

LEXICAL SEMANTICS

LICENCE 3_LA

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BRAINSTORMING

- ❑ Your classmate Holly, a philosophy major, frequently poses language questions to her friends. Recently she asked, “Do you think *George Washington* and *the first president of the United States* mean the same thing?” What do you tell her?
- ❑ Your friend Nathan claims there are no true synonyms. You counter with *fast* and *quick* as synonyms that both mean ‘*speedy*’. Nathan one-ups you by pointing out that *a quick talker* isn’t necessarily *a fast talker*, and he claims that since you can’t always exchange *fast* and *quick*, they’re not synonyms. Now what do you say?

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- ❑ An uncle who knows you are studying linguistics asks whether there is a term to capture the relationship between word pairs like *uncle* and *nephew*, *student* and *teacher*, *doctor* and *patient*. “They are not opposites like *hot* and *cold*”, he says. “But what are they?” What do you tell him?
 - ❑ At a family picnic you listen to your cousin tease his four-year-old daughter about a coloring book he’s taken from her. The girl says, “That’s *mine*.” Her father says, “That’s right, it is mine.” The girl repeats, “No, it’s *mine*.” Her father says, “That’s what I said: it’s *mine*.” “No, it’s not,” she insists. Then she grabs the book and walks away. What is it about the meaning of *yours* and *mine* that makes it possible to tease a four-year-old this way?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

❑ GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

- **The students will learn the basics of Lexical Semantics**

❑ SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the course, Learners will understand the fact that:

- a word can have more than one meaning;
- different words appear to have the same meaning;
- some words can be analysed into components;
- some words seem to have opposites;
- the meanings of some words are included in the meaning of others;
- certain combinations of words have meanings which are very different from the combination of their separate meanings.

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INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Semantics is the study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences.
- ❑ It is a wide subject within the general study of language.
- ❑ An understanding of semantics is essential to the study of ***language acquisition*** (how language users acquire a sense of meaning, as speakers and writers, listeners and readers) and of ***language change*** (how meanings alter over time).
- ❑ It is important for understanding ***language in social contexts***, as these are likely to affect meaning, and for understanding varieties of English spoken worldwide and effects of style.

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- ❑ 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*.
 - ❑ Semantics refers to meaning and meaning is so intangible that one group of linguists, the structuralists, preferred not to deal with it or rely on it at all!

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- ❑ To illustrate what we mean by the intangible quality of **'meaning'**, think of such words as 'beauty', 'goodness', 'love' ; it would be hard to find two people who agree absolutely on what each of these words implies.
 - ❑ Similarly, we all think we know what we mean by 'boy' and 'man', but at *what age does a 'boy' cease to be a 'boy' into becoming a 'man'?* at thirteen, fifteen, eighteen, twenty-one? Meaning is a variable and not to be taken for granted.

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- ❑ Word meaning mediates between conceptualization and language: simply put, words name concepts.
 - ❑ Studying which concepts can have names---and how the fine-grained structure of those concepts interacts with the linguistic structures that contain them---reveals something important about the nature of language and cognition. What can words mean?

Conceptual Meaning and Associative Meaning

- ❑ In semantic analysis, there is always an attempt to focus on what the words conventionally mean, rather than on what an individual speaker might want them to mean on a particular occasion
- ❑ This approach is concerned with objective or general meaning and avoids trying to account for subjective or local meaning
- ❑ Doing semantics is attempting to spell out what it is we all know when we behave as if we share knowledge of the meaning of a word, a phrase, or a sentence in a language.

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- ❑ We can go further and make a broad distinction between conceptual meaning and associative meaning
 - ❑ **Conceptual meaning** covers those basic, essential components of meaning that are conveyed by the literal use of a word.
 - ❑ It is the type of meaning that dictionaries are designed to describe. Some of the basic components of a word like needle in English might include “thin, sharp, steel instrument.” These components would be part of the conceptual meaning of needle.

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- ❑ However, different people might have different associations or connotations attached to a word like needle.
 - ❑ They might associate it with “pain,” or “illness,” or “blood,” or “drugs,” or “thread,” or “knitting,” or “hard to find” (especially in a haystack), and these associations may differ from one person to the next.
 - ❑ These types of associations are not treated as part of the word’s conceptual meaning.

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- ❑ In a similar way, some people may associate the expression low-calorie, when used to describe a product, with “healthy,” but this is not part of the basic conceptual meaning of the expression (i.e. “producing a small amount of heat or energy”).
 - ❑ Poets, song-writers, novelists, literary critics, advertisers and lovers may all be interested in how words can evoke certain aspects of associative meaning, but in linguistic semantics we are more concerned with trying to analyze conceptual meaning.

1- OVERVIEW OF LEXICOLOGY & SEMANTICS

In the Beginning There was a Question ...

► WHAT IS LEXICAL SEMANTICS?

- ❑ To a first approximation, lexemes are words, so lexical semantics is the study of word meaning.
- ❑ The main reason why word-level semantics is especially interesting from a cognitive point of view is that words are names for individual concepts.
- ❑ Thus, lexical semantics is the study of those concepts that have names. The question *What can words mean?* then, amounts to the question *What concepts can have names?*

1.1- What is a Lexical Item/Unit?

- ❑ A **lexical item** (or **lexical unit**, **lexical entry**) is a single word, a part of a word, or a chain of words (=catena) that forms the basic elements of a language's lexicon (\approx vocabulary).
- Examples are '*cat*', '*traffic light*', '*take care of*', '*by the way*', and '*it's raining cats and dogs*'.
- ❑ Lexical items can be generally understood to convey a single meaning, much as a *lexeme*, but are not limited to single words.

