

Lesson#07

Semantics and Pragmatics

Lexical Relations – I

What are Lexical Relations?

- The branch of semantics that deals with word meanings is called lexical semantics (Yule, 1994).
- Lexical relations are relationships of the meanings of the words to other words (Bolinger, 1968:11).
- Lexical relations are central to the way speakers and hearers construct meaning.
- The lexical relation is used to indicate any paradigmatic relation among words.
- It is not just a semantic relation; so, it includes phonetic relations such as rhyme and alliteration, morphological relations such as inflectional variations and morpho-syntactic relations such as co-membership in a grammatical category.
- Aims of lexical semantics are to represent the meaning of each word in the language and to show how the meanings of the words in a language are interrelated.
- These aims are closely related because, meaning of word is defined in part by its relations with other words, related but absent words as well.
- E.g. “I saw my mother just now”, without any further information, you know that the speaker saw a woman.
- There are different types of relationships that can hold between words describing differences and similarities in word meaning.
- These relations examine the network-like structure given to our mental lexicon.
- A particular lexeme can be in a number of these relations, so that it may be more accurate to think of the lexicon as a network.
- An important organizational principle in the lexicon is the **lexical field** i.e. the group of lexemes which belong to a particular activity or area of specialist knowledge.
- such as the terms in cooking or sailing or the vocabulary used by doctors, coal miners or mountain climbers.
- Dictionaries recognize the effect of lexical fields by including in lexical entries labels like Banking, Medicine, Angling etc.
- For instance:

- Red /rɛd/ n: the color resembling blood or a ruby.
- Blood /blʌd/ n: the red liquid that circulates in the heart, arteries and veins of animals.
- What can we learn from dictionaries?
- Relations between words: Oppositions, Similarities, Hierarchies

Words and Lexical Items

- Our interest in semantic relations is with lexemes or semantic words.
- First, we should examine this unit “word”.
- Words can be identified at the level of writing, where we are familiar with them being separated by white space, where we can call them orthographic words.
- In phonology, they are strings of sounds which may show internal structuring.
- In syntax, where the same semantic word can be represented by several grammatical distinct variations e.g. walks, walking, walked.
- However, for semantics these are instances of the same lexeme, the verb ‘walk’.
- There is a problem that how to combine various levels of applications of the words, mentioned above, to an overall definition of ‘word’.
- To Sapir, the word is merely a form, a molded entity that takes in as much or as little of the conceptual material of the whole thought as the genius of the language cares to allow (Saeed, 2004).
- Further, a problem raised that words seem to have some psychological reality for the speakers.
- Sapir (1949) noted that “linguistic experience, both expressed in standardized, written form and as tested in the daily usage, indicates that there is not, as a rule, the slightest difficulty in bringing the word to consciousness as a psychological reality”.
- “A word is a minimum free form... for the purposes of ordinary life, the word is the smallest unit of the speech” (Bloomfield, 1984: 178).
- Thus, words are independent entities that are being able to occur in isolation.
- This works quite well in most of the cases but leaves elements like *a*, *the* and *my* in grey area.
- In this regard, “none of the criteria can be strictly applied
- Many forms lie on the border-line between bound forms and words, or between words and phrases.

Problems with Pinning Down Word Meaning

- The difficulty arises from the influence of context on the word meaning.
- Usually, it is easy to define a word if you are given the phrase or sentence it occurs in.
- These contextual effects seem to pull word meanings in two opposite directions.
- First, restricting influence is the tendency for words to occur together repeatedly, called “Collocation”.
- Let’s compare the collocation patterns of two adjectives *strong* and *powerful*; which might give similar meanings.
- Though both of them can be used with same items, e.g. strong arguments and powerful arguments elsewhere there is collocation effects such as when we talk of a strong tea rather than a powerful tea; but a powerful car rather than a strong car.
- These collocations also undergo the process of fossilization - fixed expressions.
- e.g. saying ‘they’re husband and wife’ rather than ‘wife and husband’.
- Second, the contextual effects can pull word meanings towards creativity and semantic shift.
- For example:
- I go for a run every morning.
- The tail-end batsmen added a single run before lunch.
- He built a new run for his chicken.
- We took a new car for a run.
- The problem is how to view the relationship between these instances of ‘run’ above.
- Are these different senses of the word ‘run’ or examples of the same senses influenced by different contexts?
- Some writers have described this distinction in terms of **ambiguity** and **vagueness**.
- This proposal is that if each of the meaning of ‘run’ is a different sense, then ‘run’ is four ways ambiguous but if the meaning of ‘run’ share same senses, then ‘run’ is merely vague between these different uses.
- Problem: is to decide, for any given example, whether one is dealing with ambiguity or vagueness.

