

Semantic

Definition of Semantics

Semantics is one of the important branches of linguistics, and deals with interpretation and meaning of the words, sentence structure, and symbols. It deals with the reading comprehension of the readers, in how they understand others and their interpretations. In addition, semantics constructs a relation between adjoining words and clarifies the sense of a sentence, whether the meanings of words are literal or figurative.

Types of Semantics

There are two types of Semantics:

Connotative Semantic

When a word suggests a set of associations, or is an imaginative or emotional suggestion connected with the words, while readers can relate to such associations. Simply, it represents figurative meaning. Usually poets use this type of meaning in their poetry.

Denotative Semantic

It suggests the literal, explicit, or dictionary meanings of the words, without using associated meanings. It also uses symbols in writing that suggest expressions of writers, such as an exclamation mark, quotation mark, [apostrophe](#), colon, or quotation mark.

Examples of Semantics in Literature

Example #1: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

Juliet:

“O, be some other name!
What’s in a name? that **which we call a rose**
By any other name would smell as **sweet**;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d ...”

The above-mentioned quote is, in fact, conveying figurative meaning. However, its surrounding text clarifies the meaning. Juliet is using metaphoric language, arguing with Romeo that his family name is not important to her, because she only wants Romeo.

Example #2: *A Portrait of An Artist As a Young Man* (By James Joyce)

The use of [denotation](#) or general meaning can be seen in the very first chapter of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of An Artist As a Young Man*, when Stephen expresses his feelings for his mother and father saying:

“His mother had a nicer smell than his father.”

This sentence is conveying a denotative or general meaning that he likes his mother more than his father. Thus the meaning is understandable and acceptable for all types of readers around the world. Hence, the general acceptability for all people is the major factor for communicating with people successfully.

Example #3: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)

In the famous [soliloquy](#) of Prince Hamlet, “To be or not to be,” William Shakespeare has used a word that we use quite differently these days. Hamlet says:

“When we have shuffled off this mortal coil ...”

Here, “mortal coil” carries a connotative meaning that suggests life, as Hamlet compares death to sleep. However, we are using coils in different connection today, which means a series of spirals tightly joined together

Example #4: *Hedda Gabler* (By Henrik Ibsen)

We can understand the use of semantics in the beginning of *Hedda Gabler*, in which Bertha mentions Hedda, saying:

“She’s real lady. Wants everything just so.”

This sentence lays emphasis on the implication that, unlike Hedda, other women are not real. That they neither have any discipline, nor structure in the schedules of their lives. In another [dialogue](#), she says:

“But, Lord! I never dreamed I’d live to see a match between her and master George.”

Here, an exclamation mark highlights Bertha’s feelings of curiosity and astonishment. Her word choice, “never dreamed,” shows her intensity of surprising emotions about class inequality.

Example #5: *Night* (By William Blake)

We can find use of semantic features in poetry more elaborately, as these features describe the meanings of sentences, phrases, and words, and make relations between them. These features include [personification](#), [simile](#), [imagery](#), [metaphor](#), and [allusion](#). For example, in William Blake’s poem *Night*, he uses all semantic features. The poet employs a simile to compare the beauty of the moon with a flower,

“The moon like a flower ...”

Then he uses a covert [comparison](#) between unlike things:

“And there the lion’s ruddy eyes
Shall flow with tears of gold ...”

Here, the phrase “tears of gold” illustrates the value of tears. Then, we see

“The feet of angels bright ...”

and imagery:

“The sun descending in the west,

The evening star does shine...”

This paints a picture in the minds of readers.

Function of Semantics

The purpose of semantics is to propose exact meanings of words and phrases, and remove confusion, which might lead the readers to believe a word has many possible meanings. It makes a relationship between a word and the sentence through their meanings. Besides, semantics enable the readers to explore a sense of the meaning because, if we remove or change the place of a single word from the sentence, it will change the entire meaning, or else the sentence will become anomalous. Hence, the sense relation inside a sentence is very important, as a single word does not carry any sense or meaning.