- ❑ Lexical items are like *semes* in that they are "natural units" translating between languages, or in learning a new language.
- ❑ In this last sense, it is sometimes said that language consists of ***grammaticalized lexis, and not lexicalized grammar.***
- ❑ The entire store of lexical items in a language is called its lexis.
- ❑ Lexical items composed of more than one word are also sometimes called *lexical chunks, gambits, lexical phrases, lexical units, lexicalized stems, or speech formulae.*

1.1.1. Defining the Term "Word"

- ❑ A better approach to defining words is to acknowledge that there is no one totally satisfactory definition, but that we can isolate four of the most frequently implied meanings of 'word': the *orthographic* word, the *morphological* word, the *lexical* word and the *semantic* word

❖ The Orthographic Word

- ❑ An *orthographic* word is one which has a space on either side of it. This definition applies only to the written medium because in normal speech we rarely pause between words.
- ❑ Nevertheless, even in speech it is possible to isolate words by pausing between them. Ex: Ø girl Ø

❖ The Morphological Word

- ❑ A *morphological* word is a unique form. It considers form only and not meaning.
- ❑ 'Ball', for example, is one morphological word, even though it can refer to both a *bouncing object* and a *dance*.
- ❑ So, 'Ball' & 'balls' would be two morphological words because they are not identical in form.



The Lexical Word

- ❑ A *lexical* word comprehends the various forms of items which are closely related by meaning.
- ❑ Thus, 'chair' and 'chairs' are two morphological words, but one lexical word.
- ❑ Similarly, 'take', 'takes', 'taking', 'taken', and 'took' are five morphological words but only one lexical word.
- ❑ Often in linguistics, when capital letters are used for a word, for example TAKE, it implies that we are dealing with a lexical word and so TAKE comprehends all the various forms, that is, 'take', 'takes', 'taking', 'taken' and 'took'.

❖ The Semantic Word

- ❑ A *semantic* word involves distinguishing between items which may be morphologically identical but differ in meaning.
- ❑ We have seen above that 'ball' can have two distinct meanings. This phenomenon of 'polysemy' is common in English.
- ❑ Thus, 'table' can refer to a piece of furniture or to a diagram.
- ❑ The diagram and the piece of furniture are the same morphological word but they are two semantic words because they are not closely related in meaning.

1.2. Word Classes

- ❑ We have looked at the definition of the term 'word' and we should note that words in English can function in many different ways. So, in English, it is always essential to see how a word functions in a particular example before assigning it to a word class.
- ❖ Thus 'round' can be a ***noun*** in:
He won the first *round*.



❖ An ***adjective*** in:

She bought a *round* table for the dining room.

❖ A ***verb*** in:

They *rounded* the corner at eighty miles an hour.

❖ An ***adverb*** in:

The doctor will come *round* this evening.

❖ A ***preposition*** in:

He went *round* the track in four minutes.

II- COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS

2.1- Definition

- ❑ **Componential analysis (feature analysis or contrast analysis)** is the analysis of words through structured sets of semantic features, which are given as “present”, “absent” or “indifferent with reference to feature”.
- ❑ The method thus departs from the principle of compositionality. Componential analysis is a method typical of structural semantics which analyzes the structure of a word's meaning.
- ❑ Thus, ***it reveals the culturally important features*** by which speakers of the language distinguish different words in the domain.

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- ❑ This is a highly valuable approach to learning another language and understanding a specific semantic domain of Ethnography.
 - ❑ It says that we can describe meanings, meaning relationships (like entailment) and the grammatical behavior of word classes by analyzing word meanings into **meaning components**.
 - ❑ Some of these meaning components correspond to words of the language and some do not. This analysis procedure is called **lexical decomposition**. Here are two basic reasons that we might want to use lexical decomposition.

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- ❑ Words can be analyzed and described in terms of their semantic components, which usually come in pairs called semantic oppositions: "Up" and "Down," for example, are related in that they both describe vertical directions, one in one direction (call it "plus") and the other in the other (call it "minus").
 - ❑ There are several variations on these pairs, depending on how they related to each other and how they can be used with other words.
 - ❑ There are also sets of words that are variations on a single semantic theme, such as penny, nickel, dime, quarter, etc.

2.2- The Theory of Componential Analysis in Semantics

- ❑ Linguistic semantics is also used by anthropologists called ethnoscience to conduct formal semantic analysis (componential analysis) to determine how expressed signs—usually single words as vocabulary items called lexemes—in a language are related to the perceptions and thoughts of the people who speak the language.
- ❑ Componential analysis tests the idea that linguistic categories influence or determine how people view the world; this idea is called the Whorf hypothesis after the American anthropological linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, who proposed it.

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- ❑ In componential analysis, lexemes that have a common range of meaning constitute a semantic domain.
 - ❑ Such a domain is characterized by the distinctive semantic features (components) that differentiate individual lexemes in the domain from one another, and also by features shared by all the lexemes in the domain.
 - ❑ Such componential analysis points out, for example, that in the domain “seat” in English, the lexemes “chair”, “sofa”, “loveseat,” and “bench” can be distinguished from one another according to how many people are accommodated and whether a back support is included.

- At the same time all these lexemes share the common component, or feature, of meaning “something on which to sit.” Thus, in the terms of Katz: ***The word is broken down into meaningful components which make up the total sum of the meaning in a word***

	[MALE]	[ADULT]
➤ Man	+	+
➤ Woman	-	+
➤ Boy	+	-

- The analysis of this kind allows us to provide definitions for all these words in terms of a few components as ‘man is = human + adult + male and so on’.

