

Lexical Semantics

Week 3: Verbs of judging

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Reminder: Assignment 1 due today by 2pm!

1 Approaching the meaning of a word

Various approaches:

- **mentalist** approaches: the meaning of a word is associated with the image or concept in the head of the speaker before utterance, and/or the hearer after utterance
- **behaviourist** approaches: the meaning of an utterance is fully associated with the input and output situations and associated actions of participants (Bloomfield)
 - NB: there's something reasonable about this, but how would we isolate the meaning of a single lexical item?
- **structuralist** approaches: the meaning of a word is what's in common with all situations in which it is appropriately used
 - this will diagnose some kinds of meaning, but what might go wrong?

Decompositional approaches:

- break down the meaning of words into *features* or *components*
 - we can use ideas from behaviourist and structuralist approaches to do this
 - for nouns:
 - use the **selectional restrictions** of verbs to test for particular features/properties of a noun
- (1) a. The wolf fell. \leadsto *wolf* has feature [+PHYSICAL OBJECT]
 b. The wolf dreamed. \leadsto *wolf* has feature [+ANIMATE]
 c. #The wolf wrote a speech. \leadsto *wolf* has feature [–HUMAN]
- Fillmore's objection: we could go on doing this forever

- how do we decide what the basic categories for features/concepts might be?
- our particular beliefs about wolves might affect the set of features we assign in this way (e.g., maybe you don't think wolves dream, or at least don't think we can know if they do)
- how can we be more systematic?
- Fillmore's point: by asking the right sort of questions about what meaning is

What do we know when we know the meaning of a lexical item?

- **presuppositions:**
we need to know when it can and cannot be appropriately used
- **illocutionary “aspects”:**
we need to know what to understand when others use a word (i.e. the effect it is expected to produce)

Example: inferences associated with an imperative utterance:

- (2) Please shut the door.
 - i. Speaker and addressee have a relationship allowing speaker to give addressee orders/make requests.
 - ii. Addressee is in a position to comply with the request (shut the door).
 - iii. There's a specific door, which both speaker and addressee will coordinate on.
 - iv. The door is open.
 - v. Speaker wants the door to be closed.
- these are different types of inference, and come from different places/aspects of (2)
 - i., ii. are associated with the **imperative** form (meaning convention, associated with sentence type)
 - iii. is a presupposition imposed by *the* (definite article, existence and uniqueness presuppositions)
 - iv. is imposed by *shut* (verb requires a certain context)
 - v. is conveyed directly, reverses under negation → **at-issue content**
 - i-iv. are **not at-issue**/preconditions coming from different places.
- we need to know that i-iv are 'required' for (2) to be uttered, and we also need to know v. to understand the sentence
 - which means, at the level of lexical items:
 - we need to know the independent presuppositions of the words involved, and their meaning
 - (as well as the conventions associated with the imperative form)

Verbs, generally:

- appear (like all words) within larger structures
- typically impose requirements on what they can co-occur with
 - number of arguments
 - type and/or features of arguments
 - ways that arguments relate to main event (and what can or must be expressed)
- in establishing the meaning of a verb:
 - we need a set of **role concepts** that establish the ways that participants relate
 - **role structure** can pick out a particular class of verbs, or a **semantic field**
 - follow-up question: what differences do we expect between verbs in a semantic field?
 - preview: based on case study, we might expect alternations in which arguments are expressed, or which parts of meaning they foreground/background

2 Case study: verbs of judging

2.1 Lexical information and basic contrasts

Fillmore's **verbs of judging** form a semantic field:

accuse, blame, criticize, credit, praise, scold, confess, apologize, forgive, justify, excuse

Question: what do these verbs have in common?

