

Semantics

[sɪ'mæntɪks]; [sə'mantɪks]

is the branch of linguistics and logic
concerned with **meaning**.

Semantics

[sɪ'mæntɪks]; [sə'mantɪks]

is the study of the meaning of words,
phrases and sentences.

Semantics

[sɪ'mæntɪks]; [sə'mantɪks]

Linguistic semantics deals with the conventional meaning conveyed by the use of words and sentences of a language.

Levels of Language

Phonology

**Morphology
& Semantics**

Prosody

Syntax

Pragmatics

**The
sound
system of a
language
(phonemes)**

**How a
language
expresses
meaning
(morphemes,
words)**

**How melody
used to
create
meaning**

**The structure
of a language.
Rules for
combining
words**

**How
language
is used**

Levels of language

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graph TD; A([Levels of language]) --- B[Phonetics, Phonology]; A --- C[Morphology]; A --- D[Syntax]; A --- E[Semantics]; A --- F[Pragmatics]; B --- B1[all sounds, system sounds]; C --- C1[forms and words]; D --- D1[clauses and sentences]; E --- E1[meanings of various kinds]; F --- F1[language use];
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Phonetics, Phonology

Morphology

Syntax

Semantics

Pragmatics

all sounds,
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meanings of
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language
use

What is semantics?

Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It is a wide subject within the general study of language.

Understanding semantics is essential to the study of language acquisition (how language users acquire a sense of meaning, as speakers and writers, listeners and readers).

It is also essential to the study of **language change** (how meanings alter over time).

What is semantics?

It is important for understanding language in social contexts, as these are likely to affect meaning, and for understanding varieties of English and effects of style. It is thus one of the most fundamental concepts in linguistics. The study of semantics includes the study of how meaning is constructed, interpreted, clarified, obscured, illustrated, simplified, negotiated, contradicted, and paraphrased.

What is semantics?

Some important **areas of semantic theory** or related subjects include these:

- ✓ Symbol and referent;
- ✓ Conceptions of meaning;
- ✓ Words and lexemes;
- ✓ Denotation, connotation, implication;
- ✓ Pragmatics;
- ✓ Ambiguity;
- ✓ Metaphor, simile and symbol;
- ✓ Semantic fields etc.

What is semantics?

Some important areas of semantic theory or related subjects include these:

- ✓ Synonym, antonym and hyponym;
Collocation, fixed expression and idiom;
Semantic change and etymology;
- ✓ Polysemy;
- ✓ Homonymy, homophones and homographs
- ✓ Lexicology and lexicography
- ✓ Thesauruses, libraries and Web portals
- ✓ Epistemology
- ✓ Colour.

What is semantics?

The noun semantics and the adjective semantic are derived from the Greek word *semantikos* (“significant”).

In linguistics, semantics is the subfield that is devoted to the study of meaning, as borne on the syntactic levels of words, phrases, sentences, and sometimes larger units of discourse, generically referred to as texts
linguistics – texts.

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What is semantics?

- o The study of the linguistic meaning of morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences is called Semantics.

Subfields of word meaning

- ❑ **Denotation** (referents) is the set of entities to which a linguistic unit (a word) refers.
- ❑ The denotation of the word summer corresponds to the season between spring and autumn (regardless of whether or not it is hot and unpleasant).
- ❑ One approach to semantics attempts to equate meaning with denotation.

Subfields of word meaning

□ The denotational aspect of lexical meaning:

- a) expresses the notional content of a word.
- b) is the component of the lexical meaning that makes communication possible.

Subfields of word meaning

- ❑ **Connotation** is the set of associations that a word's use can evoke (bring to mind):
 - For Canadians, the word winter evokes thoughts of: snow, bitter cold, long nights, and the like.
 - These associations make up the word's connotation, but they cannot be its (entire) meaning:
 - The word winter is used for the season (December to March) even if none of the above is experienced. Therefore, we must look beyond connotation for our understanding of what meaning is.

Subfields of word meaning

- **The connotational aspect** of lexical meaning is the part of meaning which reflects the **attitude of the speaker** towards what he speaks about.
- Connotation conveys **additional information** in the process of communication.

Subfields of word meaning

Maybe all the types of meanings of words are somewhat hard to count. E.g. these may include:

- Common denotation or individual reference, practiced by sb in a certain situation;
- Emotion of the speaker or a rhetoric set, causing emotion in the listener;
- Some gradable evaluative components;
- Social Register or some distinct discourse markedness;
- Eloquent etymology - meaningful inner form of a word;
- Pragmatic meaning (or message) etc.

