

Online Lecture N°5

Level: Master II

Specialty: Language Sciences

Module: Analysis of Linguistic Levels

Teacher: Dr. Boumediene BENRABAH

Part Two: Semantic Level

3.1. Definition

3.2. Conceptual vs. Associative Meaning

3.2.1. Conceptual Meaning

3.2.2. Associative Meaning

3.3. Semantic Features

3.4. Semantic Roles

3.4.1. Agent

3.4.2. Theme

3.4.3. Experiencer

3.5. Lexical Relations

3.5.1. Synonymy

3.5.2. Antonymy

3.5.3. Hyponymy

3.5.4. Homophony

3.5.5. Homonymy

3.5.6. Polysemy

3.5.7. Metonymy

3.5.8. Collocation

Semantics

3.1. Definition

Semantics is the study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. In semantic analysis, there is always an attempt to focus on what the words conventionally mean, rather than on what the speaker might want the words to mean on a particular occasion. This technical approach to meaning (this definition) emphasizes the objective and the general. It avoids the subjective and the local. Therefore, linguistic semantics deals with the conventional meaning conveyed by the use of words and sentences of a language.

3.2. Conceptual vs. Associative Meaning

When Linguists investigate the meaning of words in a language, they are normally interested in characterizing the conceptual meaning and less concerned with the associative or stylistic meaning of words.

3.2.1. Conceptual meaning

It covers those basic, essential components of meaning which are conveyed by the literal use of a word. Some of the basic elements of a word like 'needle' in English might include thin, sharp, steel, instrument. These components would be part of the conceptual meaning of needle.

3.2.2. Associative meaning

It deals with connotations attached to a word, like: 'needle' which leads to 'painful'. This association is not treated as part of the conceptual meaning of the word. Another example is 'low calorie' meaning associatively 'good for diet'

It is never included within the basic conceptual meaning of the expression. The users of associative meanings are poets and advertisers

3.3. Semantic Features

To understand the nature of any language through a semantic approach is the consideration of what is 'odd'. The following examples (sentences) are well-structured sentences

a- The hamburger ate the man —S—→ NP VP

b- NP V NP

So, the sentence above is syntactically good, but semantically odd. What is the source of the oddness?

Answer:

The kind of nouns which can be subjects of the verb 'eat' must denote entities which are capable of eating. However, the noun 'hamburger' does not have this property (and man does); hence, the oddness of the sentence.

Departing from the above observation, we can generalize the crucial components of meaning which a noun must have when used as a subject. Such component may be "animate being". We can then take this component and use it to describe part of the meaning of words as either (+) plus animate or (-) minus animate.

So, this procedure is a way to analyse meaning in terms of:

Semantic Features

Animate+/- human+/- male+/- adult+/-

The above features can be treated as the basic features involved in differentiating the meanings of words.

E.g., Instruction: Give the crucial distinguishing features of the meanings of this set of English words

	Table	Cow	girl	woman	Boy	Man
Animate	-	+	+	+	+	+
Human	-	-	+	+	+	+
Male	-	-	-	-	+	+
Adult	-	-	-	+	-	+

*For a noun to be used as a subject of a verb there should be characteristics (to characterize) with semantic features:

The _____ is reading a book

N (+human)

This approach then gives us the ability to predict what nouns would make the above sentence semantically odd.

E.g., (dog- tree- table....) are odd because (-human).

N.b: Still some problems may rise with some words (advice- threat- warning...)

Problem:

Words recognized as containers or sets carrying meaning mainly. However, other components of meaning can be related to lexical words in terms of the relation they have in a given context or situation, hence having some semantic roles.

3.4. Semantic Roles

In here, instead of thinking of words as containers of meaning, we can look at words within the roles they fulfill in opposite situation described sentences.

E.g., The boy kicked the ball { verb (kick) describes action
NP (boy- ball) roles of entity

The boy (entity that performs an action) → Agent

The ball (entity that is affected by the action) → Theme

3.4.1. Agent

This entity constitutes a set of words which are typically humans and can be non-human forces:

E.g., the wind blew the ball away

*can be machines:

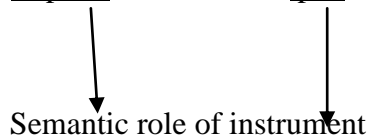
E.g., the car ran over the ball

*can be creatures:

E.g., the dog caught the ball

*can be used as instruments

E.g., eat with a spoon - write with a pen



3.4.2. Theme:

That particular entity denotes human entity

E.g., The boy hurt himself



1) - Experiencer: a noun phrase designating an entity as the person who has feeling-perception- state. So, when you see, know, enjoy; no action is performed. So, you are not an agent: you are in the role of 'Experiencer'

Eg: Did you hear that noise
 ↓ ↓
 Experiencer theme

2) - Location: Another semantic role designating where an entity is in the description of the event.

E.g., on the table - in the room (role of location)

3) - Source: Where an entity moves from

4) - Goal: Where an entity moves to

Below are some semantic roles illustrated

Mary saw a mosquito on the wall
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 Experiencer theme location

She borrowed a magazine from George
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 Agent theme source

And she hit the bug with the magazine
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 Agent theme instrument

She handed the magazine back to George
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 Agent theme goal

3.5. Lexical relation

Till now, we have seen words treated as 'containers', or fulfilling 'roles'. However, these words can also have 'relationships'.