- all of them can describe events of communication; potentially verbs of saying
 - *accuse, criticize, praise, scold, confess, apologize* necessarily describe a communicative act (not necessarily spoken)
 - others can just relate to internal attitudes: *blame, credit, justify, excuse*
- certain sets of roles, related in certain ways:
 - **situation:** state of affairs, prompting the judgement/act described
 - **affected:** impacted by the situation (or as part of it)
 - **defendant:** individual or entity potentially responsible
 - **judge:** attitude holder, communicator
 - **addressee:** individual at whom the potential communicative act is targeted

- we might also ask:
 - is there a value judgement (evaluation) of the situation, or just responsibility?
 - reality/factuality of the situation (and participants' attitudes towards it)

Examples:

- (3) John accused my congressman of being soft on crime.
 - a. **judge:** John
 - b. **defendant:** my congressman
 - c. **situation:** someone (my congressman) being soft on crime (cf. McCawley)
 - (4) John apologized to Mary for writing the letter.
 - a. **defendant:** John
 - b. **addressee/affected:** Mary
 - c. **situation:** someone (John) writing the letter
 - (5) Mary forgave John for writing the letter.
 - a. **defendant:** John
 - b. **addressee/affected:** Mary
 - c. **situation:** someone (John) writing the letter
- (3)-(4) differ in the roles that are realized
 - (4)-(5) differ in how the roles relate to the main event (and who performs the communicative act that is required)
 - *accuse, criticize, scold, blame, credit, praise* judge, defendant, situation
 - (6) a. John accused Harry of writing the letter.
 - b. John criticized Harry for writing the letter.
 - c. John scolded Harry for writing the letter.
 - d. John blamed Harry for writing the letter.
 - e. John credited Harry with writing the letter.
 - f. John praised Harry for writing the letter.
 - *apologize, forgive* require affected, defendant, situation
 - examples (4), (5)
 - *justify, excuse* defendant, situation
 - (7) a. Harry justified his having written the letter/his letter-writing.
 - b. Harry excused his writing the letter/his letter-writing.

ACCUSE **and** CRITICIZE:

- Fillmore suggests these verbs differ minimally
- We get the same basic inferences from both (6a) and (6b):
 - (8) John accused Harry of writing the letter/John criticized Harry for writing the letter.
 - a. → Writing the letter was blameworthy
 - b. → Harry was responsible for writing the letter.
- But, they belong to different types of meaning:
 - (6a) John didn't accuse Harry of writing the letter.
→ Writing the letter was blameworthy. **presupposition**
 - (6b) John didn't criticize Harry for writing the letter.
→ Harry was responsible. **presupposition**
- What about the other inference in each case?

Fillmore's lexical entries for *accuse*, *criticize*:

- (9) ACCUSE [Judge, Defendant, Situation]
 - i. *Primary meaning*: SAY [Judge, 'X', Addressee] (verb of saying)
X = RESPONSIBLE [Situation, Defendant]
 - ii. *Presupposition*: BAD [Situation]
- (10) CRITICIZE [Judge, Defendant, Situation]
 - i. *Primary meaning*: SAY [Judge, 'X', Addressee] (verb of saying)
X = BAD[Situation]
 - ii. *Presupposition*: RESPONSIBLE [Situation, Defendant]
 - iii. *Presupposition*: ACTUAL [Situation]

Claims:

- (9)-(10) predict that we can use *accuse*, *criticize* in the same situations, but we pick which one based on what is established and what we want to introduce
 - *accuse* when we agree the situation is bad, and want to assign blame/responsibility
 - *criticize* when we know who was responsible, and want to give a value judgement
- actuality comes along with presupposed responsibility

- another close item:

(11) SCOLD [Judge, Defendant, Situation]

- i. *Primary meaning*: SAY [Judge, ‘X’, Addressee] (verb of saying)
X = BAD[Situation]
- ii. *Presupposition*: RESPONSIBLE [Situation, Defendant]
- iii. *Presupposition*: THINK [Judge, ACTUAL [Situation]]
- iv. *Presupposition*: Defendant = Addressee

- Fillmore: *accuse* is used in more serious situations than *criticize* or *scold*
 - we can predict this from the distribution of primary meaning and presupposition: more serious situations don’t need badness to be overtly/communicatively established

2.2 Digging deeper

Revising Fillmore’s case study, McCawley (1979) makes two points:

- there are syntactic differences between certain verbs of judging: e.g. *accuse of* something, but *criticize for*, *credit with*
 - do these correspond to meaning differences that Fillmore missed?
 - what about differences in the types of arguments that verbs of judging take?
 - does this affect the ‘minimal pair’ analysis?
- Not all of Fillmore’s presuppositions behave in the way we’d expect:

(12) Mary scolded John for writing the letter even though she knew that it was Bill who wrote the letter.