Word /verb/	Denotational Component	Connotational Component	Type of connotation
to glare	to look	1. steadily, lastingly	connotation of duration
		2. in anger, rage etc.	emotive connotation; causal connotation.
to glance	to look	briefly, passingly	connotation of duration
to gaze	to look	steadily, lastingly in tenderness and admiration	connotation of duration + emotive connotation

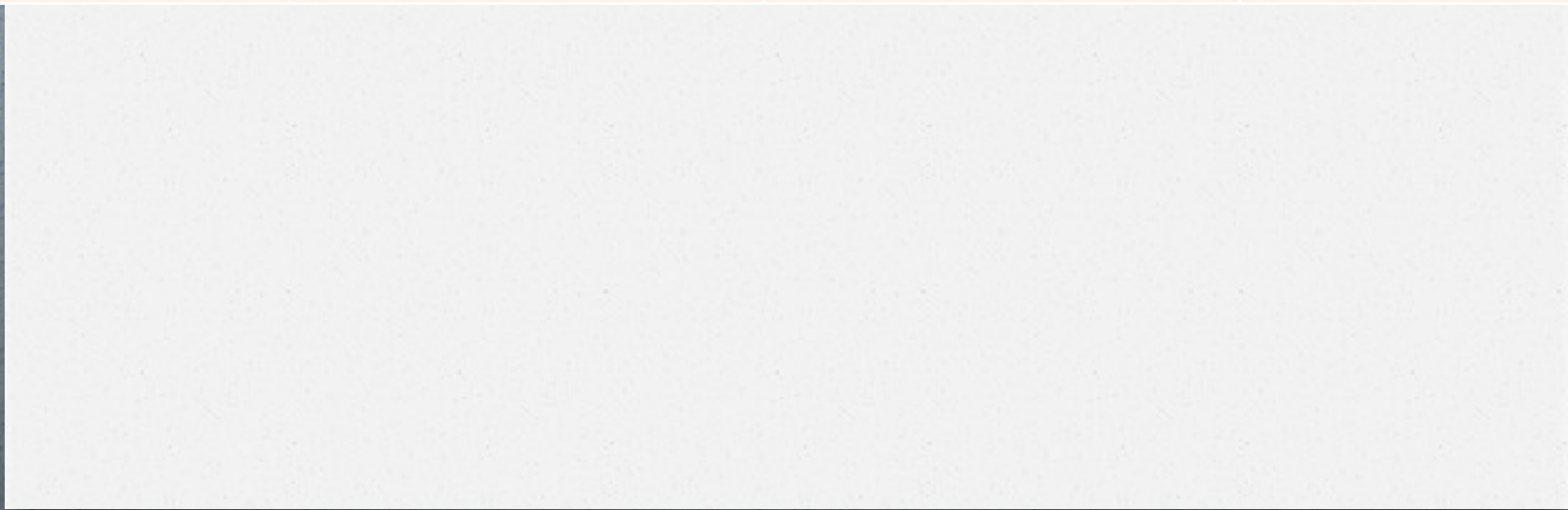
Word /Part of Speech	Denotational Component	Connotational Component	Type of connotation
notorious [nəu'tɔ:riəs] Adj	famous or well known	well-known for some bad or unfavourable quality, deed, etc.; infamous	negative evaluative connotation
celebrated ['seləbreɪtɪd] Adj	famous, known about by many people	famous & greatly admired; renowned	positive evaluative connotation

Word /noun	Denotational Component	Collocational Component	Type of connotation
hovel ['hʌ- ['hɒv(ə)l],	a place where one lives	miserable / wretched hovel	evaluative [I'væljʊətɪv] connotation
hut [hʌt]	a small single-story building of simple or crude construction, serving as a poor, rough, or temporary house or shelter	a mud-walled hut	evaluative [I'væljʊətɪv] connotation
mansion [mæ̃nʃ(ə)n]	A mansion is a very large house, stately home; the residence. Opulent ['ɒpjulənt] is ostentatiously rich and luxurious or lavish	Large, impressive, opulent mansion with every imaginable [I'mædʒɪnəbl] luxury	evaluative [I'væljʊətɪv] connotation
manor ['mæ̃nə]	a large private estate house in the country, usually built in the Middle Ages, also includes the land and smaller buildings.	an imposing 17th-century baronial manor house...	evaluative [I'væljʊətɪv] connotation
shack [ʃæk]	a roughly built hut or cabin	dilapidated / run-down shack; jerry-built shack	evaluative [I'væljʊətɪv] connotation