In every day communications, we tend to use meanings of words in terms of their relationships.

E.g., conceal → the same as = hide

Shallow → opposite to deep

Daffodil → a kind of flower

In doing so, we are not characterizing the meaning of a word in terms of its component features, but in terms of its relationship to other words. Thus, we treat words in terms of their lexical relations, among which:

3.5.1. Synonymy:

Two or more forms with very closely related meanings which are often not always intersubstitutable in sentences

E.g., of synonyms → pairs = broad-wide, hide- conceal, almost- nearly, cab- taxi, liberty- freedom, answer, reply

N.b → sameness in meaning = not → total sameness.

*Eg (1) I had only one answer correct → ‘reply’ would sound odd.

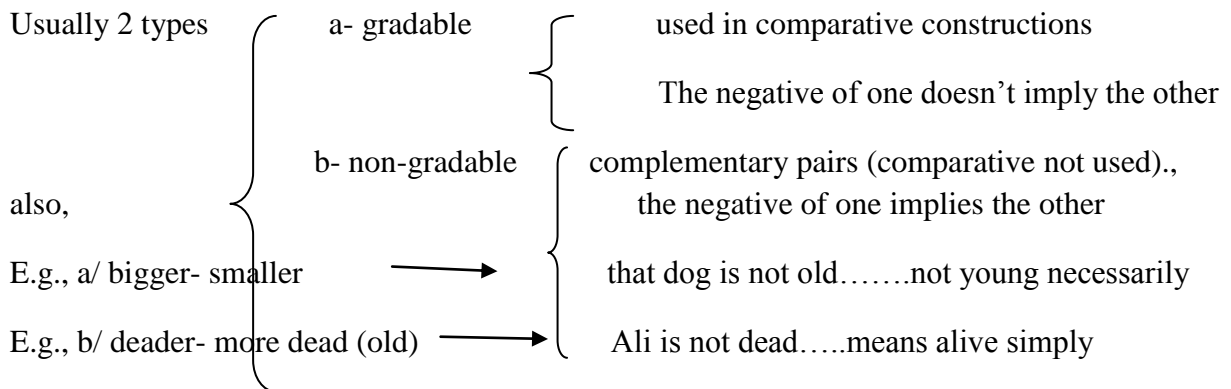
*Eg (2) my father purchased a large automobile (formal)

My dad bought a big car (casual)

3.5.2. Antonymy

Two forms with opposite meanings

E.g., pairs: → quick slow, big-small, long- short, rich- poor, happy- sad, hot-cold, old-young, male-female, true-false, alive-dead.



c- Reversive antonyms: do the reverse

Tie/ untie, enter/ exit, lengthen/ shorten

Raise/lower, pack/ unpack, dress/undress.

3.5.3. Hyponymy

The meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another.

Eg: daffodil-flower *dog-animal *poodle-dog *carrot-vegetable

So, the meaning of flower is included in daffodil or daffodil is a hyponym of flower.

When we consider hyponomous relations we look at hierarchical relation.

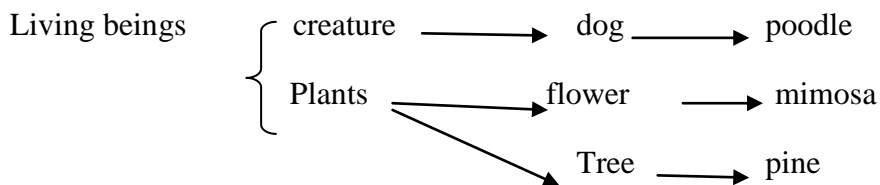


Diagram above → mimosa is a hyponym of flower

→ Flower, tree are co-hyponyms

Plant is super ordinate

Hyponym means “a kind of”.

Prototypes: is ‘the best example of’, in terms of resemblance

Eg: Ostrich, Penguin, pigeon, swallow

The last two are much closer to the prototype of ‘bird’.

Eg: Furniture: chair, stool, bench

Clothes: shirt, shoes, cardigan

Vegetables: carrots, potato, tomato (fruit...)



3.5.4. Homophony

Two or more different written forms have the same pronunciation.

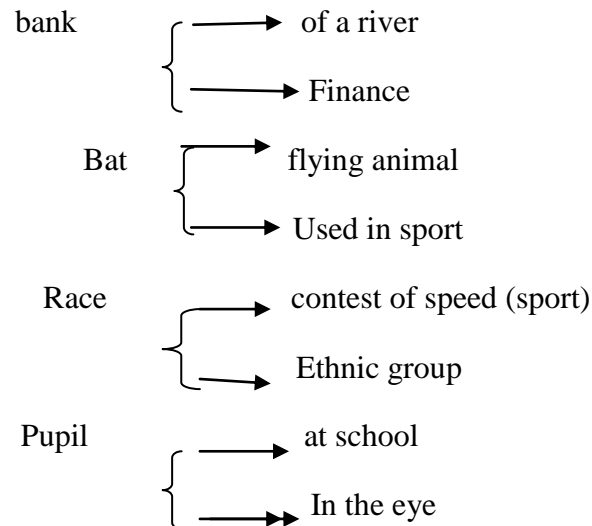
Eg: bare-bear, meat-meet, flour-flower, pail-pale, sew-so.

