

# Lexical Semantics and Word Senses

Hongning Wang

CS@UVa

# Today's lecture

## 1. Lexical semantics

- Meaning of words
- Relation between different meanings


## 2. WordNet

- An ontology structure of word senses
- Similarity between words

## 3. Distributional semantics

- Similarity between words
- Word sense disambiguation

# What is the meaning of a word?

- Most words have many different senses
  - dog = animal or sausage?
  - lie = to be in a horizontal position or a false statement made with deliberate intent
- What are the relations of different words in terms of meaning?
  - Specific relations between senses
    - Animal is more general than dog
  - Semantic fields  *“a set of words grouped, referring to a specific subject ... not necessarily synonymous, but are all used to talk about the same general phenomenon” - wiki*
    - Money is related to bank

# Word senses

- What does ‘bank’ mean?
  - A financial institution
    - E.g., “US bank has raised interest rates.”
  - A particular branch of a financial institution
    - E.g., “The bank on Main Street closes at 5pm.”
  - The sloping side of any hollow in the ground, especially when bordering a river
    - E.g., “In 1927, the bank of the Mississippi flooded.”
  - A ‘repository’
    - E.g., “I donate blood to a blood bank.”

# Lexicon entries

lemma

**<sup>1</sup>bank** *noun* \ˈbɑŋk\

**Definition of BANK** [Cite!](#) [g+1](#) [f Like](#)

**1** : a mound, pile, or ridge raised above the surrounding level: as

**a** : a piled-up mass of cloud or fog

**b** : an undersea elevation rising especially from the continental shelf

**2** : the rising ground bordering a lake, river, or sea or forming the edge of a cut or hollow

**3 a** : a steep slope (as of a hill)

**b** : the lateral inward tilt of a surface along a curve or of a vehicle (as an airplane) when turning

**4** : a protective or cushioning rim or piece

**<sup>2</sup>bank** *verb*

**Definition of BANK** [Cite!](#) [g+1](#) [f Like](#)

*transitive verb*

**1 a** : to raise a bank about

**b** : to cover (as a fire) with fresh fuel and adjust the draft of air so as to keep in an inactive state

**c** : to build (a curve) with the roadbed or track inclined laterally upward from the inside edge

**2** : to heap or pile in a bank

**3 a** : to drive (a ball in billiards) into a cushion

**b** : to bounce (a ball or shot) off a surface (as a backboard) into or toward a goal <*bank* in a rebound>

**4** : to form or group in a tier

senses

# Some terminologies

- **Word forms:** runs, ran, running; good, better, best
  - Any, possibly inflected, form of a word
- **Lemma** (citation/dictionary form): run; good
  - A basic word form (e.g. infinitive or singular nominative noun) that is used to represent all forms of the same word
- **Lexeme:** RUN(V), GOOD(A), BANK<sup>1</sup>(N), BANK<sup>2</sup>(N)
  - An abstract representation of a word (and all its forms), with a part-of-speech and a set of related word senses
  - Often just written (or referred to) as the lemma, perhaps in a different FONT
- **Lexicon**
  - A (finite) list of lexemes

# Make sense of word senses

- Polysemy
  - A lexeme is polysemous if it has different related senses



bank = financial institution

or

a building



# Make sense of word senses

- Homonyms
  - Two lexemes are homonyms if their senses are unrelated, but they happen to have the same spelling and pronunciation

**Bank of America**



bank = financial institution

or



river bank



# Relations between senses

- Symmetric relations
  - Synonyms: couch/sofa
    - Two lemmas with the same sense
  - Antonyms: cold/hot, rise/fall, in/out
    - Two lemmas with the opposite sense
- Hierarchical relations:
  - Hypernyms and hyponyms: pet/dog
    - The hyponym (dog) is more specific than the hypernym (pet)
  - Holonyms and meronyms: car/wheel
    - The meronym (wheel) is a part of the holonym (car)

# WordNet

*George Miller, Cognitive  
Science Laboratory of Princeton  
University, 1985*

- A very large lexical database of English:
  - 117K nouns, 11K verbs, 22K adjectives, 4.5K adverbs
- Word senses grouped into synonym sets (“synsets”) linked into a conceptual-semantic hierarchy
  - 82K noun synsets, 13K verb synsets, 18K adjectives synsets, 3.6K adverb synsets
  - Avg. # of senses: 1.23/noun, 2.16/verb, 1.41/adj, 1.24/adverb
- Conceptual-semantic relations
  - hypernym/hyponym

# A WordNet example

- <http://wordnet.princeton.edu/>

## WordNet Search - 3.1

- [WordNet home page](#) - [Glossary](#) - [Help](#)