Word	Denotation	Connotation	Synonyms	Antonyms	Etymology:	Observations
legal [liːg(ə)l]						
lawful ['lɔːf(ə)l], [-fʊl]						
loyal [ləɪəl]						
juridical [dʒʊə'riːdɪk(ə)l]						

Word	Denotation	Connotation	Synonyms	Antonyms	Etymology:	Observations
legal [liːg(ə)l]	is used to describe things that relate to the law.	An action / situation that is legal is allowed or required by law.	judicial , juridical , forensic lawful , legitimate , licit , within the law ,	illegal	from Latin lēgālis, from Latin lēx law	from French, or from Latin legalis, from lex, leg- 'law'. Compare with loyal
lawful ['lɔːf(ə)l], [-ful]	is allowed by law.	Conforming to, permitted by, or recognized by law or rules ; within the law	Legal, legitimate , licit , just , permitted , allowed , rightful , sanctioned , authorized ,	unlawful , illegal , criminal	Origin: Old English lagu, from Old Norse lag 'something laid down or fixed', of Germanic origin and related to lay	compare Icelandic log () things laid down, law - lawful blanket = ? - lawful jam = ?
loyal [lɔɪəl]	having or showing continuing allegiance [ə'liːdʒ(ə)n(t)s]	faithful to one's country, government, etc	Syn: faithful	treacherous	Etymology: from Old French loial, leial , from Latin lēgālis	
juridical [dʒuə'riːdɪk(ə)l]	relating to law, to the administration of justice / the law, or to the office or function of a judge;		legal , juristic	juristic [dʒuə'ristɪk] of or relating to		from Latin jūridicus, from iūs law + dicere to say

Word	Denotational Component	Conotational Component	Synonyms
legal [liːg(ə)l]	is used to describe things that relate to the law.	An action or situation that is legal is allowed or required by law.	judicial , juridical , forensic lawful , legitimate , licit , within the law , legalized , valid ; permissible , permitted , allowable , allowed , aboveboard , admissible , acceptable ; authorized , sanctioned , licensed , constitutional; recognized, enforceable,



Pretty – handsome – beautiful

Pretty – handsome – beautiful;

special types of human beauty:

- *beautiful* is mostly associated with classical features and a perfect figure;
- *handsome* with a tall stature, a certain robustness and fine proportions,
- *pretty* with small delicate features and a fresh complexion.

Subfields of semantics

o Subfields of semantics are:

1. lexical (of or relating to the vocabulary, words, or morphemes of a language) semantics, which is concerned with the meanings of words, and the meaning relationships among words;

2. phrasal or sentential semantics, which is concerned with the meaning of syntactic units larger than the word.

Pragmatics versus Semantics

The study of how **context** affects meaning is called **Pragmatics**.

For example, the sentence "It's cold in here" can be interpreted in certain situations as "close the windows".

Pragmatics versus Semantics

- Pragmatics:
 - Pragmatics is a systematic way of explaining language use in context.
 - It seeks to explain aspects of meaning which cannot be found in the plain sense of words or structures, as explained by semantics.

Ex: “It is cold in here”

(**Implicature**: request to close the window)

Semantics/pragmatics distinction:

not always easy to draw.



Branches of Semantics

o formal semantics;

o lexical semantics;

o conceptual semantics.

o formal semantics

studies the logical aspects of meaning, such as sense, reference, implication, and logical form.

o lexical semantics

studies word meanings and word relations.

o conceptual semantics

studies the cognitive structure of meaning.



Branches of Semantics

sememe

['sɛmi:m, 'si:m-]

is the unit of meaning carried by a morpheme
Origin: early 20th cent.: from seme + -eme

Compare with **semanteme**

seme

['si:m-]

- 1) an elementary unit of meaning
- 2) noun another term for semanteme

Origin: mid 19th cent.:

from Greek sēma 'sign'

Compare with semanteme

semanteme
[sɪ'mænti:m]

is a minimal distinctive unit of meaning

Compare with sememe

Theories of Meaning

There are two traditional schools of theories of meaning:

(1) the reference theory

and

(2) the representation theory.

Some have been trying to establish definitions of the meanings of words so that the meaning of linguistic expressions can be given. Saeed (1997) calls it

(3) the definition theory.

The referential theory

(1) **The referential theory** holds that a linguistic sign derives its meaning from something **in the reality**. For example, words like man, fish, are meaningful in that they each refer to an individual or a collection of living beings existing in the reality. However, some linguistic signs, like ghost, dragon, unicorn, merely denote something imaginative.