3.5.5. Homonymy

One form (written and spoken) has two or more unrelated meaning:

Examples:

Same
Form
different
meaning



3.5.6. Polysemy

Relatedness of meaning of identical form and related by extension.

E. g., the word 'head' → top of body, headline, company, school...

'Foot' → person-table/chair, mountain

'Run' → a person does, water does- colour does, nose does, Polysemy

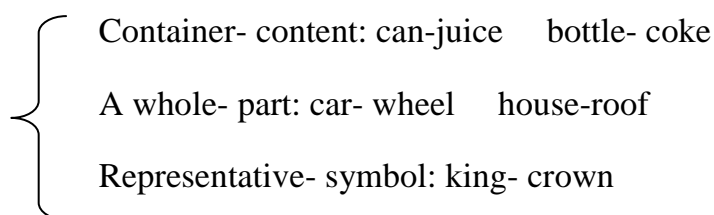
Vs Hyponymy

-polysemic words in dictionary → one entry

-two separate hyponyms → 2 different entries in dictionary

3.5.7. Metonymy

Another related aspect of meaning in terms of



So, thanks to familiarity that we understand the following

1. He drank the whole bottle
2. The white house announced
3. Filling up the car
4. Answering the door
5. Giving someone a hand

3.5.8. Collocation

Which word tends to occur with other words?

Hammer..... Nail

Table.....chair

Salt.....pepper

Collocations are sorts of words which frequently occur together

(Practice & Testing)

Practice: n° 01

(1)- *What is the basic semantic relation between the following pairs of words?*

*Shallow- deep *mature- ripe

*suite- sweet *Table- furniture

*single- married *move- run

(2)- *How would you describe the oddness of the following sentences using semantic features?*

a- The television drank my water

b- His dog writes poetry.

(3)- *Identify the semantic roles of all the noun phrases in this sentence*

“With his new golf club, Fred watched the ball from the woods to the grassy area near the river and he felt good.

(4)- *Which of the following opposites are gradable, non-gradable or reversive?*

*Absent- present *high- low *full- empty *fail- pass

*fair- unfair *appear- disappear *know-ignore

(5)- *How would you describe the oddness of the following sentences using semantic features?*

a. The building slept for three hours.

b. A flower is violent.

c. The children made theories about language.

(6)- *Identify the semantic roles of the noun phrases used in the following sentences*

a- The politicians appreciated the result of the election.

b- John is rich.

c- She wrote a letter to her sister.

d- The boy sliced the cake with a knife.

e- The thieves were in the house when they heard the voice of the neighbor. One of them took a gun from drawer and shot the man.

(7)- *What is the basic lexical relation between the following pairs of words?*

*Answer- reply *man- woman

*Shakespeare- works *shallow- deep

- Some pupils gathered data from their daily interactions and analyzed them with the help of their teachers

- The importance of poetry goes beyond the usual literary works of the ancient times

Practice n°05

1. *What kind of difference exists between the representation of simple sentences and that of complex ones?*

.....
.....
.....

2. *How does generative grammar explain the relationship between sentences such as the ones below?*

-The mechanic repaired the car.

-The car was repaired by the mechanic

.....
.....
.....

3. *Find out the semantic oddness of the following sentences and comment on each case using semantic features*

a. The prisoner bought a bicycle to his son.

.....
.....
.....

b. The mouse took the cheese.

.....
.....
.....

4. *Represent the following sentences in a tree diagram*

a. The thief broke the window down.

b. John saw a star with a telescope.

c. He said his brother supposed his friend said they bought a car

d. He took a bus to reach the place of the appointment

References

- Allen, W.S. (1970) *Living English Speech*. Longman, London
- Crystal, D. ((1985). *Linguistics*. Great Britain: Richard Clay (the Chaucer Press)
- Dinnen, S. J. (1967). *An Introduction to General Linguistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, INC.
- Finch, G. (2003). *Linguistic Terms and Concepts*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Fromkin, V. (2001). *Linguistics: An Introduction to Linguistic Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Hewings, M. (2002) *Pronunciation Tasks. A course for Pre-intermediate Students*. C.U.P. Cambridge
- Kuiper, K. and Allan, W.S. (2003). *An Introduction to English Language*. London: Macmillan Press LTD.
- Ladefoged, P. (2001) *A Course in Phonetics*, 4th ed, Harcourt Brace
- Lyons, J. (1995). *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction*. Great Britain: CUP
- Roach, P. (1992) *Introducing Phonetics*. England: Penguin English.
- Trubetzkoy, N. S. (1969) *Principles of Phonology*. Berkley: University of California Press
- Wells, J.C. (2000). *The Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*, 2nd Ed, Longman. London
- Widdowson, H.G. (2000). *Linguistics*. Oxford: OUP
- Yule, G. (1997). *The Study of Language*. Cambridge: CUP