Homonymy and Polysemy

- A word with two or more possible meanings is called an ambiguous word.
- There are two sources of ambiguity: homonymy and polysemy.
- A word with multiple possible meanings need not be ambiguous; it may simply be vague.
- **Homonyms** are unrelated senses of the same phonological words.
- Different types of homonyms can be distinguished by their syntactic behaviors and spellings, for instance:
 1. Lexemes of the same syntactic category; with same spellings e.g. lap - 'circuit of a course' and lap - 'part of the body when sitting down'.
 2. Lexemes of the same syntactic category; with different spellings e.g. the verb 'ring' and 'wring'.
 3. Lexemes of the different syntactic category; with same spellings e.g. the verb 'keep' and the noun 'keep'.
 4. Lexemes of the different syntactic category; with different spellings e.g. not, knot .
- **Polysemy** is identified using the criteria of "relatedness"; when the senses are judged to be related under the same lexical entry.
 - e.g. hook n. 1. a piece of material, usually metal, curved or bent and used to suspend, catch, hold, or pull something. 2. short for fish-hook. 3. a trap or snare. 4. Chiefly US something that attracts.
 - These are the various senses of hook that are treated as polysemy and therefore listed under one lexical entity.
 - However, there is a distinction made in lexicology between homonymy and polysemy; both deal with multiple senses of the same phonological words.
 - Polysemous senses are related and listed under the same lexical entry.
 - Homonyms are treated as unrelated senses under separate entries.
 - Distinction between homonymy and polysemy is not always clear cut.
 - Speakers may differ in their intuitions, which may contradict each other.

Synonyms and Antonyms

- Synonymy is the notion of sameness of meaning.

- To Saeed (2014), synonyms are different phonological words which have the same or very similar meanings e.g. couch/sofa, boy/lad, lawyer/attorney,
- Two words are synonymous: if the substitution of one for the other does not change the truth value of a sentence.
- For instance, How big is that plane?
- How large is that plane?
- Synonyms are almost never truly substitutable.
- While it is difficult to find two exactly identical words, there are examples of synonyms in our everyday language.
- Synonyms often have different distributions along a number of parameters.
- They may belong to different dialects, registers, styles of language, colloquial, formal, literary etc. that belong to different situations
- e.g. *wife* or *spouse* is more formal than *old lady* or *missus*.
- They may portray positive or negative attitudes of the speaker: e.g. naïve or gullible Vs. ingenuous.

Antonyms - words which are opposite in meaning.

- Different types of relationships that seem to involve words which are at a time related in meaning yet incompatible or contrasting, some of them are as follow:
- 1. Simple Antonyms - the negative of one implies the positive of the other - complementary pairs or binary pairs
- e.g. dead/alive (for animals), pass/fail (a test), hit/miss (a target).
- 2. Gradable Antonyms - this is a relationship between opposites where the positive of one term does not necessarily imply the negative of the other.
- E.g. rich/poor, fast/slow, young/old, beautiful//ugly.
- 3. Taxonomy Sisters -antonym sometimes describe words which are at the same level in a taxonomy.
- Taxonomies are classification systems e.g. the color adjectives in English (i.e. red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown).
- Words 'red' and 'blue' are sister-members but incompatible with each other.

- Hence one can say; His car isn't red, it's blue.
- 4. Reverses - shows reverse relation in between terms describing movements, where one term describes movement in one direction, and the other the same movement in the opposite direction, ; e.g. push/pull, come/go, up/down, in/out, right/left.
- They are also applied to any process, e.g. inflate/deflate, expand/ contract, full/empty.
- 5. Converses - describe a relation between two entities from alternate viewpoints, e.g. own/belong to, above/ below, employer/ employee.
- Thus, if we are told that 'Ali owns this book', then we know automatically, This book belongs to Ali.