Semantics and Pragmatics

Lecture No.12

Study Material

Sentence Semantics - I : Situations

Introduction: Classifying Situations

- Language allows speaker to classify situations by using semantic distinctions of actions, states, processes, tenses and aspects.

- Classification of situations helps us to understand the meaning of a discourse deeply.

   Situation Types

   - Two common situation types: Static and Dynamic which create different situations with the help of lexical categories in verbs. E.g.

   - I love pizza. (Static)

   - Gives no information about the interal structure of state: just holds for a certain time.

   - He was driving a car. (Action)

   States

   - Knows, thinks, loves, like, have, remains etc. are stative verbs and do not contain physical actions. E.g 'I like to watch movies'. '***Like'*** is a stative verb and can't be said as '*I'm liking to watch movies.*'

   Dynamic situation

   - This type contains action verbs such as eat, drive, walk. e.g. *I killed a snake*.

   Types of Dynamic Verbs

   - Dynamic Verbs can be classified into a number of types, based on the semantic distinctions durative/punctual and telic/atelic

   - **Durative** is applied to those verbs which describe a situation or a process which lasts for a particular period of time. E.g. '*Maria slept.*' (Saeed, 2004)

   - **Punctual** describes an event that seems so instantaneous or quick and it involves virtually no time, e.g. *'Ali coughed' or 'Liza laughed.'*

- **Telic** refers to those processes which are seen as having a natural completion, e.g. *'Ali was gazing at the sea.'* could be transformed as *'Ali gazed at the sea.'*

- **Atelic** refers to those processes about which we can't say they are naturally completed.

- Look at the example:

- *'Saira was building a house.'*

- We are not sure whether Saira has completed the construction or left the house incomplete.

Events and Situations

- In **events,** the speaker views the situation as a whole, e.g. 'the mine blew up.'

- While, in **processes**, the speaker views, as it were, the internal structure of a dynamic situation, e.g. *'he ran to the forest.'*

- Processes can be divided into inchoatives and resultatives.

System of Situations contains four kinds. (Vendler 1967: 97-121)

- States such as *desire, want, love, believe*

- Achievements such as *stop, start, find*

- Activities (unbounded processes) such as *run, walk, swim, push a car*

- Accomplishments (bounded processes) such as *run a mile, draw a circle.*

Tense and Aspect

What is Tense?

- Tense is a category which allows a speaker to relate situations to time.

- **Examples of simple tenses**

- *They **cut** the grass yesterday.* (Past)

- *They will **cut** the grass tomorrow.* (Future)

- *They **cut** the grass everyday.* (Present)

Aspect System allows speaker to relate situation and time, and to view an event in various ways: as complete or incomplete.

- Aspects have to do not with the location of an event in time, but with it's temporal distribution or contour. (Saeed, 2004)

- Example: *'She is coming.'* (incomplete), *'She has come.'* (Complete)

The perfect aspect

- It allows a speaker to emphasize the relevance of events in the past to the *'present'.* Here the 'present' is time of speaking.

- For example, *Don't run. The train has left.* (Present)

- Same condition would apply in past and future.

- *He didn't run because the train had left.* (Past)

- Examples of complex tenses

- *By 2005 my friend **had seen** several arrests.* (Past perfect tense)

- *I **have** just **finished** my work.* (Present perfect tense)

- *By 2025 I **will have joined** another company.* (Future perfect tense)

- Complex tenses are also called **pluperfect**

- **Progressives** describes an ongoing or continuous action.

- progressives are used with dynamic situations. (Saeed, 2004)

- For example:

- I am working right now. (Present)

- I was working. (Past)

- I will be working. (Future)

Comparison of simple and progressive

- *'John **was building** a fire-escape last week'* or '*John **built** a fire-escape last week.'*

- 1st example gives no information about whether the fire-escape ever got finished. While, 2nd example shows that fire-escape got finished.

- ***'Was building'*** is past progressive.

Differentiate among simple, progressive and perfect tenses

- She has been working in the company since 1992.

- Ali has just completed his assignment.

- Maria works in a bank.

- John will be calling you by 2:00 pm.

- Yasir was discussing this topic yesterday.

Modality

- Modality is a linguistic category (like aspect or tense) that modifies the meaning of the event or action we talk about to include ways to "influence" the event described.

- *Modality* may express what the speaker wants to do (give permission, describe ability, suggest, request, offer, prohibit, express desires or necessity, etc.)

- Also express whether the speaker believes, or is sure that what he or she is saying is true.

- *'Maria was in the office this morning.'*

- **Modal System** allows to show a strong and weak commitment to the factuality of statements. 'It is certain that….'It is possible that….'It is likely that….'It is probable that… (Saeed, 2004)

- Look at some more example and find the difference.

- I know that.

- I believe that.

- I think that.

- I doubt that.

- She might have gone.