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- ❑ Word has been analyzed through this method in terms of a number of distinct elements or components of meaning. Names of Katz and Fodor are prominently associated with Componential Theory.
 - ❑ They tried to describe words in terms of relatively small sets of general elements of meaning which some are also called 'Universals'. *Kinship terms, color vocabulary, words for botanical and animal world* easily lend themselves for this kind of analysis. Sex is one of the parameters in kinship terminology. So sets like mother-father, brother-sister are relevant here.

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- ❑ This analysis is called ***Componential Analysis*** because the meanings of lexemes are analyzed into components, which can then be compared across lexemes or groups of lexemes.
 - ❑ The idea of dividing a lexeme into semantic components is like that of Distinctive Feature theory: **Components have a distinguishing function.**
 - ❑ They serve to distinguish the meaning of a lexeme from that of other related lexemes and we show this through a matrix.



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- ❑ This shows that the semantic components [MALE] and [ADULT] serve to distinguish the meanings of these four lexemes.
 - ❑ The semantic domain where Componential Analysis was successfully used 'Kinship terminology' where we need many semantic components to distinguish the kinship terms.
 - ❑ Here we can add [ASCEND] and [DESCEND] components to show generation older or younger than the other and also [LINEAL] to show collateral descent.

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- ❑ There are two broad types of components: those that serve to identify a semantic domain and that are shared by all the lexemes in the domain and those that serve to distinguish lexemes from each other within a semantic domain.
 - ❑ The first type is called ***Common Component*** and the second one is called the ***Diagnostic Component*** or as in phonology a distinctive feature.
 - ❑ For example, all jugs are containers have bottoms, open mouths and handles which are the common components, but if one jug is not round, but rectangular, so [SHAPE] will be the diagnostic component in the domain.

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- ❑ There are also ***Formal Components*** related to form of the object and ***Functional Components*** related to the function the object plays i.e. sofas, chairs and bench can be described in terms of form and function.
 - ❑ The presence of a component is represented by [+], the absence is marked by [-] and these are usually binary; but if the components may or may not be present, we describe them as [+/-].

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- ❑ This is so, as language is independent and universal. Katz says: **“Semantic components may be combined in various ways in different languages yet they would be identifiable as the ‘same’ component in the vocabularies of all languages”.**
 - ❑ In conclusion, these components or categories are not part of vocabulary of language itself, but rather theoretical elements ***‘postulated in order to describe the semantic relation between the lexical elements of a given language’.***

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- ❑ Within generative-transformational theory, meaning is studied through semantic features where the deep structures of a sentence and the meaning of words used in that structure together represent the total meaning of the sentence features mention the permissible relationship among words (e.g. that is a good hope).
 - ❑ In order to carry out a semantic analysis, noun-abstract-inanimate-non-human-uncount-definite) and comprehensive meaning emerges.

What is Lexical Semantics?

- ❑ Semantics is the study of language meaning.
- ❑ The traditional method used in dictionaries is to define a word in terms of other words. Ultimately, this strategy is circular, since we must then define the words we use in the definition, and in their definitions, until finally we must either run out of words or re-use one of the words we are trying to define.
- ❖ What is meaning?
- ❖ Can we ignore syntax, then?
- ❖ Can we ignore pragmatics (domain effects, ...)?

Working Definition:

- ***The study of what individual lexical items mean, why they mean what they do, how we can represent all of this, and where the combined interpretation for an utterance comes from***
- Let us interpret the following compound nominalizations:
- ***police failure = (the) police (SUBJ) fail(verb)***
- ***player selection = [Somebody] selects (the) player O_{BJ}***

Interpret following compound nominals according to 7 prepositions:

- ❖ ***Of***: *state law* = *law* **OF** *state*
- ❖ ***for***: *baby chair* = *chair* **FOR** *baby*
- ❖ ***in***: *morning prayer* = *prayer* **IN** *morning*
- ❖ ***at***: *airport food* = *food* **AT** *airport*
- ❖ ***on***: *Sunday television* = *television* **ON** *Sunday*
- ❖ ***from***: *reactor waste* = *waste* **FROM** *reactor*
- ❖ ***with***: *gun man* = *man* **WITH** *gun*
- ❖ ***about***: *war story* = *story* **ABOUT** *war*



□ Define words by way of a constrained representation language, in an attempt to avoid circularity and enforce consistency of annotation.

➤ E.g. definition of **love** in Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Goddard, 2000):

❖ **X loves Y =**

❖ **X often thinks about Y**

❖ **X thinks good things about Y**

❖ **X wants to do good things for Y**

❖ **X wants good things to happen to Y**

❖ **when X thinks about Y, X often wants to be with Y**

❖ **when X thinks about Y, X often feels something good**

LEXICAL SEMANTICS OVERLAPS CRUCIALLY WITH FIELDS SUCH AS:

- ❖ Lexicography
- ❖ Phraseology
- ❖ Philosophy
- ❖ Corpus linguistics
- ❖ Syntax
- ❖ Pragmatics
- ❖ Child language acquisition
- ❖ natural language understanding
- ❖ computational lexicography
- ❖ computational language learning (lexical acquisition)
- ❖ knowledge representation

Starting at the Beginning ...

