Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics

Class 4 – Semantic Relations and Semantic Features
Revision - Polysemy

Linguistic Test – Exercise

In Groups, take the lexeme *run* in English

1. Using your knowledge of English and a dictionary (one of you will have one on a phone or something),
   find 5 clear meanings of the lexeme *to run*

2. Can you make a linguistic test to distinguish at least two of them?
!! Why is this important??

Every time we speak, we are choosing between not only words, but between meanings – we must, in order to choose the words!!

Every time we understand, we are choosing between different meanings – we must, in order to understand the words

Why do we care?

1. Scientific desire to understand the world
2. Automatic translation
3. Artificial intelligence
   even, perhaps,
4. Better dictionaries
Revision - Types of semasiological / polysemic relations

All polysemy, all differences in meaning of a lexeme, are of three types.

Theoretically, these types are cognitive differences, three possible ways of conceiving the world for a human

Genersalised - Literal extension  more or less the same concept
Contiguous - Metonymic Extension  a subpart of the concept
Comparative - Metaphoric Extension  a concept that is similar to another concept
Polysemic Sense Relations

Literal Extension (vagueness)
The dog’s chair
(remember, every tree is different!)
Polysemic Sense Relations - Metonymic extension

To chair the meeting

A chair (the thing you sit on)
Is //part// of the concept
Polysemic Sense Relations - Metaphoric extension

Railway chair

It’s //like// a chair…
Well sort of
Exercise – this one will be difficult

Let us go back to *over*.

In groups, think of 5 meanings of *over*
are they literal, metonymic or metaphoric extensions
Part 3 - Onomasiological Sense Relations

Synonymy
Antonymy
Meronymy
Hyponymy
What is the difference between
good and bad?

cat and dog
table and tree
table and furniture
table and bench
table and dining table
table and tabletop
glass and glass of wine
**Synonymy - Revision**

similarity between words

It is rare (arguably impossible) that any two words are exactly the same

but words like

*table* – flat topped furniture at which you eat, but sometimes work
*bench* - flat topped furniture at which you work, but sometimes eat

are very similar

but what about *desk*?
Synonymy – Paradigmatic Relations
Let’s look at the lexeme über babe

It has many near-synonyms
What about girl, chick, babe, über babe, chicka, lass, sheila, woman, lady, maiden, mademoiselle?

Are they all paradigmatically inter-changable?

John bought a pin up of an ————————————
Synonymy – Paradigmatic Relations
Exercise

Are the nouns lust, passion, desire, love, devotion, adoration, adulation— are they synonyms?

In groups, invent a sentence where you can exchange these lexemes

Does it change the meaning of the sentence?
Antonymy

The antonymy of synonymy is antonymy – the opposite word so good and bad, black and white

but what about

husband - wife?

heavy - light
Complementary (non-gradable) Antonymy

These are complete opposites

*dead* - *alive*;  *occupied* – *vacant*

Traditionally, these are considered Non-Gradable
You are either dead or alive, it is occupied or vacant!

but note, the effect of polysemy

*Man, I was half-dead when I got home last night*

Why is it that this example does not disprove the
Non-gradable antonymic relation between
*dead* and *alive*
Exercise – Complementary Antonymy

In groups

1. Find 3 complementary antonyms in French

2. Are these 3 concepts also complementary in other languages people in your groups know.

3. Consider the sentences below:
   
   John is more man than Hamish
   
   Beethoven is more dead than Kurt Cobain

How is this possible? What semantic relation would help us explain why it is possible?
Gradable Antonymy

Things that are opposite but on a continuum

*big - small; hot - cold etc.*

This is so easy, I can’t think of an exercise

but....

**Question 1:** Does the lexeme *hot* in *hot day* and *hot kettle* mean the same thing? If not, is this polysemy?

**Question 2:** Does the lexeme *hot* in *hot babe* and *hot day* mean the same thing? If not, what type of polysemy is it (literal, metonymic, metaphoric)?

**Question 3:** What is the antonym of *hot babe*? Can you make a gradable antonym of the lexeme?
Relational Antonyms

Table and chair,
knife and fork...
husband and wife...

When you think of one,
you think of the second in contrast

what about husband and son?
Exercise - Relational Antonyms

In groups
1. Find three relational antonyms.
2. Are the same in other languages that you speak.
3. Do you think they are universal?
4. What about husband and son, wide and daughter.... ?
Hyponymy and Meronymy

This bit is even easier :)

Meronymy
Test: $x$ is part of $y$

finger nail – finger – hand – arm – body : meronyms

Hyponymy
Test $x$ is a type of $y$

furniture – seat – stool : hyponyms
Exercise - Hyponymy and Meronymy

1. Divide into groups
2. take a sheet of paper
3. Give 2 examples of hyponymy
4. Give 2 examples of meronymy
5. Again, talk about other languages that people in your group speak.
   5a. Is there always the same hyponyms and meronyms?
   5b. Hyponyms and meronyms vary massively, why do you think that might be the case?
Summary
Types of Semasiological Variation

Literal Extension - Generalisation

*run* - river runs (coule)
- nose runs (coule)

*verre* - hard transparent material
- drinking vessel

Metonymic Extension – Part for Whole

*verre* - Drinking vessel
- Alcoholic beverage

*run* - river runs (coule)
- person runs (courir)

Metaphoric Extension – Conceptual Comparision

*run* - machine runs (fonctionner)
- run a company (diriger)

*corchon* - farm animal
- impolite person
Summary
Types of Onomasiological Variation

Synonymy
Antonymy
Meronymy
Hyponymy
Exercise

Many good dictionaries list the meanings in chronological order which makes it easier to see the semantic change over time.

