Semantics and Pragmatics

Lecture No.16

Study Material

Practical Dictionary

- Dictionary may be seen as a reference book which is the inbuilt dictionary that everyone of us carries around as part of his mental equipment as a speaker of a language.

- 'Semantic Competence' is how a native speaker knows about lexical items to understand the meaning.

- Leech (1981) has used different terminologies for dictionaries such as:

- 'Theoretical dictionaries, 'flesh-and-blood dictionaries or practical dictionaries', such as the Concise Oxford Dictionary, compiled by lexicographers – we all consult regularly.

- Why should we use dictionary while we are using proper lexical items?

- Because human language is getting vast day by day and the dictionary as a refence book adapts to the various linguistic needs which society expects it to satisfy (Leech, 1981).

- We have learnt to go to 'the dictionary' for all manners of information on words, for example; their history and origin, etc.

- An approach: that the meaning of a linguistic expression is precisely that knowledge which enables one to use it appropriately in linguistic communication, whether in everyday or specialist contexts.

- According to Leech (1981), there are two practical conditions of dictionary-writing.

- The first: lexicographers try to make dictionaries comprehensive even to the extent of defining easy words.

- The second: the more important, because it arises from a basic unavoidable difference between 'practical and theoretical' dictionaries:

- It is that a practical dictionary - definition must consist of words.

- It has been argued that the lexical definition, as part of the native speaker's linguistic equipment, can be precisely represented only by a special formal language. (Leech, 1981)

- But practical lexicographers cannot use this method of explanation, if they do, they would convey nothing to the average dictionary-users.

- There is no guarantee that the expression rules of the language furnish paraphrases for every word in the language. In Johnson's own words:

- Many words cannot be explained by synonyms, because the idea signified by them has not more than one appellation; nor by paraphrase, because simple ideas cannot be explained. (End)

Theoretical Dictionary

- **The Lexicon or Theoretical Dictionary**

- The lexicon will be considered as an unordered list or set of lexical entries.

- A lexical entry is considered to be a combination of:

- 1) Morphological specification: gives the form of the word in terms of stems & affixes.

- *Morphological Specification'* breaks the word down into a structure of morphemes, i.e. stems and affixes.

- The stem *'book'*, for example, occurs in the words *book, bookish and handbook*.

- The morphological structure of a word may involve bracketing.

    - Book

    - Stem $_{book}$

    - Bookish

    - (Stem $_{book}$ + Suffix $_{ish}$)

    - Handbook

    - Stem $_{hand}$ + Stem $_{book}$

    - Book-bindery

    - Stem $_{book}$ + (Stem $_{bind}$ + Suffix $_{ery}$)

- Syntactic Specification

- It consists of a set of features which classify it in terms of primary categories e.g. *(Noun, Verb, Adjective)* and secondary categories *(Countable Nouns, Predicative Adjectives)*

- Syntactic specification: classifying the words in terms of their distributional potential within sentences.

- Semantic Specification (or definition)

- Representation of its meaning in terms of componential or predicational analysis.

- Example:

- Active noun denotes the person who has some active role in a relationship.

- For example, a 'teacher' is 'a person who teaches' someone.

- Passive nouns can be the converse of nouns of 'Active Nouns', i.e. pupil is the converse of teacher.

- Function nouns denote objects (usually artefacts) which are identified by their functions: seat, may be defined as 'an object for sitting on'.

- **Adjectives**

- An adjective expresses, 'a quality' as opposed to nouns, which often represent classes of 'objects' identifiable by a bundle of such qualities. i.e. literate means 'who can read

- **Verb**

- Verbs either can be state, i.e. 'I think so' or can be action, i.e. 'I work in a bank'. (End)

Lexical Rules (Graded accessibility)

- Lexical rules are rules accounting for the 'creative' or 'productive' aspect of the lexicon which allows us to form new words (word formation).

- Or to derive new meanings from existing words (Transfer of meaning).

- such use or coinage such is unique in the history of English.

- Lexical rules not only explain how new lexical entries come into existence on the basis of old ones (e.g., to form a verb 'googling/googled' by a noun 'google).

- But also explain the interrelationships of derivation that we recognize between lexical entries already established in the language. (Leech, 1981)

- What chiefly distinguishes *lexical rules* from *grammatical rules* is their limited productivity; that is, a lexical rule does not apply equally well to all the cases to which in theory it may apply.

- *Lexical Rules* can be divided into three grades: Actual and Potential Acceptability; and those which are totally unacceptable.

- The Actual Acceptability of lexical entries which have attained institutional acceptance.

- Actual Acceptability is a graded concept If, for example, we take the suffix 'less' with a list of English nouns,

- For example, helpless, friendless seem actual acceptable while, *boyless doesn't satisfy 'Actual Acceptability'.

- The potential acceptability of any lexical entry that can be generated by a lexical rule.

- The principle of partial productivity that we have seen to operate in suffixation can be observed equally clearly not only in other types of word-formation, such as prefixation and compounding, but in semantic transfer.

- If we take metaphor as one type of semantic transfer, then a 'dead metaphor' is one which has gone all the way towards complete assimilation as a separate definition of the word concerned; as hit in the sense 'successful pop song'. Leech (1981)

- The Unacceptability of a lexical entry not allowed for in the lexical rules at all. For example, *sheapable (suffix –able is added should be added to a verb, i.e. adjustable, gradable)

Activity

- Make some examples and then, put them three grades; actually acceptable, protentional and unacceptable. (End)

Types of Lexical Rules

- **The form of Lexical Rules**

- Lexical rules take general form, within the same formula -derivation of one lexical entry from another.

- Major types: Morphological derivation, conversion, and semantic transfer.

- Morphological derivation involves a change in the morphological specification.

- E.g. the addition of an affix to the original morphological specification, which is called the base. Base= Base + Suffix (*less*)

- Usually involves a change of syntactic function and a change in the meaning.

- **Conversion:**

- A change in the syntactic function (and usually the meaning) of an item without a corresponding change in morphological form.

- For example, 'catch[verb] might have been changed into catch[noun], i.e. 'Shahid Afridi had a big catch'. Or 'if you drop a catch, you drop a match'.

- An example of a rule of conversion is that which enables us to form verbs from nouns with the meaning 'to put into…' or 'to put onto…':

- 1) he pocketed the change. *(he put the change into pocket)*

- 2) he netted the ball. *(he put the ball into net.)*

- 3) *they carried all their belongings. *(they put all their belongings into the car).*

- We observed in the above examples that (1) and (2) are well-established while, (3) is not acceptable.

- Additionally, this metaphoric rule is more general than most, because it can apply to various parts of speech, not just to nouns (Leech, 1981).

- Other type of semantic transfer often designated metonymy in traditional terminology.

- Examples:

- *'Neighborhood objected to his plans'* and *(Neighborhood=people in the neighborhood)*

- *'I enjoy Shakespeare immensely'*

- *(Shakespeare = the works of Shakespeare) (Leech, 1981: 218)* *(End)*

Other observations about lexical rules

- Leech discussed some other points to explain the meaning generating power of lexical rules..

- **1. Diversity**

- The diversity of lexical rules is such as to allow the possibility of applying a large number of different rules to the same lexical entry. (Leech, 1981)

- For example, manly, manlike, mannish, manhood, mankind, unman, unmanly have been derived from the noun man.

- **2. Open-Endedness**

- Lexical rules are open ended which allow the language-user freedom to read into a new lexical entry whatever information he finds necessary to the understanding of it.

- There may be not just a single path of semantic connection to be traced, but a whole range of possibilities.

- Example:

- 'the detached, ironical, adverbial James'

- In what sense can a writer be adverbial? (Leech, 1981)

- **Recursiveness**

- This property is the ability of a lexical entry which is the output of one lexical rule to be also the input to another lexical rule.

- An example of recursiveness in the rules of conversion is the noun 'bag' (in the sense of 'a catch, that which is caught or bagged').

- Noun – Verb - Noun

- **Bi-directionality**

- Bi-directionality is yet another factor produces new entries, and underlines the gap of unused 'capacity' between the theoretically enormous generative power of lexical rules, and the comparatively limited use that is made of them in practice. Leech (1981)

- Consider an example of backformation, where the process takes place in opposite/both direction, i.e. Televise (1927) is historically derived from television (1909)

- Peddle – Pedlar

- Edit – Editor

- Derivation can move in either direction (Noun - Verb).

- **. Petrification**

- The process by which an institutionalized lexical meaning diverges from the 'theoretical' meaning specified in a lexical rule.

- Extend or changes the meaning

- Examples:

- wheel-chair 'chair which has wheels'.

- push-chair 'chair which pushes'.