

# Lexical Semantics

## Assignment 2

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**Due by:** 2pm on November 5, 2019.

You can submit your assignment by email to `prerna.nadathur@phil.hhu.de`, hand it in in class next week, or turn in a paper copy to the Lexical Semantics box in the Linguistics department office (24.53.00.86). Let me know in advance if you will need to complete assignments in German.

### Reminders:

- Typed assignments are strongly preferred, unless you have very neat handwriting
- You may work with one another or consult additional resources in completing the assignment, but remember to cite your sources, and to write up your answers alone.
- You will NOT be penalised for mistakes related to English grammar
- You may ask questions about the homework in class on November 5. You can also email me, or request a time for office hours.

You should attempt to answer all three questions.

### Question 1: Polysemy and *blame*

The verb *blame* can be used to refer to acts of communication (speech, writing) as well as internal and unspoken judgements. As indicated by Fillmore (1970) and McCawley (1979), when used to describe internal judgements, *blame* can be ambiguous. For example, (1) can be used in two different types of context:

- (1) John blamed me for talking about the problem to the president.
- (2) Context 1: Suppose there is no question in anybody's mind that I talked to the president about the problem. With stress on the verb, (1) conveys that John regarded my action as blameworthy:
  - a. John *blamed* me for talking about the problem to the president.

- (3) Context 2: Suppose someone actually talked to the president about the problem, and it is generally accepted that this is blameworthy. With stress on the direct object (*me*), (1) conveys John's belief that I was the person who talked to the president.
- a. John blamed *me* for talking about the problem to the president.

Using the lexical entries Fillmore provides for *criticize* and *accuse* as your model (repeated on last week's handout), propose lexical entries for these two meanings of *blame*. Use the same role structure that Fillmore uses, and be careful to distinguish between primary meaning and presuppositions. Include a short justification for why you assign a particular meaning to primary meaning or to presuppositional content, and be clear about which lexical entry corresponds to which context. You can use THINK to represent an internal judgement (just as SAY represents a communicative act in some of Fillmore's entries).

## Question 2: Probing presuppositional content

McCawley (1979) presents the following examples as cases that challenge the presuppositional content of Fillmore's (1970) lexical entries for *accuse* and *credit*.

- (4) a. 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.  
b. 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.
- (a) Provide Fillmore's lexical entries for *accuse* and *credit*, and give some examples which support those entries.
- (b) Explain why examples of the sort in (4) are a problem for Fillmore's proposal.
- (c) In class we suggested revising the presuppositional content of *accuse* to relativize it to the judge. Does this solve the problem you described in (b)? Why or why not?
- (d) Briefly explain McCawley's proposal for solving this problem, and suggest a way that you might encode the new presuppositions for *accuse* and *credit*. McCawley only discusses *accuse* in detail; you will need to think a bit about how you might extend this to work for *credit*.

## Question 3: Negative prefixes on denominal verbs

- (a) Give lexical decompositions for the *un-* verbs in (5). Start with the lexical decomposition of the basic denominal verb (without the prefix *un-*) and then propose a minimal adjustment to capture the contribution of the negative prefix.

- (5) a. She uncaged the guinea pig as soon as she entered the house.  
b. He unflagged all the messages he had answered.

In deciding on your decompositions for *cage* and *flag*, you should classify these verbs as belonging to one of the types of denominal verbs we have discussed. Justify this classification – that is, justify your representation of the part of the meaning that is due to the nominal source of the denominal verbs. You can use additional examples for your explanation.

- (b) English can also attach the prefix *de-* to denominal verbs: while it also adds a negative element to the verb meaning, *de-* and *un-* seem to work differently. For example, the sentences in (6) do not have the same meaning.

- (6) a. She unbuttoned the shirt before putting it in the laundry basket.  
*Paraphrase:* She unfastened the buttons on the shirt before putting it in the laundry basket.  
b. She debuttoned the shirt before putting it in the laundry basket.  
*Paraphrase:* She removed the buttons from the shirt before putting it in the laundry basket.

Using your lexical entries from part (a) as a guide, suggest a lexical entry for *unbutton*. Based on the paraphrased meaning in (6b), does *debutton* belong to the same class of denominal verbs? If not, what class does it belong to? Based on your answer to this question, propose a lexical entry for *debutton* that accounts for the difference in meaning between (6a) and (6b).