- *Lexical semantics is concerned with the identification and representation of the semantics of lexical items.*
- *If we are to identify the semantics of lexical items, we have to be prepared for the eventuality of a given word having (shock, horror) multiple interpretations = **polysemy** (as opposed to **monosemy**)*

DISTINGUISHING POLYSEMES

- *The polysemy of a word can be tested by a variety of means, including:*
- **Antagonism:** can the word be used in a sentence with multiple competing interpretations? (cf. ***Kim can't bear children***)
- **Zeugma:** can the word be used in a context where multiple competing interpretations are simultaneously evoked? (cf. ***Kim and her visa expired***)
- **Independent truth conditions:** can the word be used in a given sentence with different truth conditions according to different interpretations? (cf. ***Kim is wearing a light jacket***)
- **Definitional distinctness:** it is impossible to come up with a unified definition which encompasses the different sub-usages of the word

Polysemy

- ❑ When we encounter two more words with the same form and related meanings, it is technically known as polysemy.
- ❑ Polysemy can be defined as one form (written or spoken) having multiple meanings that are all related by extension. Examples are the word head, used to refer to the object on top of your body, froth on top of a glass of beer, person at the top of a company or department, and many other things.
- ❑ Other examples of polysemy are foot (of person, of bed, of mountain) or run (person does, water does, colors do).

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- ❑ If we aren't sure whether different uses of a single word are examples of homonymy or polysemy, we can check in a dictionary.
 - ❑ If the word has multiple meanings (i.e. it's polysemous), then there will be a single entry, with a numbered list of the different meanings of that word.
 - ❑ If two words are treated as homonyms, they will typically have two separate entries. In most dictionaries, bank, mail, mole and sole are clearly treated as homonyms whereas face, foot, get, head and run are treated as examples of polysemy.

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- ❑ Of course, it is possible for two forms to be distinguished via homonymy and for one of the forms also to have various uses via polysemy.
 - ❑ The words date (= a thing we can eat) and date (= a point in time) are homonyms. However, the “point in time” kind of date is polysemous in terms of a particular day and month (= on a letter), an arranged meeting time (= an appointment), a social meeting (= with someone we like), and even a person (= that person we like). So the question *'How was your date?'* could have several different interpretations.

Metonymy

- ❑ The relatedness of meaning found in polysemy is essentially based on similarity. The head of a company is similar to the head of a person on top of and controlling the body.
- ❑ There is another type of relationship between words, based simply on a close connection in everyday experience.
- ❑ That close connection can be based on ***a container–contents relation*** (bottle/water, can/juice), ***a whole–part relation*** (car/wheels, house/roof) or ***a representative–symbol relationship*** (king/crown, the President/the White House). Using one of these words to refer to the other is an example of **metonymy**.

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- ❑ It is our familiarity with metonymy that makes it possible for us to understand He drank the whole bottle, although it sounds absurd literally (i.e. he drank the liquid, not the glass object).
 - ❑ We also accept ***The White House*** has announced...or ***Downing Street*** protested ... without being puzzled that buildings appear to be talking.
 - ❑ We use metonymy when we talk about filling up the car, answering the door, boiling a kettle, giving someone a hand, or needing some wheels.

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- ❑ Many examples of metonymy are highly conventionalized and easy to interpret. However, other examples depend on an ability to infer what the speaker has in mind.
 - ❑ The metonymy in ***Get your butt over here*** is easier to understand if you are used to male talk in the United States, The strings are too quiet if you're familiar with orchestral music, and I prefer cable if you have a choice in how you receive television programs (in the USA).
 - ❑ Making sense of such expressions often depends on context, background knowledge and inference.

Collocation

- ❑ One final aspect of our knowledge of words has nothing to do with any of the factors considered so far. We know which words tend to occur with other words.
- ❑ If you ask a thousand people what they think of when you say hammer, more than half will say nail. If you say table, they'll mostly say chair, and butter elicits bread, needle elicits thread and salt elicits pepper.
- ❑ ***One way we seem to organize our knowledge of words is simply on the basis of collocation , or frequently occurring together.***

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- ❑ In recent years, the study of which words occur together and their frequency of co-occurrence has received a lot more attention in corpus linguistics . A corpus is a large collection of texts, spoken or written, typically stored as a database in a computer.
 - ❑ Those doing corpus linguistics can then use the database to find out how often specific words or phrases occur and what types of collocations are most common.

II- Semantic Features

- ❑ One way in which the study of basic conceptual meaning might be helpful would be as a means of accounting for the “oddness” we experience when we read sentences such as the following:
 - The hamburger ate the boy.
 - The table listens to the radio.
 - The horse is reading the newspaper.
- ❑ We should first note that the oddness of these sentences does not derive from their syntactic structure. According to the basic syntactic rules for forming English sentences, we have well-formed structures.
 - NP V NP
 - The hamburger ate the boy

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- ❑ This sentence is syntactically good, but semantically odd. Since the sentence The boy ate the hamburger is perfectly acceptable, we may be able to identify the source of the problem.
 - ❑ The components of the conceptual meaning of the noun hamburger must be significantly different from those of the noun boy, thereby preventing one, and not the other, from being used as the subject of the verb ate.
 - ❑ The kind of noun that can be the subject of the verb ate must denote an entity that is capable of “eating.” The noun hamburger does not have this property and the noun boy does.

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- ❑ We can make this observation more generally applicable by trying to determine the crucial element or feature of meaning that any noun must have in order to be used as the subject of the verb ate.
 - ❑ Such an element may be as general as “animate being.” We can then use this idea to describe part of the meaning of words as either having (+) or not having (–) that particular feature.
 - ❑ So, the feature that the noun boy has is “+animate” (= denotes an animate being) and the feature that the noun hamburger has is “–animate” (= does not denote an animate being).