Word to search for:

Display Options:

Key: "S:" = Show Synset (semantic) relations, "W:" = Show Word (lexical) relations

Display options for sense: (gloss) "an example sentence"

### Noun

- [S:](#) (n) **bank** (sloping land (especially the slope beside a body of water)) *"they pulled the canoe up on the bank"; "he sat on the bank of the river and watched the currents"*
- [S:](#) (n) [depository financial institution](#), **bank**, [banking concern](#), [banking company](#) (a financial institution that accepts deposits and channels the money into lending activities) *"he cashed a check at the bank"; "that bank holds the mortgage on my home"*
- [S:](#) (n) **bank** (a long ridge or pile) *"a huge bank of earth"*
- [S:](#) (n) **bank** (an arrangement of similar objects in a row or in tiers) *"he operated a bank of switches"*
- [S:](#) (n) **bank** (a supply or stock held in reserve for future use (especially in emergencies))
- [S:](#) (n) **bank** (the funds held by a gambling house or the dealer in some gambling games) *"he tried to break the bank at Monte Carlo"*
- [S:](#) (n) **bank**, [cant](#), [camber](#) (a slope in the turn of a road or track; the outside is higher than the inside in order to reduce the effects of centrifugal force)

# Hierarchical synset relations: nouns


- **Hypernym/hyponym** (between concepts)
  - The more general ‘meal’ is a hypernym of the more specific ‘breakfast’
- **Instance hypernym/hyponym** (between concepts and instances)
  - *Jane Austen, 1775–1817, English novelist*  
← Austen is an instance hyponym of author
- **Member holonym/meronym** (groups and members)
  - professor is a member meronym of (a university’s) faculty
- **Part holonym/meronym** (wholes and parts)
  - wheel is a part meronym of (is a part of) car.
- **Substance meronym/holonym** (substances and components)
  - flour is a substance meronym of (is made of) bread

# WordNet hypernyms & hyponyms

- S: (n) **bank** (sloping land (especially the slope beside a body of water))
  - direct hyponym / full hyponym
    - S: (n) riverbank, riverside (the bank of a river)
    - S: (n) waterside (land bordering a body of water)
  - direct hypernym / inherited hypernym / sister term
    - S: (n) slope, incline, side (an elevated geological formation)
  - derivationally related form
- S: (n) depository financial institution, **bank**, banking concern, banking company (a financial institution that accepts deposits and channels the money into lending activities)
  - direct hyponym / full hyponym
    - S: (n) credit union (a cooperative depository financial institution whose members can obtain loans from their combined savings)
      - direct hypernym / inherited hypernym / sister term
        - S: (n) depository financial institution, **bank**, banking concern, banking company (a financial institution that accepts deposits and channels the money into lending activities)
    - S: (n) Federal Reserve Bank, reserve bank (one of 12 regional banks that monitor and act as depositories for banks in their region)
    - S: (n) agent bank (a bank that acts as an agent for a foreign bank)
    - S: (n) commercial bank, full service bank (a financial institution that accepts demand deposits and makes loans and provides other services for the public)

# Hierarchical synset relations: verbs

*the presence of a 'manner'  
relation between two lexemes*



- Hypernym/troponym (between events)
  - travel/fly, walk/stroll
  - Flying is a troponym of traveling: it denotes a specific manner of traveling
- Entailment (between events):
  - snore/sleep
    - Snoring entails (presupposes) sleeping

# WordNet similarity

- Path based similarity measure between words
  - Shortest path between two concepts (Leacock & Chodorow 1998)
    - $\text{sim} = 1/|\text{shortest path}|$
  - Path length to the root node from the least common subsumer (LCS) of the two concepts (Wu & Palmer 1994)
    - $\text{sim} = 2 * \text{depth}(\text{LCS}) / (\text{depth}(w_1) + \text{depth}(w_2))$
- <http://wn-similarity.sourceforge.net/>

