Semantics: The Analysis of Meaning

Chapter 10

Meaning

- To understand language
  - The meaning of words and of the morphemes that compose them
  - Words into phrases and sentences
  - Context which determines the meaning (Pragmatics)

Meaning

- Conceptual vs. associative meaning
- Denotative vs. connotative meaning
- *conceptual/denotative* = literal use of the word.
- *Associative/ connotative* = different associations with the conceptual meaning
- E.g. needle = ‘thin, sharp, steel, instrument’ is associated with ‘pain’, ‘blood’ or ‘illness’
- Other examples: night- rose?

What is Semantics?

- The study of meaning of words, phrases, and sentences.
  - Lexical semantics (words and meaning relationship among words)
  - Phrasal/ sentential semantics (syntactic units larger than a word)
- What a speaker *conventionally* means (objective or general meaning) ≠ *not what he/she is trying to say* (subjective or local meaning)
How can we describe the meaning of different words?

- Three types of semantic analysis
  - Words as ‘containers’ \(\rightarrow\) Semantic features
  - ‘Roles’ they fulfill \(\rightarrow\) Semantic roles
  - ‘Relationship’ with other words \(\rightarrow\) lexical relation

Semantic features

- Syntactically correct sentences but semantically odd.
  - The hamburger ate the man.
  - My cat studies linguistics.
  - The table listens to the radio

- This relates to the conceptual components of the words ‘hamburger, cat & table’ \(\rightarrow\) not human.

Semantic Features

- Semantic properties: The components of meaning of a word.
- Meaning as collection of properties/features typically with two possible values (+ / -)
- Example of componential analysis: baby is [ + young], [ + human], [ + animate]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>table</th>
<th>horse</th>
<th>boy</th>
<th>man</th>
<th>girl</th>
<th>woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>animate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>human</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>female</td>
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<tr>
<td>adult</td>
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<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. (a) widow, mother, sister, aunt, maid  
   (b) widower, father, brother, uncle  
   - The (a) and (b) words are [+ human]  
   - The (a) words are [+ female]  
   - The (b) words are [+ male]  
2. (a) bachelor, paperboy, pope, chief  
   (b) bull, rooster, drake, ram  
   - The (a) and (b) words are [+ male]  
   - The (a) words are [+ human]  
   - The (b) words are [+ animal]  

Semantic roles  
- Words are described according to the roles they fulfill with the situation described in a sentence.  
- The boy *kicked* the ball  
  - verb → indicates action  
  - Boy → performs the action = agent  
  - Ball → undergoes the action = theme  
- The NPs describe the role of entities (people or things) involved in the action, i.e. they have certain semantic (or thematic) roles.  

Semantic Roles  
- **Agent** = the entity that performs the action  
- **Theme** = the entity that undergoes the action  
- **Experiencer** = one who perceives something  
- **Instrument** = an entity used to perform an action  
- **Location** = the place where the action happens  
- **Source** = the place from which an action originates  
- **Goal** = the place where the action is directed  

Semantic roles  
- John is writing with a pen  
  - agent instrument  
- Mary saw a mosquito on the wall  
  - experienter theme location  
- The children ran from the playground to the pool  
  - agent source goal  
- The boy opened the door with a key  
- The dog bit the stick  
- With a stick, the man hit the dog.
**Lexical relations**

- What is the meaning of 'big'?  
  - 'Large' or the opposite of 'small'
- What is the meaning of 'daffodil'?  
  - A kind of flower
- Analysis in terms of lexical relations: explain the meaning in terms of the relationship with other words
  - Synonymy
  - Antonymy
  - Hyponymy
  - Homophones and Homonyms
  - Polysemy

**Synonymy**

- Words that have the same meanings or that are closely related in meaning
  - E.g. answer/reply – almost/nearly – broad/wide – buy/purchase – freedom/liberty
  - 'sameness' is not 'total sameness' - only one word would be appropriate in a sentence.
    - E.g. Sandy only had one **answer** correct on the test. (but NOT reply)
  - Synonyms differ in formality
    - E.g. buy/purchase – automobile/car

**Antonymy**

- Words that are opposites in meaning, e.g. hot & cold.
- Types
  - **Gradable**= not absolute, question of degree
    - Hot & cold – small & big
  - **Non-gradable**
    - Dead & alive – asleep & awake
- E.g. happy/sad married/single  
  present/absent fast/slow

**Synonymy & Antonymy**

- **Synonymy or Antonymy**
  - Flourish – thrive  
    a. synonym
  - Intelligent – stupid  
    b. antonym
  - Casual – informal  
    c. synonym
  - Deep-profound  
    d. synonym
  - Drunk – sober  
    e. antonym
  - Sofa – couch  
    f. Synonym
  - Hide – conceal  
    g. Synonym
  - Cheap – expensive  
    h. Antonym
  - Rich - wealthy  
    i. synonym
Hyponymy

- Words whose meanings are specific instances of a more general word, i.e. one thing is included (kind of) in another thing.
  - e.g. cats and dogs are hyponyms of the word animal.
- Cats and dogs are co-hyponyms share the same ‘superordinate’
- E.g. daffodil & flower / carrot & vegetable / ant & insect

Prototypes

- The best example that belongs to a bird is ‘robin’, but what about ‘ostrich’ and ‘penguin’?
- Characteristic instance
- Furniture – chair is a better example than bench or stool.
- Clothing – shirts more than shoes

Homonyms

- Homonymy: A word which has two or more entirely distinct (unrelated) meanings
  - e.g. bank: ‘financial institution’ ; ‘of a river’.
  - Bat: ‘flying creature’ or ‘used in sports’
  - Race: ‘contest of speed’ or ‘ethnic group’
### Homophones
- Different words pronounced the same but spelled differently
  - e.g. *two*, *to* and *too*.
  - *Flour* and *flower*
  - *Meat* and *meet*
  - *Right* and *write*
  - Other examples?

### Polysemy
- A word which has **multiple meanings related by extension**,
  - e.g. *bright*: ‘shining’; ‘intelligent’
  - ‘Head’ of the body and the person at the top of a company.
  - ‘Foot’ of a body and of a mountain and of the bed or chair.
  - ‘Run’ a person runs, the water runs

### Metonymy
- *What do you think about these sentence?*
  - He drank the whole bottle. (container-content)
  - The White House announced. (king-crown)
  - I gave her a hand. (whole-part)
  - A word substituted for another word with which it is closely associated e.g. *bottle* is used for alcohol
  - A figure of speech in which an attribute or commonly associated feature is used to name or designate something. A short definition is “part for whole.”

### Collocation
- Words tend to occur with other words.
  - E.g. *table/chair*
  - *Butter/bread*
  - *Salt/pepper*
  - *Hammer/ nail*
See you next class 😊

Read chapter 11