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- ❑ This simple example is an illustration of a procedure for analysing meaning in terms of semantic features.
 - ❑ Features such as “+animate, –animate,” “+human, –human,” “+female, –female,” for example, can be treated as the basic elements involved in differentiating the meaning of each word in a language from every other word.
 - ❑ If we had to provide the crucial distinguishing features of the meanings of a set of English words such as table, horse, boy, man, girl, woman, we could begin with the following diagram.



From a feature analysis like this, we can say that at least part of the meaning of the word girl in English involves the elements [+human, +female, -adult]. We can also characterize the feature that is crucially required in a noun in order for it to appear as the subject of a particular verb, supplementing the syntactic analysis with semantic features.

The N [+human] is reading the newspaper.

This approach would give us the ability to predict which nouns make this sentence semantically odd. Some examples would be table, horse and hamburger, because none of them have the required feature [+human].

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- ❑ The approach just outlined is a start on analyzing the conceptual components of word meaning, but it is not without problems. For many words in a language it may not be as easy to come up with neat components of meaning.
 - ❑ If we try to think of the components or features we would use to differentiate the nouns *'advice'*, *'threat'* and *'warning'*, for example, we may not be very successful.
 - ❑ Part of the problem seems to be that the approach involves a view of words in a language as some sort of “containers” that carry meaning components. There is clearly more to the meaning of words than these basic types of features.

III- Semantic Roles

- ❑ Instead of thinking of words as “containers” of meaning, we can look at the “roles” they fulfill within the situation described by a sentence.
- ❑ If the situation is a simple event, as in The boy kicked the ball, then the verb describes an action (kick).
- ❑ The noun phrases in the sentence describe the roles of entities, such as people and things, involved in the action.
- ❑ We can identify a small number of semantic roles (also called “thematic roles”) for these noun phrases.

3.1- Agent and Theme

- ❑ In our example sentence, one role is taken by the noun phrase The boy as “the entity that performs the action,” technically known as the agent.
- ❑ Another role is taken by the ball as “the entity that is involved in or affected by the action,” which is called the theme (or sometimes the “patient”). The theme can also be an entity (The ball) that is simply being described (i.e. not performing an action), as in The ball was red.
- ❑ Agents and themes are the most common semantic roles. Although agents are typically human (The boy), they can also be non-human entities that cause actions, as in noun phrases denoting a natural force (The wind), a machine (A car), or a creature (The dog), all of which affect the ball as theme.

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- The boy kicked the ball.
 - The wind blew the ball away.
 - A car ran over the ball.
 - The dog caught the ball.

□ The theme is typically non-human, but can be human (the boy), as in The dog chased the boy. In fact, the same physical entity can appear in two different semantic roles in a sentence, as in The boy cut himself. Here The boy is agent and himself is theme

3.2- Instrument and Experiencer

- ❑ If an agent uses another entity in order to perform an action, that other entity fills the role of instrument. In the sentences '*The boy cut the rope with an old razor*' and '*He drew the picture with a crayon*', the noun phrases '*an old razor*' and '*a crayon*' are being used in the semantic role of instrument.
- ❑ When a noun phrase is used to designate an entity as the person who has a feeling, perception or state, it fills the semantic role of experiencer. If we *see*, *know* or *enjoy* something, we're not really performing an action (hence we are not agents).
- ❑ We are in the role of experiencer. In the sentence *The boy feels sad*, the experiencer (The boy) is the only semantic role. In the question, *Did you hear that noise?*, the experiencer is you and the theme is that noise.

3.3- Location, Source and Goal

- ❑ A number of other semantic roles designate where an entity is in the description of an event. Where an entity is (on the table, in the room) and fills the role of location.
- ❑ Where the entity moves from the source (from Chicago) and where it moves to the goal (to New Orleans), as in '*We drove from Chicago to New Orleans*'.
- ❑ When we talk about transferring money from savings to checking, the source is savings and the goal is checking.
- ❑ All these semantic roles are illustrated in the following scenario.
- ❑ Note that a single entity (e.g. George) can appear in several different semantic roles.

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- ❑ Mary saw a fly on the wall.
 - EXPERIENCER THEME LOCATION

 - ❑ She borrowed a magazine from George.
 - AGENT THEME SOURCE

 - ❑ She squashed the bug with the magazine.
 - AGENT THEME INSTRUMENT

 - ❑ She handed the magazine back to George.
 - AGENT THEME GOAL

 - ❑ "Gee thanks," said George.
 - AGENT

IV- LEXICAL RELATIONS (Meaning in Relation to Other Words)

- ❑ One strategy is to try to find a small set of SEMANTIC PRIMES: Wierzbicka identifies on the order of 50 or so concepts (such as GOOD, BAD, BEFORE, AFTER, I, YOU, PART, KIND...) that allegedly suffice to express the meaning of all words (in any language). Whether this research program succeeds or not has important implications for the nature of linguistic conceptualization.
- ❑ In any case, speakers clearly have intuitions about meaning relations among words. The most familiar relations are synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy.

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- ❑ Not only can words be treated as “containers” of meaning, or as fulfilling “roles” in events, they can also have “relationships” with each other. In everyday talk, we often explain the meanings of words in terms of their relationships.
 - ❑ If we’re asked the meaning of the word conceal, for example, we might simply say, “It’s the same as hide,” or give the meaning of shallow as “the opposite of deep,” or the meaning of daffodil as “a kind of flower.”
 - ❑ In doing so, we are characterizing the meaning of each word, not in terms of its component features, but in terms of its relationship to other words. This approach is used in the semantic description of language and treated as the analysis of lexical relations. The lexical relations we have just exemplified are synonymy (conceal/hide), antonymy (shallow/deep) and hyponymy (daffodil/flower).