The representational theory

(2) The representational theory

The representational theory holds that language in general, and words in particular, are only an **icon** (or representation) for an actual thing (or form) being symbolized.

In other words, they conjure ['kʌndʒə] in our minds pictures of the things, happenings and ideas.

But there are a number of function words, such as a, an, the, or, which "conjure" no pictures of this kind.

Typologies of Meaning

Types of meaning

According to Leech (1981),
there exist **seven types of meaning**,
five of which are included in the associative meaning.

The pragmatics of politeness. By Geoffrey Leech.
(Oxford studies in sociolinguistics.) New York: Oxford
University Press, 2014. Pp. xvi, 343.

Typologies of Meaning

Conceptual meaning

This refers to the definition given in the dictionary. It is widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistic communication and is integral to the essential functioning of language.

For example, **man** can be defined by the contrastive features [+Human], [+Male], [+Adult], as distinct from **girl**, which can be defined as [+Human], [-Male], [-Adult].

.

Typologies of Meaning

Associative meaning

This refers to the meaning associated with the conceptual meaning, which can be further divided into following five types:

Connotative (内涵的) meaning: the communicative value attributed to an expression over and above its purely conceptual meaning.

woman.

polysemy ['pɒlɪsi:mi, pə'li:si:mi]

When we talk about the meaning of words, we often talk as if each word has only one meaning. This is rarely the case.

This ability of words to carry with them a number of meanings is called polysemy and you can read more about this in Yule (2010, 120) and in more detail in Section 5.3 of Riemer (2010, 160ff.).

polysemy ['pɒlɪsi:mi, pə'li:si:mi]

When we have two lexemes that sound the same/are spelled the same but whose meanings appear to be totally unrelated to each other, we talk about homonymy.

You can read about this in Yule (2010, 120) and in more detail in Section 5.3 in Riemer (2010).

It is not always easy to decide whether we have polysemy or homonymy.

Componential analysis of the word 'bachelor'

According to the dictionary it has 4 meanings:

- a man who has never married (холостяк);
- a young knight (рыцарь);
- someone with a first degree (бакалавр);
- a young male unmated fur seal (морской котик) during the mating season.

Bachelor

Noun

(Human)

(Animal)

(Male)

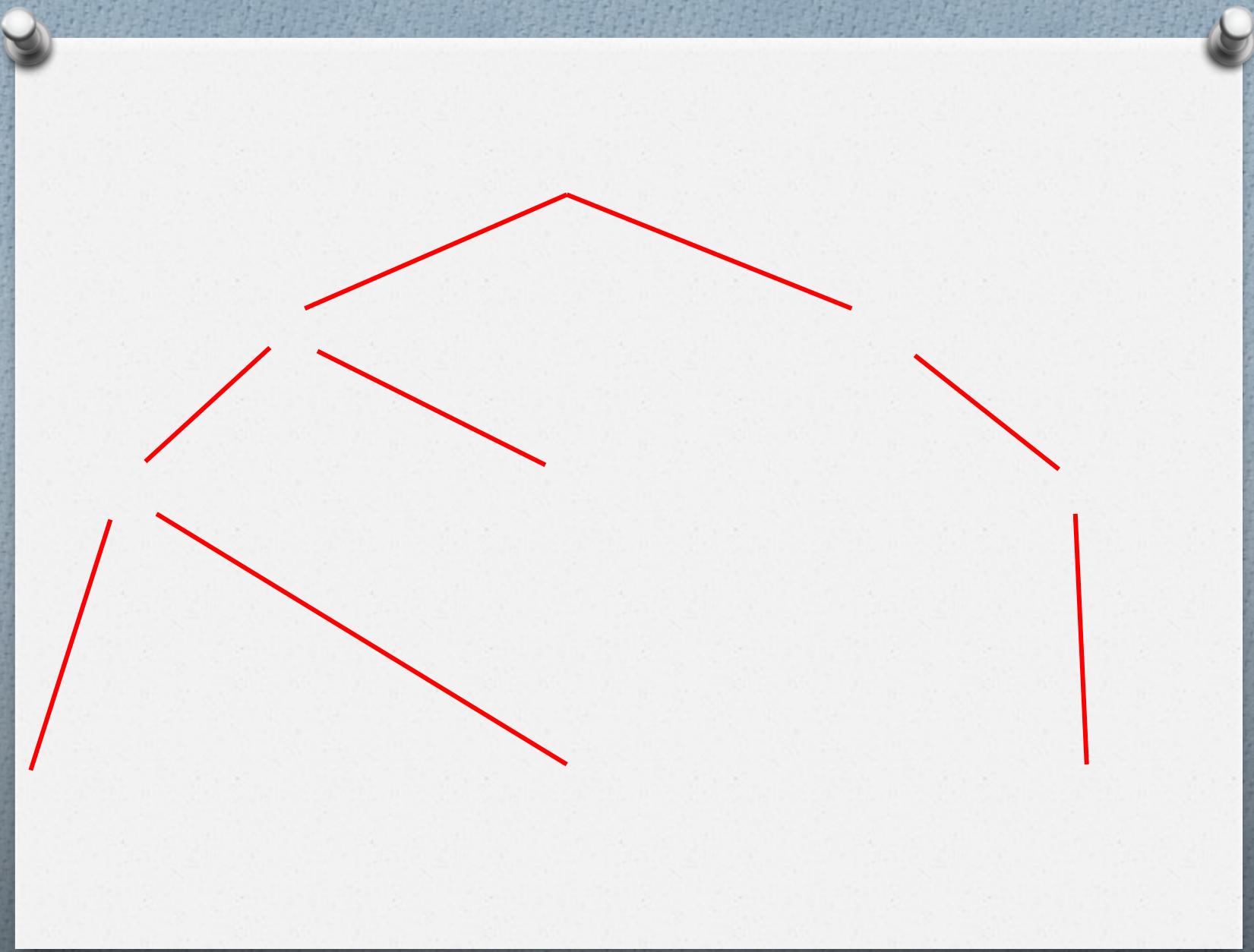
[who has the first of
lowest academic degree]