Most simple dictionaries list the older meanings at the end.

In groups, open a dictionary and find three lexemes that have a reasonable number of senses listed.

1. Go through each sense and try to identify which kind of semantic extension is responsible for the polysemy
2. Which sense do you think is the oldest / original sense?
3. Do you think that there could be one aggregate meaning that could account for all the senses?
Revision - Tests for Polysemy

Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy

1. Ha ha ha, ça c’est très drôle! Tu te moque de moi toujours.
2. C’est un drôle de type celui-là. Il me regarde jamais quand il parle.

Definitional Tests – Subjective difference

\textit{pene} (SW):  
(a) pen  
(b) pencil

Logical Tests – Truth Conditions

This man is a minister (‘priest’), not a minister (‘politician’).

Linguistic Tests – Markedness

?? The quartet are playing, and so are Real Madrid
Tests for Polysemy – Senses vs. Feature Clusters

All three tests have fallen out of favour in recent years

Since the 1990s, many semanticists believe that senses don’t actually exist!!

Instead of discrete categories “senses” we have clusters of semantic features.

The meaning is only instantiated in use, relative to context, where many of these semantic features may or may not be activated.

We will return to this after we have looked at semantic features!
Componentality and Semantic Features

Now we have looked at semantic relations, let’s turn to how we can describe them and explain how we recognise and produce them!
Componentality (Features)

Let us go back to one of our philosophical questions

How do you categorise this as a chair?
Componentality - Components of meaning (semantic features)

Componentality is a theory of semantic structure which suggests that we use specific characteristics to distinguish things.

The principle was first put forward by Roman Jakobson, one very clever linguist.

In 1938, as quite a young man, he published a paper which attempted to apply the principles of phonology to the Russian Case System.

He hypothesised that the way that phonology is structured also holds true for semantics. It is an elegant theory. Like for phonology, he proposed that concepts (the signifié of the sign), just like the sounds (the signifiant of the sign), are distinguished by a set of semantic features.

That concepts fit a table, distinguishable by a set of traits sémantiques, just like vowels or consonants.
Componentality - Components of meaning (Features)

Part of this theory has been largely disproven, but part of it still serves today. We will consider that point later when we look at Set Theory, for now, let us work with the principle of semantic features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.1. Componential analysis of English furniture terms.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>armchair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sofa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beanbag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Componentality - Components of meaning (Features)

Just like in phonology, semantic features are not just lists of features, they are hypotheses about how we distinguish things, how we categorise the world.

This explains how we distinguish chair and stool. Which semantic feature is hypothesised to distinguish them?

(1) Take the stool, not the chair
Componentality - Components of meaning

It also explains how we can extend meanings a bit like a foreign accent (e.g. a dark [l] instead of light [l]) is understood in context the same hold true for concepts.

Which of the feature above would allow this, in the example below

(1) The dog has found himself a chair
Componential Analysis – Onomasiology of TRANSFER

But what about take, lend, hire?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>transfer of possession</th>
<th>voluntary transfer</th>
<th>exchange</th>
<th>price</th>
<th>subject receives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>buy</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sell</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steal</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swap</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that these features are meant to apply to transitive, active forms of the verbs: otherwise, the feature [subject receives] will not be an accurate description of the difference between the verbs.
Exercise
Some of you will have done this in 1st year, let’s do it again more carefully

Look at the referents here
I especially chose unrealistic, sometimes hard to determine referents
Do you know what they are? How??????!!!
Exercise

Divide into groups of 2 or 3
With pen and paper,
componential analysis of the TRANSPORT nouns
take your time, this is a difficult task!

motorbike, car, train, plane, helicopter, sailboat, motorboat, ferry, lorry, bus, bicycle
Componentality - Components of semasiological structure (polysemy)

Let go back to our friend *over*

Three Basic Dimensions determine linguistic structuring of space:

TR (trajector, figure); Path, LM (landmark, ground)

The bird flew over the hill
TR Path LM
Features

TR Dimensionality
DM 1: point
DM 2: line
DM 3: thing
DM Abs: abstract

TR Kinaesthesia
TR Static
TR Dynamic

TR Animacy
TR – Animate
TR – Inanimate

TR LM Orientation
TR V – LM V
TR V- LM H
TR V – LM Abs
TR H – LM V
e tc...

TR Tactility
TR-LM Tactile
 ex.: shirt over head
TR-LM Non Tactile
 ex.: plane over hill

TR Plexity
Multiplex
 ex.: People over the hill
Uniplex
 ex.: Towel is over the pillow

TR Path Type
Point
 ex.: holidays are hanging over head
Linear
 ex.: Emotions come over me
Semi-Circle
 ex.: ball is over the fence
Spread
 ex.: water ran over the floor

Path Boundedness
Bound
 ex.: sheet laid over bed
Unbounded
 ex.: ball few over fence

Landmark Expression
Overt
Covert

Landmark Type
Point
 ex.: over a head
Extended
 ex.: over there
Vertical
 ex.: over fence
Extended-Vertical
 ex.: over hill

Landmark Dimensionality
DM 1
 ex.: point hat over head
DM 2
 ex.: line run over here
DM 3
 ex.: thing lotion of body
DM Abs
 ex.: abstract words over emotions
Over – Polysemy Network
Lakoff (another very clever linguist) in 1984
applied the principle of semantic features to *over*
This is what he got:

**senses of over**

The problem is that even with 26 different
if you look an a few hundred examples
you find many examples which are either
not explained by any of the meanings
or
are between the two meanings
1. bird is over the fence – (behind)
2. bird is over the forest – (above)
3. bird is over car – ?? behind / above??

The diagram shows the relationships between different senses of the word "over".