4.1- Synonymy

- ❑ Two or more words with very closely related meanings are called synonyms. They can often, though not always, be substituted for each other in sentences. In the appropriate circumstances, we can say, What was his answer? or What was his reply? with much the same meaning.
- ❑ Other common examples of synonyms are the pairs: almost/nearly, big/large, broad/wide, buy/purchase, cab/taxi, car/automobile, couch/sofa, freedom/ liberty. We should keep in mind that the idea of "**sameness**" of meaning used in discussing synonymy is not necessarily "**total sameness.**"
- ❑ There are many occasions when one word is appropriate in a sentence, but its synonym would be odd. For example, whereas the word answer fits in the sentence "*Sandy had only one answer correct on the test*", the word '*reply*' would sound odd.

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- ❑ Synonymous forms may also differ in terms of formal versus informal uses. The sentence My father purchased a large automobile has virtually the same meaning as My dad bought a big car, with four synonymous replacements, but the second version sounds much more casual or informal than the first.
 - ❑ Most people think of 'synonymy' as implying 'having the same meaning' but it is easy to show that synonymy is always partial, never complete. 'Tall' and 'high' are usually given as synonyms but whilst we can have both:
 - 'A tall building' and 'a high building',
 - we cannot have both
 - 'a tall boy' and '*a high boy'.

- We can best define synonymy by saying that it is the relationship in which two or more words are in free variation in all or most contexts. The closest we come to absolute synonymy is when the synonyms belong to different dialects as with:

❖ <i>British usage</i>	<i>US usage</i>
➤ Autumn	fall
➤ Estate agent	realtor
➤ Pavement	sidewalk

- But even here the choice of one term rather than indicates a regional preference. As well as regionally marked synonyms, we find synonyms which differ stylistically, in that one term may be more formal than another:

➤ Die:	pass on/over	kick the bucket	decease
➤ Steal:	relieve one of	pinch/half inch	purloin
➤ Smell:	odour	stink/pong	effluvium

- And, as the above items also illustrate, items which are cognitively synonymous may arouse very different emotional responses, the A list below implying less approval than the B list:

❖	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>
➤	conceal	hide
➤	politician	statesman
➤	stubborn	resolute

- ***Total synonymy***, that is, ***the coincidence of cognitive, emotive and stylistic identity***, is ***more of an ideal than a reality***. In addition, the choice of one word rather than its synonym can have an effect on the words and phrases than can co-occur with it. Let us illustrate this briefly by listing dictionary synonyms for 'put up with' and 'noise':

❖	<i>Put up with</i>	<i>noise</i>
➤	Bear	clamour
➤	Brook	din
➤	Endure	disturbance
➤	Tolerate	sound level

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- ❑ All the verbs can collocate with 'such noise' although 'brook' is more likely to occur with words like 'impertinence', 'offhandedness' or 'rudeness'.
 - ❑ As soon as we try to substitute 'clamour' for 'noise' we meet our first problem. We can say: 'I can't put up with such noise' but for most native speakers 'I can't put up with such clamour' is unacceptable.
 - ❑ In addition, if we substitute 'din' we need to include an indefinite article 'such a din', and the same applies to 'racket'.
 - ❑ ***What is being stressed here is the fact that items collocate and interact. We must take levels of formality into account in selecting synonyms.***

4.2- Antonymy

- ❑ *This is the general term applied to the sense relation involving oppositeness of meaning.*
- ❑ For our purposes, it will be convenient to distinguish three types of 'oppositeness', namely **(a) implicitly graded antonyms, (b) complementary and (c) converseness.**
- ❑ Two forms with opposite meanings are called antonyms.
- ❑ Some common examples are the pairs: alive/dead, big/small, fast/slow, happy/sad, hot/cold, long/short, male/female, married/single, old/new, rich/poor, true/false.

4.2.1- Implicitly Graded Antonyms

- ❑ They refer to pairs of items such as 'big' and 'small', 'good' and 'bad', 'young' and 'old'.
- ❑ In other words, 'big', 'good' and 'young' can only be interpreted in terms of being 'bigger', 'better' or 'younger' than something which is established as the norm for the comparison.
- ❑ Thus, when we say that one fly is bigger than another, we imply that 'big' is to be understood in the context of flies. This accounts for the apparent paradox of a 'big fly' being 'small when compared with other dogs'.

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- ❑ In English, the larger item of the pair is the unmarked or neutral member. Thus we can ask: 'how big is it? how old is he? how wide is the river?' without implying that the subject is either 'big', 'old' or 'wide'.
 - ❑ Such questions are unbiased or open with regard to the expectations of the enquirer.
 - ❑ On the other hand, to ask: how small is it? does prejudice the matter, claiming that it is indeed small.
 - ❑ There is nothing universal about the larger member of the pair being the neutral member. In Japanese, for example, one would ask the equivalent of:
 - How thin is it? when an English speaker would have to ask: how thick is it?

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- ❑ Related to complementary sets are sets of terms like colours or numbers where the assertion of one implies the negation of all the others.
 - ❑ Thus, if we have a set such as: green, yellow, brown, red, blue, to say: 'this is green' implies that it is not yellow, brown, red or blue.
 - ❑ In a two-term set such as (male, female), the assertion of male implies the denial of the only other term in the set.
 - ❑ Such terms, as well as being described as 'complementary', are often referred to as 'incompatible'.

4.2.3- Converseness

- ❑ It is the relationship that holds between such related pairs of sentences as 'John sold it to me' and 'I bought it from John' where SELL and BUY are in a converse relationship. English has a number of conversely related verbs and so sentence converseness is a common phenomenon:
 - ❖ John lent the money to Peter *vs* Peter borrowed the money from John.
- ❑ Other frequently occurring converse verbs include buy/sell; push/pull; command/serve; give/take; hire out/hire; lease/rent; teach/learn.