(Male)

[who has
never married]

[young knight serving
under the standard of
another knight]

[young fur seal when
without a mate during
the breeding time]



Conceptual and Associative Meaning

Conceptual Meaning covers the basic, essential components of meaning which are conveyed by the literal use of a word.

E.g. **needle** :

thin , sharp, steel, instrument.

Associative Meaning is the idea, connection what that specific word brings to you. E.g **needle: painful**

synonym ['sɪnənim]

antonym ['æntənim]

In fact some words have almost the same meaning, and some have the opposite meaning to each other; that is, the meanings of words can be related to each other.

Such relationships between the meanings of words are called lexical relations. Take, for example, two relations: that of similarity (the technical term is **synonymy**) and that of contrast or oppositeness (the term is **antonymy**).

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Lexical Relations

- **Synonymy** : 2 or more forms with very closely related meanings.

e.g broad – wide , hide – conceal

- **Antonyms** : 2 forms of with opposite meaning .

e.g quick – slow . big – small

- **Gradable Antonyms** : Antonyms that can be used in comparative constructions.

e.g bigger than – smaller than

the negative of one member of the pair does not necessarily imply the other

Lexical Relations

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- **Gradable Antonyms** : Antonyms that can be
used in comparative constructions.

e.g bigger than – smaller than

the negative of one member of the pair does not
necessarily imply the other.

e.g. That dog is not old. (It does not have to mean
“ that dog is young“)

∴

Lexical Relations

Non-Gradable Antonyms

(Complementary Pairs) :

Comparative constructions are not normally used, and the negative of one member does imply the other.

e.g. deader / more dead => not possible

e.g. that person is not dead : that person is alive.

Reversives

They do the opposite of the other action.

e.g. tie – untie , enter – exit .

Lexical Relations

Hyponymy

When the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another, the relationship is described as hyponymy.

e. g . rose – flower , carrot – vegetable
rose is a hyponymy of flower - carrot is a hyponymy of vegetable

Co – Hyponymy / Super ordinate

Animal (super ordinate) => horse / dog / bird

Horse, dog , bird => co- hyponymys of animal

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Lexical Relations

Homophony

When two or more different written forms have the same pronunciation they are described as **homophones**.

e.g. bear – bare , meet – meat, write - right

Homonymy

We use the term homonymy when one form (written or spoken) has two or more unrelated meanings. *e.g. bank (bank – of a river) , (bank – financial institution)*

Lexical Relations

Polysemy

when one form (written and spoken) has
multiple meanings

which are all related by extension.

e. g . head => top of your body / top of a glass of
beer / top of a company

Lexical Relations

Metonymy

A type of relation between words based simply on a close connection in everyday experience.

e.g.

- **bottle – coke** (a container – contents relation)
- **car – wheels** (a whole – part relation)
- **king – crown** (a representative – symbol relation)

Lexical Relations

Collocation (What about phrase building???)

the words that naturally go together.

e. g.

hammer – nail

table – chair

salt – pepper

They frequently occur together.

synonyms are antonyms

Two words with a similar meaning might have different connotations, for example **plump** is generally positive, whereas **fat** is generally negative.

