

# Chapter Eleven: Semantics, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics

## 1. LEXICAL SEMANTICS

### 1.1. Conceptual vs. Associative Meaning

**Conceptual** → basic, essential components of meaning

**Associative** → associations or connotations attached to a word

### 1.2. Semantic Features

individual elements of meaning which add up to the meaning of a word, e.g.,

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

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

### 1.3. Semantic Roles

**S-selection** is a property of verbs which specifies 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*.

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

➤ **Note:** Dummy subjects have no semantic role

- **Note:** Theta criterion
- **Note:**  $\theta$ -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. *shoulder*

### 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 characteristic instance of a category

### 1.4.10. Retronymy

an expression that would once have been redundant, e.g. *silent movie*

## 2. SENTENTIAL SEMANTICS

### 2.1. Compositional vs. Non-compositional Meaning

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

- Linear compositionality
- Nonlinear compositionality: discontinuous constituents
  - Wh-fronting
  - Extraposition: for example, *Someone left a message whom we don't know.*

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

- Idiom → principle of compositionality is superseded
- 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 rubbery

### 2.2. Truth

to determine the truth or falsehood of a sentence

**Analytic statement** → knowable without reference to the world

- **Tautologies** → always true, e.g., *Queens are female*
- **Contradictions** → always false, e.g., *Colorless green leaves*

**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

**Discourse** → language beyond the sentence

**Discourse analysis** → 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, e.g. *what is a house like*
- **Script** → a dynamic schema, 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

**3.1.3. Cohesion**

the use of explicit linguistic devices to signal relations between 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. I like ice cream, but I cannot eat it.
- **Cataphora**, e.g. When I met her, Mary was ill.
- **Exophora**, e.g. Look at this book.

**Substitution**

to substitute an expression by more general words:

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,

- **Suicing** → what follows a 'wh-word' is omitted, e.g. *Jill went out but I don't know where*
- **Gapping** → subsequent occurrences of a verb are omitted, e.g., *She washed the basket and he the dishes.*

➤ **Note:** Omissibility as a constituency test

**Conjunction**

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

**3.2. Conversational Maxims**

Paul Grice (1975) put forward what he described as the cooperative principles:

*Quantity:* Make your contribution as informative as is required

*Quality:* Do not say that which you believe to be false

*Relevance:* Be relevant

*Manner:* Be brief and orderly; avoid ambiguity

➤ **Note:** 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

### 5.1. Deixis

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

*person deixis* (e.g. you and I)

*time deixis* (e.g. yesterday and now)

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

### 5.2. Ambiguity

when a form has two or more meanings

- **Lexical ambiguity** → 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

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 → 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 → a structure is used to perform a related function

# indirect illocution → a structure is used to perform an unrelated function

#### 5.4.2. Constative vs. performative verbs

# **Constative** sentence is an utterance which asserts something that is either true or false, e.g., *Chicago is in the United States.*

# **Performative** sentence is an utterance which performs an action, e.g., *I promise to buy you an ice-cream*

- **Note:** A sentence which contains a performative verb is an instance of direct speech act
- **Note:** Performative verbs: (a) first person, (b) affirmative, (c) declarative, and (d) present tense
- **Note:** Test a sentence with a performative verb: *I hereby...*

#### 5.4.3. Felicity condition

the conditions which validate an illocution are termed felicity conditions, e.g., 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.

- **Note:** To check for presupposition use *constancy under negation*