❑ Occasionally, the same verb can be used in the conversely related pair of sentences as in:

- John rented the house to Peter *vs* Peter rented the house from John.
- And also, John married Marry *vs* Mary married John.

❑ Sometimes, in English, we can find converse nouns corresponding to converse verbs:

- Command serve: master servant
- Teach learn: teacher pupil
- Treat consult: doctor patient

4.2.4- Hyponymy

- ❑ Hyponymy is related to complementarity and incompatibility. Whereas the relationship of implicit denial is called incompatibility, the relationship of implicit inclusion is called hyponymy.
- ❑ This relationship is easy to demonstrate. Colour 'red', for example, includes or comprehends the colours 'scarlet' and 'vermilion' just as the term 'flower' includes 'daisy', 'forget-me-not' and 'rose'.
- ❑ The including term in our latter example 'flower' is known as the 'superordinate term' and the included items are known as 'co-hyponyms'.

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- ❑ The assertion of a hyponym 'this is a rose' implies the assertion of the superordinate 'this is a flower' but the assertion of the superordinate does not automatically imply one specific hyponym.
 - ❑ We can thus say that the implicational nature of hyponymy is unilateral or works one way only.
 - ❑ One of the most useful features of the principle of hyponymy is that it allows us to be as general or as specific as a particular linguistic occasion warrants, as can be seen from the following hierarchies:

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- ❑ Often these hierarchical diagrams are called 'taxonomies'. With each downward step we encounter terms of more specific meaning.
 - ❑ Hyponymy is a recently invented method of indicating the relationships that can exist between words.
 - ❑ Occasionally, items have to be illustrated by means of one classification rather than another. 'Black' and 'white' are co-hyponyms when considered as colours but they can be complementary in discussion about race, draughts and piano keys.

V- DENOTATION (Meaning in Relation to the World)

- ❑ Defining words in terms of other words or concepts will only take us so far. Language talks about the world, and ultimately, in order to know what a word like *horse* or *despair* means, it is necessary to know something about the world.
- ❑ One way of getting at the connection between meaning and the world is to consider TRUTH CONDITIONS: what must the world be like in order for a given sentence to be true?
- ❑ In general, words participate in most of the kinds of truth-conditional meaning that sentences do, plus one or two more of their own.

5.1- Entailment

- ❑ It is the most concrete aspect of meaning: one sentence entails another just in case the truth of the first sentence is sufficient to guarantee the truth of the second.
- ❑ For instance, the sentence *I have four children* entails the sentence *I have at least two children*.
- ❑ We can extend this notion to words by assuming that one word entails another just in case substituting one word in for the other in a sentence produces an entailment relation.
- ❑ Thus *assassinate* entails *kill*, since *Jones assassinated the President* entails *Jones killed the President*. Similarly, *whisper* entails *spoke*, *devour* entails *ate*, and so on.

5.2- Presuppositions

- They are what must already be assumed to be true in order for a use of a sentence to be appropriate in the first place. For instance, *and* and *but* mean almost the same thing, and differ only in the presence of a presupposition associated with *but*.
- If I assert that *Tom is rich and kind*, it means exactly the same thing as *Tom is rich but kind* as far as what Tom is like; the only difference is that the use of the sentence containing *but* presupposes that it is unlikely for someone who is rich to also be kind.

5.3- Selectional Restrictions

- ❑ These are a kind of presupposition associated exclusively with words.
- ❑ The verb *sleep* presupposes that its subject is capable of sleeping; that is, it selects a restricted range of possible subjects.
- ❑ One reason why the sentence **Green ideas sleep furiously* is deviant, then, is because ideas are not capable of sleeping, in violation of the selectional restriction of *sleep*.

5.4- Implicature

- ❑ It is weaker than entailment. If you ask me how a student is doing in a course, and I reply *She's doing fine*, I imply that she is not doing great (otherwise, I would presumably have said so).
- ❑ Yet the sentence *She's doing fine* does not entail the sentence *She's not doing great*, since it can be true that a student is doing fine work even if she is actually doing spectacular work.

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- ❑ The implicature arises in this case through contrast with other words that could have been used. Interestingly, such lexical implicatures favor the formation of lexical gaps: because *fine* implicates *not good*, there is no word that means exactly *not good* (for instance, *mediocre* entails both *not good* and *not bad*).
 - ❑ Similarly, because *some* implicates *not all*, there is no single word (perhaps not in any language) that means exactly *not all*.

5.5- Connotation

- ❑ It is the part of the meaning of a word that adds a rhetorical spin to what is said.
- ❑ More specifically, connotation signals the attitude of the speaker towards the object or event described.
- ❑ If I describe someone as *garrulous* rather than *talkative*, the described behavior may be exactly the same, but *garrulous* conveys in addition the information that I disapprove of or dislike the behavior in question.

5.6- Vagueness

- ❑ It is perhaps the quintessential problem for scientific theories of word meaning. Imagine a person with a full head of hair; clearly, this person is not bald. Now imagine pulling out one hair at a time.
- ❑ Eventually, if this process is continued long enough, the person will qualify as bald. But at what point precisely does the switch from not-bald to bald occur? It's impossible to say for sure.
- ❑ But if we can't answer this simple question, then how can we possibly claim to truly understand the meaning of the word *bald*?