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synonyms are antonyms

Words may belong to different registers; for example, **peev**ed is informal whereas **angry** can be used both in informal and in formal discourse; You are likely to find **palpate** in medical discourse whereas **touch** is not marked in this way and can appear anywhere, including in casual conversation.

antonyms are (non-) gradable

antonyms like **open** and **closed**
are non-gradable,

whereas antonyms like **hot** and **cold**
are gradable:

hot - lukewarm [ˌluːk'wɔːm] - **cold**

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hot - lukewarm [ˌluːk'wɔːm] - **cold**

hyponymy and meronymy

There are two more sense relations :
hyponymy and meronymy.

Hyponymy is known as the 'kind of' relation. It obtains between words like dog and animal – a dog is a 'kind of' animal; if something is a dog, it is an animal. Dog is called a hyponym of animal, and animal is a superordinate of dog.

hyponymy and meronymy

Read more about hyponymy in Yule (2010, 118–119) and in Section 5.1.3 in Riemer (2010, 142ff.). It is easy to represent hyponymy with a tree structure like the one below:

1 animal

2 dog / cat / cow / fish / etc.

3 poodle / terrier / spaniel / collie etc.

hyponymy and meronymy

Meronymy, on the other hand, is the 'part of' relationship. Words like arm and body are in a meronymic relationship:

the arm is a part of the body.

The arm has parts itself:

for example, the hand **is part** of the arm.

And the finger **is a part of** the hand.

hyponymy and meronymy

One of the properties of semantic relations is **transitivity**.

Let's take a relation R and assume that **A** is in such a relation to **B**, and **B** is in such a relation to **C**. If the relationship is transitive, then A will be in this relation to C. Transitivity is not a property of lexical relations only. 'Bigger than' is a transitive relation. If a number X is bigger than Y and Y is bigger than Z, then X is bigger than Z.

Componential analysis

There are many different ways to approach the problems of meaning, since meaning is related to many different functions of language. The meanings of words in a language are interrelated and they are defined in part by their relations with other words in the language.

Componential analysis

Analyzed in the same semantic domain, words can be classified according to shared and differentiating features.

Breaking down the sense of a word into its minimal distinctive features, componential analysis of meaning can be a useful approach in the study of meaning, particularly in determining the meaning of a **lexeme**.

Componential analysis

Although componential analysis has some difficulties and limitations in its application, it is still used effectively in modern linguistics.

Componential analysis

The meaning of a lexeme is a complicated structure where elements of meaning have definite interrelation (Crystal, 1987: 104).

Componential analysis

All **semantic elements** in a word are not equally important. One (or some) of them is the dominant semantic element and it organizes around itself all the other ones, which may be more or less important for the meaning of a lexeme (Lyons J, 1995: 108 and Leech, 1983: 89).

Componential analysis

A **lexeme** can be analyzed and described in terms of its semantic components, which help to define different lexical relations, grammatical and syntactic processes.

The semantic structure of a lexeme is treated as a system of meanings.

To some extent we can define a lexeme by telling what set it belongs to and how it differs from other members of the same set.

Procedural Steps in Componential analysis

Procedural Steps in the Componential Analysis of
Meaning:

Componential analysis (CA) can only be done within the same semantic domain. There are three basic steps in the procedure for determining the diagnostic features (Nida, 1975: 48), they are:

Procedural Steps in Componential analysis

The three basic steps in the procedure for determining the diagnostic features are:

- a. determining the common features and line up all the apparently relevant differences in form and possibly related functions;
- b. studying the relations of the features to one another, in order to determine the redundancies and dependencies; and
- c. formulating a set of diagnostic features and testing such a set for adequacy.

Componential analysis

The meaning of a word can be considered as the sum of some smaller elements or components. Think about the meaning of the following words: **man**, **woman**, **boy** and **girl**. What definitions can you formulate for the meaning of each word? Here are definitions adapted from a popular dictionary of English:

Componential analysis

man: an adult male human /person

woman: an adult female human / person

boy: a male child

girl: a female child.

Componential analysis

Being human is common to all the definitions. The definition of **man** makes this explicit, but it is there in the other definitions too, because 'human' is something which is part of the meaning of both 'person' and 'child'. We could say that 'human' is a component in the meaning of all these words.

Componential analysis

The definitions of man and woman share another component, again made explicit by the dictionary: that of being adult.

By contrast, both boy and girl contain the component 'child'

(in other words, NOT adult).