- She must have gone.

- Note: Auxiliary verbs in this role are called modal verbs. (Saeed, 2004).

- There are two types of Modality:

  Epistemic Modality expresses the degree of knowledge that how sure is the speaker in his communication.

- It also distinguishes between the events in **real world** and the events in **future** or **imaginary world**. E.g *'I came.'* (Reality) and *'I may come.'* (Imaginary)

- Look at these examples:

- **sure that it's true:** That must be the correct answer.

- **quite sure:** Sarah may be at her office right now.

- **somewhat sure:** It might rain tomorrow.

- **very unsure:** You could pass the exam.

- **sure that it is not true:** This can't be the end.

Deontic Modality

- Deontic Modality is, where the verbs mark the speaker's attitude to social factors of obligation, responsibility and permission. For example:

- *'You can drive this car.'* The speaker may want to give **permission** to drive this car or he is making prediction whether the driver is **able** to drive that car or not.

- Here are some more examples of **Deontic Modality**.

- Permission: The children may go to the trip.

- Necessity: You needn't have studied so hard.

- Obligation: Maya mustn't be late.

- Suggestions: She should go to England.

- Requests: Could you open the window?

Modality is grammatically expressed by:

Modal Verbs:

- John can speak English.

- You must speak up.

Non-Modal Verbs:

- She had to leave early.

- Maya will be able to speak English soon.

Adverbs, Nouns, Adjectives (Probability, Certainty):

- She is **probably** at home.

Mood

- Mood is the quality of verb which conveys a writer's attitude or feelings towards a subject (Saeed, 2004).

- Mood also shows the feelings of a speaker at time of speaking.

'It may rain tomorrow.'

- In the above example, the speaker's attitude is uncertain about the rain.

- **For example**

- It is raining. ('realis mood' - based on reality or a statement of fact)

- It may rain tomorrow. (irrealis - based on imagination.

Types of moods

- **Indicative** moods Express a fact, opinion, or question based on *realis* form.

- E.g. *'he made it.'* or *'He has completed his work'*.

- It is 44 degrees in here.

- We will go to see a movie this Sunday.

- I'll follow you.

- **Potential moods:** The word 'Potential' stands for probability. So, potential moods may have specific verb ending

- E.g. *'May be he'll come.'* or *'It's possible he'll come'*.

- Conditional uses Infinitives with auxiliary verbs such as have, be, should, etc. For example, *'He would make it', 'he would have made it.'*

- **Subjunctive moods** contrast with indicative moods because there is an element of uncertainty in subjunctive moods.

- Used for wishes, beliefs, exhortations, etc. e.g. *'May you live long!'* (Saeed,2004)

- Marks language specific types of irrealis mood.

- expresses a doubtful condition (contrary to fact) and is often used with an "if" clause.

- If I were you, I wouldn't buy this house.

- I wish I were more organized.

- **Imperative moods**

- Imperative moods make direct commands or requests.

- Here are some examples.

- Show me the money.

- Don't call the police.

- Could you please open the door?

- **Identify moods in the following examples:**

- Maria translates articles into Spanish.

- I wish you were here.

- Bring me the towels.

- Please be quiet.

- The coach asked that each player practice twice each day.

- If I were you, I wouldn't buy this house.

Evidentially

- Evidentiality is a semantic category which allows a speaker to communicate his/her attitude to the source of his/her information.

- It further allows the speaker to say whether the statement relies on personal first-hand knowledge, or was acquired from another source. (Saeed, 2004).

Examples of Evidentiality

- I saw that she was rich.

- I heard that she was rich.

- I am told she was rich.

- Apparently she was rich.

- She was rich, it seems.

- Allegedly, she was rich.

- I think she is sick.

Types of Evidentiality

- **Witness Evidentiality:** when information source is obtained from the direct observation, e.g *'I saw him breaking the window'*. It is usually visual information (Eyewitness)

- **Sensory Evidentiality:** indicates that the speaker's evidence for truth is derived from speaker's own sensory experience.

- can be non visual as well, e.g *'It smells that they are having a barbecue here.'*

- **Inferential Evidentiality:**

- Indicates that the speaker makes his/her statement based on a deduction from facts and not on a direct observation of the action itself. (Aikhenvald,2004,2006)

- 'You must be very tired after your journey.'

- **Reportative Evidentiality:**

- Indicates that the information was reported to the speaker by another person. It can be quotes, rumours or a news report. e.g.

- 'The biggest wicket to fall', says Imran Khan.

- She says that she will do it.

- **Assumed Evidential**

- An assumed evidential indicates that the information source is not based on mere guess but is rather based on the general knowledge or habitual activities.

- Example:

- 'I think that he will go to seaside on this beautiful day'.

    1. **Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality**

- Evidentiality is often considered sub-type of Epistemic Modality. (Palmer 1986, Kiefer 1994)