*the most specific concept which  
is an ancestor of both A and B.*

# WordNet::Similarity

Measure	Word 1	Word 2	Score	Trace
path	apple#n#1	pizza#n#1	0.0909	<p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 matter#n#3 solid#n#1 food#n#2 produce#n#1 edible_fruit#n#1 apple#n#1</p> <p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 object#n#1 whole#n#2 natural_object#n#1 plant_part#n#1 plant_organ#n#1 reproductive_structure#n#1 fruit#n#1 edible_fruit#n#1 apple#n#1</p> <p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 object#n#1 whole#n#2 natural_object#n#1 plant_part#n#1 plant_organ#n#1 reproductive_structure#n#1 fruit#n#1 pome#n#1 apple#n#1</p> <p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 matter#n#3 substance#n#7 food#n#1 nutriment#n#1 dish#n#2 pizza#n#1</p> <p><u>Shortest path: apple#n#1 edible_fruit#n#1 produce#n#1 food#n#2 solid#n#1 matter#n#3 substance#n#7 food#n#1 nutriment#n#1 dish#n#2 pizza#n#1</u></p> <p><u>Path length = 11</u></p>
path	apple#n#2	pizza#n#1	0.0526	<p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 object#n#1 whole#n#2 living_thing#n#1 organism#n#1 plant#n#2 vascular_plant#n#1 woody_plant#n#1 tree#n#1 angiospermous_tree#n#1 fruit_tree#n#1 apple_tree#n#1 apple#n#2</p> <p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 matter#n#3 substance#n#7 food#n#1 nutriment#n#1 dish#n#2 pizza#n#1</p> <p><u>Shortest path: apple#n#2 apple_tree#n#1 fruit_tree#n#1 angiospermous_tree#n#1 tree#n#1 woody_plant#n#1 vascular_plant#n#1 plant#n#2 organism#n#1 living_thing#n#1 whole#n#2 object#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 matter#n#3 substance#n#7 food#n#1 nutriment#n#1 dish#n#2 pizza#n#1</u></p> <p><u>Path length = 19</u></p>



# WordNet::Similarity

Measure	Word 1	Word 2	Score	Trace
wup	apple#n#1	pizza#n#1	0.4444	<p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 matter#n#3 solid#n#1 food#n#2 produce#n#1 edible_fruit#n#1 apple#n#1</p> <p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 object#n#1 whole#n#2 natural_object#n#1 plant_part#n#1 plant_organ#n#1 reproductive_structure#n#1 fruit#n#1 edible_fruit#n#1 apple#n#1</p> <p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 object#n#1 whole#n#2 natural_object#n#1 plant_part#n#1 plant_organ#n#1 reproductive_structure#n#1 fruit#n#1 pome#n#1 apple#n#1</p> <p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 matter#n#3 substance#n#7 food#n#1 nutriment#n#1 dish#n#2 pizza#n#1</p> <p><u>Lowest Common Subsumers: matter#n#3 (Depth=4)</u></p> <p>Depth(apple#n#1) = 9</p> <p>Depth(pizza#n#1) = 9</p>
wup	apple#n#2	pizza#n#1	0.25	<p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 object#n#1 whole#n#2 living_thing#n#1 organism#n#1 plant#n#2 vascular_plant#n#1 woody_plant#n#1 tree#n#1 angiospermous_tree#n#1 fruit_tree#n#1 apple_tree#n#1 apple#n#2</p> <p>HyperTree: *Root*#n#1 entity#n#1 physical_entity#n#1 matter#n#3 substance#n#7 food#n#1 nutriment#n#1 dish#n#2 pizza#n#1</p> <p><u>Lowest Common Subsumers: physical_entity#n#1 (Depth=3)</u></p> <p>Depth(apple#n#2) = 15</p> <p>Depth(pizza#n#1) = 9</p>

# Distributional hypothesis

- What is **tezgüino**?
  - A bottle of **tezgüino** is on the table.
  - Everybody likes **tezgüino**.
  - **Tezgüino** makes you drunk.
  - We make **tezgüino** out of corn.
- The contexts in which a word appears tell us a lot about what it means

# Distributional semantics

- Use the contexts in which words appear to measure their similarity
  - Assumption: similar contexts  $\Rightarrow$  similar meanings
  - Approach: represent each word  $w$  as a vector of its contexts  $c$ 
    - Vector space representation
    - Each dimension corresponds to a particular context  $c_n$
    - Each element in the vector of  $w$  captures the degree to which the word  $w$  is associated with the context  $c_n$
  - Similarity metric
    - Cosine similarity

# How to define the contexts

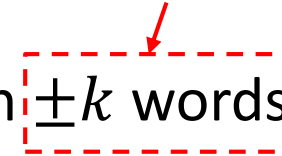
- Nearby words

- $w$  appears near  $c$  if  $c$  occurs within  $\pm k$  words of  $w$ 
  - It yields fairly broad thematic relations
- Decide on a fixed vocabulary of  $N$  context words  $c_1 \dots c_N$ 
  - Prefer words occur frequently enough in the corpus but not too frequent (i.e., avoid stopwords)
- Co-occurrence count of word  $w$  and context  $c$  as the corresponding element in the vector
  - Pointwise Mutual Information (PMI)

- Grammatical relations

- How often is  $w$  used as the subject of the verb  $c$ ?
- Fine-grained thematic relations