Componential analysis

Man and boy share the component male, whereas woman and girl share the component 'female'.

We can summarise this visually in the following way:

Componential analysis

Componential analysis			
	human	adult	female
man	+	+	-
woman	+	+	+
boy	+	-	-
girl	+	-	+

Componential analysis

However, which label we choose for our components is arbitrary; we could have just as easily used a component +/– child, or +/– male.

Componential analysis

Kinship terms	[MALE]	[ASCEND]	[DESCEND]	[LINEAL]
<i>Father</i>	+	+	-	+
<i>Mother</i>	-	+	-	+
<i>Uncle</i>	+	+	-	-
<i>Aunt</i>	-	+	-	-
<i>Brother</i>	+	-	-	+
<i>Sister</i>	-	-	-	+
<i>Son</i>	+	-	+	+
<i>daughter</i>	-	-	+	+
<i>Nephew</i>	+	-	+	-
<i>Niece</i>	-	-	+	-
<i>Cousin</i>	+/-	-	-	-

Table 2. The matrix of kinship terms (Jackson, 1996: 82)

Componential analysis

<i>+1 generation</i>	<i>father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>uncle</i>	<i>Aunt</i>	
<i>0 generation</i>	<i>Ego</i>		<i>Brother</i>	<i>Sister</i>	<i>cousin</i>
<i>-1 generation</i>	<i>son</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>Nephew</i>	<i>niece</i>	

Tabel 3. The diagnostic features of kinship terms

Componential analysis

Linguistic Basis for Componential Analysis

The actual linguistic procedures employed in CA consists of four types, they are naming, paraphrasing, defining, and classifying. If elicitation of usage is carefully conducted and if the results of such a procedure are carefully checked against spontaneous utterances, there is every reason to believe that the results of using the four basic processes of naming, paraphrasing, defining, and classifying can be essentially accurate (Nida, 1975: 64-66).

Componential analysis

a. naming

The process of naming is in certain respects similar to reference, though the perspective is somewhat different. Reference is usually described as the relation established between linear unit and a referent, while naming is the specific act of designating a referent.

Componential analysis

b. paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is also an important linguistic function and one can spell out the distinctive features of any semantic unit by employing certain types of paraphrases. Uncle can be paraphrased into my father's brother or my mother's brother.

Componential analysis

c. defining

The process of defining would seem to be simply another form of paraphrase, but defining is a highly specialized form of paraphrase and is rarely used in actual language situations. It consists essentially in combining all the various specific paraphrases into a single statement based on the diagnostic components of the particular meaning in question. Uncle may be defined as the brother of one's father or mother or the husband of one's aunt.

Componential analysis

d. classifying

It involves a triple procedure: (1) lumping together those units which have certain features in common, (2) separating out those units which are distinct from one another, and (3) determining the basis for such groupings.

Componential analysis

d. classifying

Classification is never merely a process of putting referents into conceptual files for the basic kinship terms in English, it is essential to **establish the features** of sex, generation, degree of linearity, and consanguinity- affinal distinction.

Componential analysis

CA contributions to the Study of Meaning.

Componential analysis has a useful part to play in contributing to the description of meanings of lexemes (Jackson, 2009: 91-92).

Here are some of the contributions:

Componential analysis

CA contributions to the Study of Meaning.

a. Understanding synonymy.

A pair of true synonyms will share the same set of semantic components.

For example, adult and grown-up have the same components [+HUMAN]
[+ADULT].

Componential analysis

CA contributions to the Study of Meaning.

b. Establishing degrees of synonymy.

We may talk of looser synonymy where a pair of lexemes have some but not all semantic components in common. For example, barn and shed would be looser synonyms. They share components [BUILDING], [STORAGE], but barn has additional component of [FARM] and perhaps that of [FOR CEREALS], while shed has perhaps the additional component [HOUSE].

Componential analysis

CA contributions to the Study of Meaning.

c. Understanding antonymy.

A pair of antonyms usually share all their components except one, e.g man and woman share the components [+CONCRETE], [+ANIMATE], [+HUMAN], but they are contrasted by the component [MALE].

Componential analysis

CA contributions to the Study of Meaning.

d. Understanding the sense relation of hyponymy.

Hyponymy refers to the relation of inclusion of meaning, e.g. the fact that the meaning of rat is included in the meaning of rodent ['rəʊd(ə)nt].

Componential analysis

CA contributions to the Study of Meaning.

e. Helping translator to produce accurate translation.

CA determines the essential features of meaning of lexical units, which is very useful in doing translation (Nida, 1975: 7).

