositionality is superseded by having fixed meanings.
- Proverb → for example, *There is light at the end of the tunnel*
- Anomaly → follow the rules of syntax but go awry semantically
- Metaphor → principle of compositionality is very rubbery

2.2. Truth

To determine the truth or falsehood of a sentence, i.e. the truth value

Analytic statement → knowable without reference to the world

- **Tautologies** → always true, e.g., *Queens are female*
- **Contradictions** → always false, e.g., *Queens are mother*

Synthetic statement → truth value can be determined by relying upon observation, e.g., *Moon is made of cheese*

2.3. Entailment

The relationship between two sentences where the truth of one (A) requires the truth of the other (B)

Jack swims well → *Jack swims*

- **Synonymous Sentences** → they entail each other, e.g.
Betty put off the meeting → *The meeting was put off by Betty*
- **Contradictory** → one entails the negation of the other, e.g.
Betty is present // *Betty is absent*

3. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The word **discourse** is usually defined as “language beyond the sentence” and the **discourse analysis** is typically concerned with the study of language in text and conversation.

3.1. Interpreting Discourse

3.1.1. Knowledge of the world

Pre-existing conventional knowledge structures (i.e., schema) in memory

- **Frame** → a static schema in memory, e.g. *what is a house like*

- Script → a dynamic schema in memory, e.g. *going to the dentist*

3.1.2. Coherence

The ways a text make sense to the readers through the organization of its content, and the relevance and clarity of the idea

- ➔ The key to the concept of coherence is not something that exists in words or structures, but something that exists in people.

3.1.3. Cohesion

The use of explicit linguistic devices to signal relations between sentences and parts of texts

Referring expression

Words whose meaning can only be discovered by referring to other words or to elements of the context:

- **Anaphora**, e.g. it in I like ice cream, but I cannot eat it.
- **Cataphora**, e.g. her in When I met her, Mary was ill.
- **Exophora**, e.g. this book in Look at this book.

Substitution

To substitute an expression by more general words like one, do, same or so, e.g.

A: Do you like apples?

B: Yes, I do.

Ellipsis

We do not even provide a substitute for a word or phrase which has already been said,

- **Sluicing** → what follows a ‘wh-word’ in an embedded sentence is omitted, e.g. *Jill went out but I don't know where*
- **Gapping** → subsequent occurrences of a verb are omitted in similar contexts, e.g., *She took out the basket and he the dishes.*

- ➔ Omissibility as a constituency test

Conjunction

Words and phrases which explicitly draw attention to the type of relationship which exists between one sentence or clause and another, e.g. *furthermore, thus, because*, etc.

3.2. Conversational Maxims

Paul Grice (1975) put forward what he described as the cooperative principles. Supporting this principle are four maxims, often called the ‘Gricean maxims’:

Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required

Quality: Do not say that which you believe to be false or for which you lack adequate evidence

Relevance: Be relevant

Manner: Be brief and orderly; avoid ambiguity and obscurity

- ➔ An **implicature** arises in the mind of the hearer when the speaker flouts (i.e., intentionally violates) one of the maxims.

4. TYPES OF CONTEXT

Linguistic → the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence

Situational → non-linguistic factors used to interpret words

5. PRAGMATICS

It is preoccupied with speaker-intended meanings ; It focuses on invisible meaning i.e. what is not explicitly stated and how we recognize what is meant even when it isn't actually said or written.

5.1. Deixis

Expressions that in order to understand their reference you should rely entirely on the situational context of the utterance:

person deixis (e.g. you and I)

time/temporal deixis (e.g. yesterday and now)

place/spatial deixis (e.g. there, right and go)

5.2. Ambiguity

When a form has two or more meanings.

- **Lexical ambiguity** → phrase contains a homonym, e.g. *I'll meet you near the bank.*
- **Structural ambiguity**
 - **Grouping ambiguity** → The same string of words may have two different possible groupings of words, e.g. *Old men and women are respectable.*
 - **Function ambiguity** → A word or phrase potentially fulfills two or more grammatical relations, e.g. *Visiting professors can be interesting.*

5.3. Figures of Speech

Figures of speech have figurative or non-literal meaning.

- **Metaphor**, e.g. *The car won by a nose.*
- **Metonymy**, e.g. *I noticed several new faces tonight.*
- **Personification**, e.g. *This drawer refuses to open.*
- **Hyperbole**, e.g. *I'd rather kill myself than watch music videos.*
- **Irony**, e.g. *You've been a great help!*

5.4. Speech Act

The patterned language that speakers and writers in a given speech community use to perform functions such as thanking, complimenting, requesting, refusing, and apologizing. John Austin:

- **Locutionary meaning** → the literal/propositional meaning of an utterance.

- **Illocutionary meaning** → the communicative purpose of an utterance / what the speaker is trying to do with language → warning, stating, promising, etc.
- **Perlocutionary act** → the effects/results the utterance has/produces on the listener → persuading, surprising, enlightening, etc.

5.4.1. Direct vs. indirect speech act

Direct illocution (or Direct speech act) → a structure is used to perform a related function

Indirect illocution (or Indirect speech act) → a structure is used to perform an unrelated function

5.4.2. Constative vs. performative verbs

A **constative** is an utterance which asserts something that is either true or false; for example, *Chicago is in the United States*. **Performative** sentence is an utterance which performs an action, such as I promise to buy you an ice-cream.

- ☞ A sentence which contains a performative verb is an instance of direct speech act.
- ☞ Performative verbs have four characteristics (a) first person, (b) affirmative, (c) declarative, and (d) present tense.
- ☞ An informal test to see whether a sentence contains a performative verb is to begin it with the phrase *I hereby...* .

5.4.3. Felicity condition

The conditions which validate an illocution are termed felicity conditions. **PROMISE:**

1. The speaker believes the hearer desires X
2. The speaker is able to and willing to bring about X

5.5. Presupposition

An assumption by a speaker/writer about what is true or already known by the listener/reader, e.g.

He travelled to India again. >> He has been to India before.

My car is black. >> I have a car.

Where did he buy the book from? >> He bought the book.

- ☞ One of the tests to check for the presupposition(s) underlying a sentence is called constancy under negation.