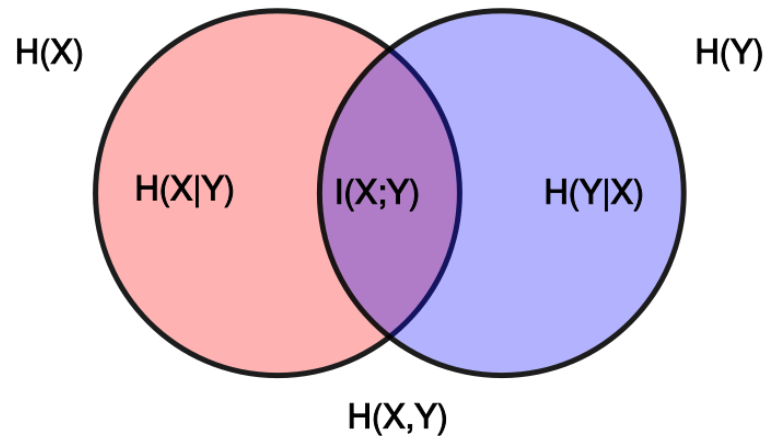
*within a sentence*



# Mutual information

- Relatedness between two random variables

$$-I(X; Y) = \sum_{y \in Y} \sum_{x \in X} p(x, y) \log\left(\frac{p(x, y)}{p(x)p(y)}\right)$$



# Pointwise mutual information

*within a sentence*

- PMI between  $w$  and  $c$  using a **fixed window** of  $\pm k$  words

$$- PMI(w; c) = p(w, c) \log\left(\frac{p(w, c)}{p(w)p(c)}\right)$$

*How often  $w$  and  $c$  co-occur inside a window*

How often  $w$  occurs

How often  $c$  occurs

# Word sense disambiguation

- What does this word mean?
  - This **plant** needs to be **watered** each day.
    - living plant
  - This **plant** **manufactures** 1000 widgets each day.
    - factory
- Word sense disambiguation (WSD)
  - Identify the sense of content words (noun, verb, adjective) in context (assuming a fixed inventory of word senses)

# Dictionary-based methods

- A dictionary/thesaurus contains glosses and examples of a word

## bank<sup>1</sup>

**Gloss:** a financial institution that accepts deposits and channels the money into lending activities

**Examples:** *“he cashed the check at the bank”,  
“that bank holds the mortgage on my home”*

## bank<sup>2</sup>

**Gloss:** sloping land (especially the slope beside a body of water)

**Examples:** *“they pulled the canoe up on the bank”,  
“he sat on the bank of the river and watched the current”*



# Lesk algorithm

- Compare the context with the dictionary definition of the sense
  - Construct the **signature** of a word in context by the signatures of its senses in the dictionary
    - **Signature** = set of context words (in examples/gloss or in context)
  - Assign the dictionary sense whose gloss and examples are the most **similar** to the context in which the word occurs
    - Similarity = size of intersection of context signature and sense signature

# Sense signatures

## bank<sup>1</sup>

**Gloss:** a financial institution that accepts deposits and channels the money into lending activities

**Examples:** “he *cash*ed the *check* at the *bank*”,  
“that bank *holds* the *mortgage* on my *home*”

**Signature**(bank<sup>1</sup>) = {*financial, institution, accept, deposit, channel, money, lend, activity, cash, check, hold, mortgage, home*}

## bank<sup>2</sup>

**Gloss:** sloping land (especially the slope beside a body of water)

**Examples:** “they *pulled* the *canoe* up on the *bank*”,  
“he *sat* on the *bank* of the *river* and *watched* the *current*”

**Signature**(bank<sup>2</sup>) = {*slope, land, body, water, pull, canoe, sit, river, watch, current*}

# Signature of target word

*“The **bank** refused to give me a loan.”*

- Simplified Lesk
  - Words in context
  - *Signature(bank) = {**refuse, give, loan**}*
- Original Lesk
  - Augmented signature of the target word
  - *Signature(bank) = {**refuse, reject, request,...** , **give, gift, donate,...** **loan, money, borrow,...**}*

# Learning-based Methods

- Will be discussed in the lecture of “Text Categorization”
  - Basically treat each sense as an independent class label
  - Construct classifiers to assign each instance with context into the classes/senses

# What you should know

- Lexical semantics
  - Relationship between words
  - WordNet
- Distributional semantics
  - Similarity between words
  - Word sense disambiguation

# Today's reading

- Speech and Language Processing
  - Chapter 19: Lexical Semantics
  - Chapter 20: Computational Lexical Semantics