Componential analysis

General shortcomings and difficulties of the method

- The discovery procedures for semantic features are not clearly objectifiable.
- Only part of the vocabulary can be described through more or less structured sets of features.
- Metalinguistic features are expressed through language again.
- Features used may not have clear definitions.
- Limited in focus and mechanical in style.

Componential analysis

A number of **fundamental difficulties** are involved in determining the diagnostic components of the meanings of semantic unit (Nida, 1975: 61-64).

Componential analysis

a. **The lack of an adequate metalanguage** with which to describe some of the diversities. It is difficult enough to speak of distinctions in color, so that a contiguous [kən'tɪgjuəs] series such as violet, blue, purple, green, yellow, orange, and red can be properly described in terms of diagnostic components.

Another obvious example involves the semantic domain of odors: stink, smell, stench, and malodor, or the semantic domain of noises: scream, screech, squeak, and squeal.

Componential analysis

b. Meanings which constitute a contiguous set.

The meaning of even in contexts such as even John kissed Marry, John even kissed Marry, and John kissed even Marry is paralleled to some extent by only, e.g. only John kissed Marry, John only kissed Marry, and John kissed only Marry.

The related meanings of even, only, and just are contiguous, therefore one must look for other sets of contrast to provide the basis for componential analysis.

Componential analysis

c. Some terms which primarily differ only in the degree of intensity.

There may be no absolute feature which marks the difference but by only a **relative contrast**. Toss and hurl may be regarded as types of throwing, but the major difference is one of intensity, and accordingly one must reckon with a continuum on which there is no fixed boundary between the two. The speed at which a professional baseball player may toss a ball may be much faster than the speed at which some amateur ball players can hurl.

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Componential analysis

d. The meanings of certain terms exist only in one's passive vocabulary.

One may, for example, have a general idea of the meanings of saunter, stroll, and meander, as referring to ways of walking, but the fact that these terms are not in one's active vocabulary tends to make it difficult to determine how and to what extent such meanings differ.

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Componential analysis

e. The diversity of view points, especially in describing spatial relations.

For a house one can speak of behind and in front of, since a house is regarded as having a back and front. But when one speaks of behind a tree and in front of a tree, the spatial relation must be relative to a view point character or existing situation. Time involves similar difficulties.

Componential analysis

f. The meaning of many abstract terms.

It involves a number of complications because of their potential syntagmatic relations to so many events and entities.

A word such as lousy may occur with a vast number of different semantic heads, e.g. lousy meal, lousy person, lousy time, lousy deal, lousy weather, lousy grades, lousy book, lousy performance, etc.

None of which have anything to do with a louse.

Componential analysis

g. A word can have different meanings in different fields.

The word **competence** is used in the fields of linguistics, education and psychology, and they define and use it in different ways and contexts.

h. Deixis terms.

The different meanings and use of “**there and here**” and “**this and that**” depend primarily on space and time.

Componential analysis

i. Distinctions may be based on relations rather than on physical features.

Certain aspects of complications have already been noted in the discussions of kinship terms, but meanings reflected in such terms as friend, partner, colleague, and associate are even more difficult to analyze.

j. The componential analysis becomes much more complex when the relation describe logical arrangements, as with if, though, because, in order to, etc.

Componential analysis

Componential analysis is also limited in its **range of applicability** as it does not apply easily to all areas of the vocabulary.

Semantic components, when they can be identified, have a discriminatory function and they add to our understanding of the meaning of a lexeme by providing points of contrast with semantically related lexemes.

The meaning of a lexeme must also involve a number of perspectives, e.g. denotation, sense relations, and collocation.

Prototypes

When people think of birds, they often think of flying. And yet there are birds that can't fly: **penguins and ostriches** for example.

We also associate birds with wings. But **bats** have wings (and fly) and yet they are not birds.

Prototypes

Prototypicality is the other way round you can try to explain the meaning of words. It is linked, to some extent, to the difficulties people might have in constructing a definition of words which will describe their meaning exactly and precisely

Prototypes

Many speakers of English the most typical bird is the **robin**. In other words, we could talk about prototypical and less prototypical examples of a certain category.

Prototypes

Prototypicality can be a useful notion, in a way, when you discuss **colours** as well.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980. Pp. xiii + 242.

ARGUMENT IS WAR

Your claims are *undefensible*.

He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.

His criticisms were *right on target*.

I *demolished* his argument.

I've never *won* an argument with him.

You disagree? Okay, *shoot!*

If you use that *strategy*, he'll *wipe you out*.

He *shot down* all my arguments.