

Introduction to English Linguistics

2. Semantics and Pragmatics I
26 September 2019

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Linguistics

- Linguistics: The scientific study of language.
- Language as a form of knowledge.
 - Goal: To make *explicit* the (largely) unconscious knowledge speakers have of their language.
- Main areas of linguistic knowledge:
 - Phonetics/Phonology.
 - Morphology.
 - Syntax.
 - Semantics/Pragmatics.

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Lexical semantics

- Semantics: The study of meaning.
- Lexical semantics: The study of word meaning.
- Focus on two main aspects of word meaning:
 - Meaning relations.
 - Semantic properties and features.

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Meaning relation 1: Synonymy

- Synonymy: Identity in meaning.
 - *mercury – quicksilver*
 - *pullover – sweater*
- Generally: partial synonymy.
 - (1) a. You have my *deep/profound* sympathy.
b. The river is very *deep/*profound*.
 - (2) a. The house stands at the *side/edge* of the lake.
b. Britain and Australia are on opposite *sides/*edges* of the world.
- Cf. also: *chips – French fries, children – kids, brolly – umbrella*.

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Meaning relation 2: Opposition

- Three types of opposition in meaning:
 - Non-gradable antonymy.
 - Gradable antonymy.
 - Relational opposition.
- Non-gradable antonyms: complementary – *not X is Y*.
 - *pass – fail, possible – impossible, alive – dead, obey – disobey*.

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Opposition

- Gradable antonyms.
 - *fast – slow, long – short, strong – weak, high – low, cheap – expensive*.
 - Not complementary.
 - Gradable: *very, slightly, rather, quite, a bit*.
 - Interpretation not fixed.
 - Often: A neutral (unmarked) question. *How fast/*slow is it?*

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Opposition

- Relational opposites: same relationship, opposite perspective.
 - *above* – *below* ($X \text{ is above } Y \Rightarrow Y \text{ is below } X$), *precede* – *follow*, *parent* – *offspring*, *-er/-ee* pairs.
 - Comparatives of gradable antonyms form relational opposites:
 $X \text{ is faster than } Y \Rightarrow Y \text{ is slower than } X$.
 $X \text{ is longer than } Y \Rightarrow Y \text{ is shorter than } X$.

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Meaning relation 3: Hyponymy

- Hyponymy: A structuring relation in the vocabulary. Logical inclusion:

- (3)
- ```

graph TD
 furniture[furniture] --> chair[chair]
 furniture --> table[table]
 furniture --> bed[bed]
 furniture --> desk[desk]
 furniture --> bookshelf[bookshelf]
 furniture --> etc[etc.]

```
- *Chair*: hyponym.
  - *Furniture*: superordinate term.
  - *Chair, table, bed*: co-hyponyms.

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## Hyponymy

- (4)
- ```

graph TD
    fish[fish] --> sole[sole]
    fish --> trout[trout]
    fish --> salmon[salmon]
    fish --> bass[bass]
    fish --> etc1[etc.]
    
```
- (5)
- ```

graph TD
 animal[animal] --> fish2[fish]
 animal --> dog[dog]
 animal --> cat[cat]
 animal --> etc2[etc.]
 fish2 --> sole2[sole]
 fish2 --> trout2[trout]
 fish2 --> salmon2[salmon]
 fish2 --> etc3[etc.]

```

*Fish*: Superordinate term e.g. for *salmon*, co-hyponym e.g. for *dog*.

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## Meaning relation 4: Homophony

- Homophony (or homonymy): No meaning relation, same pronunciation.
    - *punch*; *sound*; *flower* – *flour*.
  - Puns (6a), lexical ambiguities (6b-f) due to homophony.
- (6) a. Is Soya a has-bean?  
 b. March Planned For Next August  
 c. Stadium Air Conditioning Fails – Fans Protest

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## Homophony

- (6) d. "Mine is a long and sad tale!" said the Mouse, turning to Alice and sighing.  
 "It is a long tail, certainly," said Alice, looking with wonder at the Mouse's tail, "but why do you call it sad?"

e. Turkey gives itself all-clear on bird flu

f. AND IN THIS CORNER, WEARING RED TRUNKS, SPORTING A GREY TIE, AND SITTING ON AN OLD TRUNK...

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

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## Homophony

- Spelling difficulties due to homophony:
- (7) **Notice for staff**  
 As of the 01/10/03  
 Staff will only be aloud  
 To have 30 mins on the Internet, those 30 mins will  
 Taken on there lunch break,  
 Any member staff taking  
 Advantage of this right will  
 Be given there first warning  
 (Poster at Newbury (UK) railway station; in: *Private Eye* 1092, Oct. 2003)

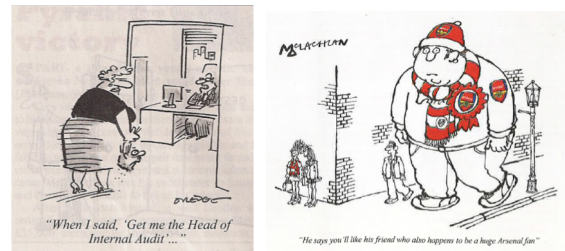
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## Meaning relation 5: Polysemy

- Polysemy: Related meanings, same pronunciation.
  - *mouth, ceiling*
  - Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter. (Mark Twain)
- Ambiguities due to polysemy:
  - (8) a. Council to Make Rubbish Decision
  - b. Do your feet smell? Does your nose run?  
You may be built upside-down.

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## Meaning relation 5: Polysemy



Private Eye

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## Meaning relation 5: Polysemy



Private Eye

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## Homophony vs. polysemy

- (8) a. Somali Head Seeks Arms.
- b. *Another nursery rhyme:*  
Whether the weather is fine,  
Or whether the weather is not,  
Whether the weather is cold,  
Or whether the weather is hot,  
We'll weather the weather  
Whatever the weather,  
Whether we like it or not!

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