2.2.1 Lexical information and grammatical structure

If *accuse*, *criticize* have same components of meaning (just moved around), expect the same selectional restrictions:

- *accuse* requires human defendant, *criticize* does not:

(13) a. #Mencken accused Act 2 of being too short.
b. Mencken criticized Act 2 for being too short.
- situation restrictions on *criticize*:

(14) a. #Sean criticized the Mississippi river for being too wide.
b. Sean criticized the Cuyahoga river for being too filthy.
c. Sean criticized the Erie Canal for being too narrow.
- McCawley: judgement has to do with human action in bringing about situation

- syntactic facts: in both cases we assign or associate blame on the basis of action, but (according to McCawley), only *accuse* requires that we indicate the defendant/agent of the action
 - is this a fluke or does it correspond to a real, describable difference?

2.2.2 Presuppositions

(15) Nixon accused Agnew of wanting to end the war.

(16) Nixon accused Agnew of wanting to end the war, but Agnew was right to want peace.

(17) ACCUSE [Judge, Defendant, Situation]
 i. *Primary meaning*: SAY [Judge, ‘X’, Addressee]
 $X = \text{RESPONSIBLE} [\text{Situation}, \text{Defendant}]$
 ii. *Presupposition*: THINK [Judge, ‘Y’]
 $Y = \text{BAD} [\text{Situation}]$

- but:
 - (18) Officer O'Reilly accused me of not offering him a bribe and threatened to take me to the police station and accuse me of offering him a bribe.
- a possible solution: value judgements are related to context of the communicative act associated with the judgement
 - the two accusations are not evaluated relative to the same context/set of norms
 - McCawley aims to capture this with the idea of **jeopardy** – the potential for negative consequences

- a possible solution: value judgements are related to context of the communicative act associated with the judgement
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- similar problem for *credit*

(19) CREDIT [Judge, Defendant, Situation] Fillmore, p.287
 i. *Primary meaning:* THINK [Judge, ‘X’]
 X = RESPONSIBLE [Situation, Defendant]
 ii. *Presupposition:* GOOD [Situation]

(20) Mayor Daley credited me with saving his life and promised to reward me by taking me to Mike Royko and crediting me with refusing to save his life.

- note: type of value judgement also reflected in the use of *threat* vs. *promise*

Speaker, judge, and responsibility

(11) SCOLD [Judge, Defendant, Situation]

- i. *Primary meaning:* SAY [Judge, ‘X’, Addressee] (verb of saying)
X = BAD[Situation]
- ii. *Presupposition:* RESPONSIBLE [Situation, Defendant]
- iii. *Presupposition:* THINK [Judge, ACTUAL [Situation]]
- iv. *Presupposition:* Defendant = Addressee

- do you have to believe someone is guilty to scold them?

(12) Mary scolded John for writing the letter even though she knew that it was Bill who had written it.

- *scold* is a verb of saying; does this make a difference?

(21) BLAME₂ [Judge, Defendant, Situation]

- i. *Primary meaning:* THINK [Judge, ‘X’]
X = BAD[Situation]
- ii. *Presupposition:* RESPONSIBLE [Situation, Defendant]
- iii. *Presupposition:* THINK [Judge, ACTUAL [Situation]]

(22) ??Mary blamed₂ John for writing the letter even though she knew that it was Bill who had written it.

- why does this make a difference?

3 References

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4. McCawley, J. 1979. Verbs of Bitching. In J. McCawley Adverbs, Vowels, and Other Objects of Wonder, 135–150. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.