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- ❑ A little reflection will reveal that virtually every word that refers to objects or events in the real world contains vagueness: exactly how tuneless must a verbal performance get before the claim *She is singing* is no longer true?
 - ❑ Is that short sofa really a chair?
 - ❑ The pervasiveness and intractability of vagueness gives rise to profound philosophical issues.

VI- IDIOMS

- ❑ An idiom is a group of words whose meaning cannot be explained in terms of the habitual meanings of the words that make up the piece of language.
- ❑ Thus 'fly off the handle' which means 'lose one's temper' cannot be understood in terms of the meanings of 'fly', 'off' or 'handle'.
- ❑ They are considered as lexicalized syntaxes. Idioms involve the non-literal use of language and they can be categorized as follows:

6.1- Alliterative Comparisons

- Dead as a dodo
- Fit as a fiddle
- Good as gold

6.2- Noun Phrases

- A blind alley (route that leads nowhere, a false trail)
- A close shave (a narrow escape)
- A red letter day (a day that will never be forgotten)

6.3- Prepositional Phrases

- At sixes and sevens (unable/unwilling to agree)
- By hook or by crook (by whatever methods prove necessary)
- In for a penny, in for a pound ('I'm involved irrespective of cost')

6.4- Verb+ Noun Phrase

- Kick the bucket (die)
- Pop your clogs (die)
- Spill the beans (reveal a secret)

6.5- Verb + Preposition Phrase

- Be in clover (be exceptionally comfortable)
- Be in the doghouse (be in disgrace)
- Be between a rock and a hard place (have no room for manoeuvre)

6.6- Verb + Adverb

- Give in (yield)
- Put down (kill)
- Take to (like)



□ **NB:**

- ❖ Idioms range from the semi-transparent where either the meaning can be interpreted in terms of metaphor:
 - Clip someone's wings (reduce someone's mobility)
 - Or because one part of the idiomatic phrase is used literally: Run up a bill
 - To the totally opaque: Go bananas (lose one's temper)

- They tend to be relatively fixed with regard to number:
 - Spill the beans *and not* *spill the bean

- The use of determiners:
 - A dead duck *and not* *the/that dead duck

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- ❑ The use of comparatives and superlatives:
 - Good as gold *and not* *better than gold
 - Red tape *and not* *reddest tape

 - ❑ Word order: Hale and hearty *and not* *Hearty and hale

 - ❑ The use of passive:
 - They buried the hatchet *and not* *The hatchet was buried
 - He spilt the beans *and not* *The beans were spilt

 - ❑ There is a tendency for the more transparent idioms to allow some change:
 - Run up a bill *and* run up an enormous bill

 - ❑ But:
 - Kick the bucket *and not* not kick the enormous bucket

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- ❑ And there is a marked tendency for a few colours – black, blue, green, red and white – to be used idiomatically: Blackmail/ a blue moon/ a red herring/ a white elephant
 - ❑ Idioms differ according to region and according to formality. They are more frequently found in speech than in writing and, because they are both hackneyed and imprecise, they are best avoided in formal contexts.
 - ❑ Idioms are a marked example of non-literal use of language and, although they occur in all languages, they can rarely be translated from one language to another.

CONCLUSION

- ❑ Meaning is not an easy concept to deal with partly because we are dealing with *abstractions* (one person's idea of 'goodness' may differ radically from another's), with *mobility* ('silly' used to mean 'holy' and 'regiment' used to mean 'government'), with *difference of opinion* (when, for example, does a hill become a mountain or a sea become an ocean?) and with *distinctions* essential in one language but not in another (the English only need one word for 'sand' but Arabs need many more).
- ❑ To overcome these problems linguists have tried to deal with the relationships that exist within a specific language, in terms of similarity (synonymy), differences (antonymy), related sets (complementary and hyponymy) and the non-literal use of language (idiom).

ID: Questions & Discussions on Lexical Semantics

I- Identify the semantic role of each underscored noun phrase in these sentences:

- 1) In October, I gazed from the wooden bridge into the small river behind our college.
- 2) I have forgotten everything that I learned in grade school.
- 3) The Grand Tetons tower majestically over the valley.
- 4) The snow completely buried my car during the last storm.
- 5) Fifty kilos of cocaine were seized by the DEA.
- 6) Natalie was awarded one thousand dollars' worth of travel.
- 7) The hurricane destroyed the island.
- 8) Their ingenuity never ceases to amaze me.

II- Languages may differ with respect to the semantic roles that particular verbs may take. The following are semantically well-formed French sentences with the verb *goûter* ('taste'):

Il n'a jamais goûté au caviar.
he not-have ever tasted the caviar
'He's never tasted caviar.'

Je goûte un goût amer dans ce café.
I taste a taste bitter in this coffee
'I taste a bitter taste in this coffee.'

By contrast, the following sentence is not well constructed:

* Les cuisses de grenouille goûtent bon.
The thighs of frog taste good
'Frog's legs taste good.'

QUESTION: What is the difference between English *taste* and French *goûter* in terms of the range of semantic roles that they permit as subject?



III- There is one aspect of contemporary English that seems very redundant (to some people). One example would be: *You will receive a free gift.* We might complain that if it is a *gift*, it is necessarily *free*, so it is redundant to use both words.

QUESTIONS:

Do you agree with this point of view?

Do the following expression also contain redundancies?

Might there be a reason for such combinations?

- 1- We should provide advance warning.
- 2- I will make it my first priority.
- 3- That was an unexpected surprise.
- 4- Could you repeat that again?
- 5- They had already heard that before.
- 6- We got it for a cheap price.
- 7- There was a general consensus.
- 8- It was in close proximity.
- 9- And that was his final conclusion.



THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION!