

Lesson03

Important Assumptions about Semantics

Reference and Sense

- Every discipline is based on certain assumptions which define its theoretical boundaries.
- Semantics also works within some assumptions - basic ideas which are central to semantic theories.
- Reference & Sense; Utterances, Sentences & Propositions; Literal & Non literal meanings; and Semantics & Pragmatics.

Reference and Sense

- The terms were introduced by Friedrich Ludwig Gottlob Frege (1848 -1925) in his treatise entitled “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” from 1892, translated into English as “On sense and reference”.
- It is important, first, to define reference and sense in line with semantic theories.

Reference:

- “has to do with the relationship which holds between an expression and what that expression stands for on particular occasions of its utterance” (Lyons, 1977).
- “relationship between the linguistic elements, words, sentences, etc., and the non-linguistic world of experience” (Palmer, 1981).
- Examples: “I am an M.A English student.” “I” refers to X - a person who lives in a real world.
- “The door in this classroom is white.” “door” - the flat surface that separates our room from the corridor.
- Sense - Allan describes that “Sense is a decontextualised meaning, abstracted from innumerable occurrences in texts.”
- Saeed (2004) claims that the “relationship by which language looks onto the world is usually called reference”.
- Thus, reference can be concluded as the meanings of a word in any language which exist in real world.
- According to Chapman (2012), meanings exist in any world either it is imaginary or real.
- Sense relates to the complex system of relationships between the linguistic elements themselves (mostly the words).
- Concerned only with intra-linguistic relations”(Palmer, 1981).

- To Saeed (2009), the “semantic links between elements within the vocabulary system is an aspect of their sense”.
- It can be concluded that “sense” exists in the word.
- This is a word to word relation.
- Examples: Dog: domesticated canine mammal, occurring in many breeds showing great size, color, and form variety.
- Desk: piece of furniture with a flat top and legs, used to read and write.
- Both “reference” and “sense” are important to understand meaning and the whole process of meaning making.
- They are interlinked with each other - only one cannot make complete meaning.
- In short, the meaning of linguistic expressions derives from TWO sources.
 1. The world they describe.
 2. Language they are part of.
- The meaning of CHAIR is partially defined by the existence of other words like STOOL.
- Similarly, the scope of RED color is defined by the other terms BROWN, ORANGE, YELLOW, etc.
- Example:
 - ENGLISH: SHEEP
 - FRENCH: MOUTON

Utterance, Sentence and Proposition

- Describe different levels of language.
- They are considered most important elements of a speech.
 - i. Proposition – A declarative sentence, when uttered to make a statement, that is, to say something true or false, about some state of affairs in the external world (Haung, 2014).
- These are words that exist in lexicon and have a meaning.
- A proposition is the lowest level of language.
- A sentence may have many propositions.
- Only lexical words are considered propositions.

- The concept proposition came from philosophy.
- For instance, “Alice invaded wonderland” or “Wonderland was invaded by Alice” or “The one who invaded wonderland was Alice”.
- All show the same information, if one is true, so are others.
- To capture this, logicians identify common propositions, and can be represented by using capital letters, e.g. ALICE INVADED WONDERLAND.
- ii. Sentence – Abstract grammatical elements obtained from utterances.
- A well-formed string of words put together by the grammatical rules of language (Huang, 2014).
- Sentence is some higher level of language - may have many propositions.
- When a proposition is combined with grammar, it becomes a sentence.
- E.g. “I eat mangoes” and “Mangoes are eaten by me”, here, proposition is the same but sentence emphasis is different.
- Moreover, ‘*China suffered a lot during Mao’s Cultural Revolution*’ is a sentence in English but ‘*China a lot during Mao’s Cultural Revolution suffered’ is not a sentence.
- Sentence is a complete expression while proposition is partial.
- iii. Utterance – a particular piece of language – be it a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a sequence of sentences- spoken or written by a particular speaker or writer in a particular context on a particular situation (Huang, 2014).
- It is the most concrete level of language.
- To Leech (1981), “it is a natural unit of speech bounded in articulation”.
- An utterance is created by speaking (or writing) a piece of language.
- Utterance is always written in inverted commas to indicate that what is put between them is taken from a specific context on a specific occasion of use.
- For instance, “I am reading the novel.”, “Hello!”, “A Cappuccino, please.”

Utterance, Sentence and Proposition – Activities

- (5) Utterances may consist of a single word, a single phrase or a single sentence. Yes / No
- (6) They may also consist of a sequence of sentences. Yes / No
- (7) It is also not unusual to find utterances that consist of one or more grammatically incomplete sentence-fragments. Yes / No

Utterance

- Practice - Decide whether the following could represent utterances.
- Indicate your answer by circling Yes or No.
- (1) 'Hello' Yes / No
- (2) 'Not much' Yes / No
- (3) 'Pxgotmgt' Yes / No
- (4) 'Schplotzenpflaaaaaargh!' Yes / No
- (8) No simple relation of correspondence between utterances and sentences. Yes / No

Sentence

- Practice - Which of the following utterances are tokens of whole sentences (S) and which are not (NS)?
- (1) 'John' S / NS
- (2) 'Who is there?' S / NS (3) 'Mine' S / NS
- (4) 'It's mine' S / NS
- (5) 'Where shall I . . .?' S/NS
- Practice – Following are some sample conversations. In each case the second utterance is not a token of a sentence.
- Write out a full sentence expressing the intended meaning.
- (1) Magnus: 'When did Goethe die?'
- Fred: 'In 1832'
- (2) Hostess: 'Would you like tea or coffee?'
- Guest: 'Coffee, please'.
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- (3) A: 'Who won the battle of Waterloo?'
- B: 'Wellington'

Proposition

- Practice - Consider the following pairs of sentences.

- In each case, say whether there are any circumstances of which one member of the pair could be true and the other false (assuming in each case that the same name, e.g. Harry, refers to the same person).

- 1. Harry took out the garbage

Harry took the garbage out Yes / No

- 2. John gave Mary a book

Mary was given a book by

John Yes / No

- 3. Isabel likes Tony

Tony likes Isabel Yes / No

- 4. George agreed with Ethel

George didn't agree with

Ethel Yes / No

Literal and Non Literal Meaning

- The basic distinction between the two is based upon common sense.
- While interpreting a word, there can be different meanings.
- i. Literal Meanings - told by a dictionary of that language – conventional meaning.
- A description of the word to which it refers to in the real world.
- Instances where the speaker speaks in a neutral, factually accurate way.
- E.g. I am hungry or I am starving.
- The source of these meanings is society which gives meaning to the words.
- These meanings are also called conceptual meaning.
- E.g. Let's look the dictionary/literal meaning of "elephant".
- 'A very large animal with thick grey skin, large ears, and two curved outer teeth called tusks' (Oxford advanced learner's dictionary).
- Similarly, if we say, "I am a teacher" and "He is sleeping" illustrate literal meanings.
- ii. Non-Literal Meaning - Instances where the speaker deliberately describes something in untrue or impossible terms in order to achieve special effects.

- For instance, “I could eat a horse” or “my stomach is screaming for food”. (Saeed, 2003)
- “traditionally called figurative and are described by a host of rhetorical terms including metaphor, irony, metonymy, etc.” (Saeed, 2003, p.17).
- These are associated meaning of the words - symbolic meaning.
- To Lakoff, there is no principled distinction between the literal and non-literal meanings.
- Metaphors are an integral part of human categorization: a basic way of organizing our thoughts about the world.
- By dealing with the clustering of metaphoric uses and giving them labels e.g. “time is money”, Lakoff and Johnson claim that whole semantic fields are systematically organized around central metaphors.

Semantics and Pragmatics

- There are three different schools of thoughts on the distinction between semantics & pragmatics.
- One group of linguists says that only three fields of linguistics are pure linguistics i.e. semantics, morphology and syntax.
- They do not include pragmatics in pure linguistics as it does not rely on logic.
- Actually, these linguists considered pragmatics as a ‘wastebasket’.
- They ignored it by saying that anyone can interpret language according to his own desire.
- Thus, it cannot be studied with other branches of linguistics.
- This school of thought is known as semanticism.
- The other group of linguists holds that semantics is only a study of conceptual meaning but real conversation takes place within pragmatics.
- Without pragmatics, everything is useless because without it meaning will be partial and incomplete
- Ignored semantics.
- This school of thought is called pragmatism.
- While the third and most recent school of thought is of the view that both semantics and pragmatics are important.
- Pragmatics gives non-literal meaning and semantics gives literal meanings.
- Leech gives the example of paper to emphasize the importance of both semantics and pragmatics.

- He says, if a paper is divided into two parts, and, some part of dialogue has been written on the first half, while the other is written on second half. We will not be able to understand complete speech without consulting the both sides.
- Pragmatics and semantics has the same relationship.

Conclusion

- Semantics: concerned with sentence meaning - meaning in language
- Pragmatics: concerned with speaker's meaning - meaning in social context
- Their distinction has proved useful but problem arises when linguists get down to detail; Which phenomena are semantic and which is pragmatic.