

# Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics

## Class 3 – Semantic Relations

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# Semantic Relations

## **Semantic Intention**

What do you want to say

How do you choose to say it?

**When you speak**

**You are making thousands of choices**

**every second**

**semasiological and onomasiological choices**

**but also**

**syntagmatically and paradigmatically...**



**So far, we have looked at the complexity of communication**

1. Sign Theory – what goes on when we communicate

- no meaning in a word
- complexity of onomasiological (word choice)
- complexity of semasiological (meaning choice)

**How does the semanticist deal with all of this?**

**How can we scientifically describe semantic structure?**

## Semantic Relations and Semantic Features

Semantics describes meaning by breaking into down into

types of **sense relations**

and

sets of **semantic features**

This week, we look at semantic relations

it's tough, but you will survive

next week, we look at semantic features

## **Sense Relations**

**In order to understand / map the choices that humans makes when they communicate**

**We break down those choices into different types**

Semantic choices of a form – Semasiology / Polysemy

Semantic choices between forms – Onomasiology / Synonymy

## Dimensions of Choice

### Syntagmatic Sense and Paradigmatic Sense Relations

Paradigmatic relations reflect the semantic choices available at a particular structure point in a sentence.

For instance:

I'll have a glass of —  
    beer  
    wine  
    water  
    lemonade  
    etc.

It is the choices you make at a given point in a sentence

Typically, paradigmatic relations involve words belonging to the same syntactic category, although not infrequently there are minor differences

John	—	across the field	I'd like a glass of	—	sherry.
	ran			dry	
	walked			sweet	
	crawled			warm	

## Syntagmatic Sense Relations and Paradigmatic Sense Relations

Syntagmatic relations hold between items which occur in the same sentence, particularly those which stand in an intimate syntactic relationship.

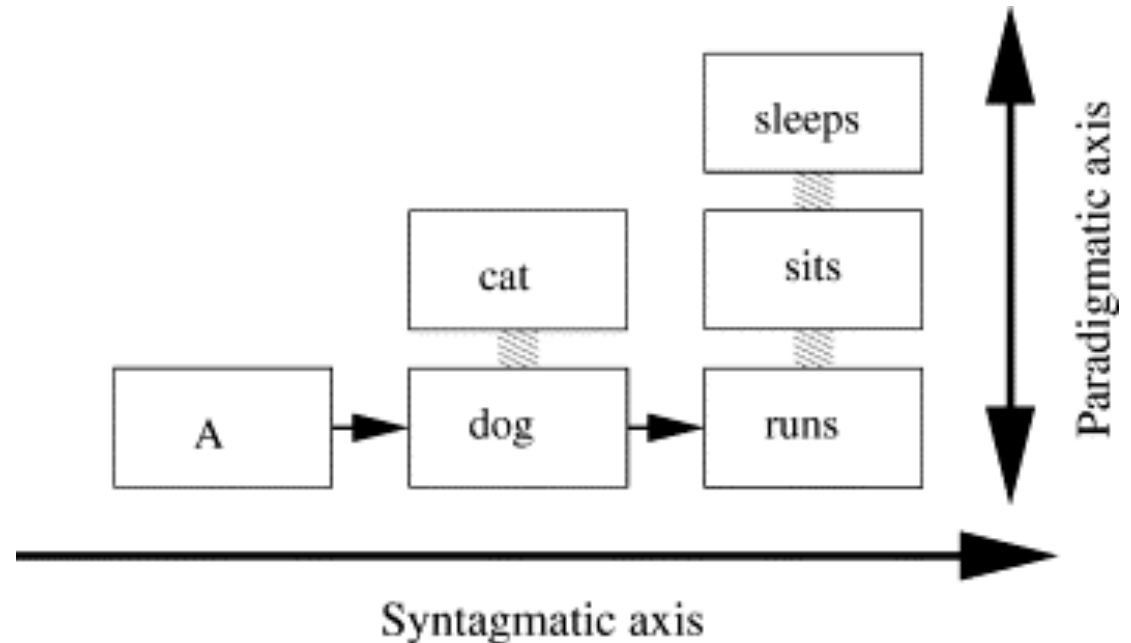
For instance,

(a) *I'd like a glass of dry sherry*

(b) *I'd like a glass of striped sherry*

because of syntagmatic sense relations between the adjective and the noun

(a) is correct and (b) is not





# Semasiological Sense Relations

Homonymic – no relation

Polysemic Extension

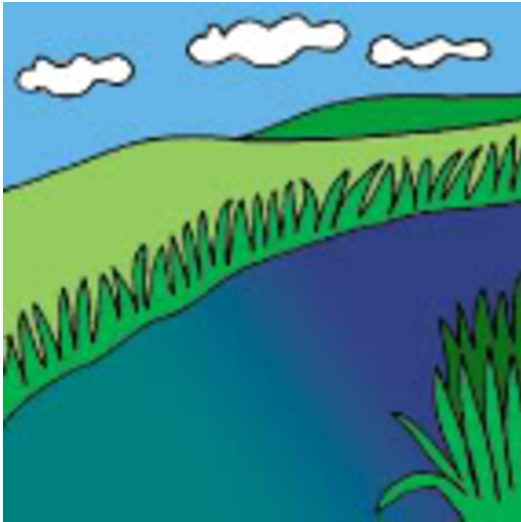
- Literal
- Metaphor
- Metonymy

# Homonymic sense relations

The same form, but totally unrelated meanings

*bank*

*Not very interesting for us....*



## **Exercise - Homonyms**

### **Two subtypes: homophones & homographs**

Homographs are less interesting than homophones. From the name, can you work out what they are?

Homophones are a problem for learners in French because there are so many.

Can you think of 5 homophones in French?



## **Polysemic Sense Relations**

### **Revision**

#### **Polysemy! - *over***

The veil is over the face (in front of)

The ball is over the fence (behind)

The car is over the hill (beyond)

The bird is over her head (above)

The cloth is over the table (on)

I reached over the table (across)

I bend over (fold)

I roll over (turn)

He is over there (distance)

He said it over the weekend (during)

The argument is over money (because)

He is over the problems (finish)

He said it over (again)

He is over this weekend (visiting)

It is over 10 minutes (more than)

## **Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy**

Polysemy – many senses

Monosemy – single sense

Vagueness – something in-between the two

How do we identify instances of polysemy?

Is the lexeme *drôle* polysemous?

Consider the following examples

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.

## **Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy**

Three methods for determining polysemy

### **Definitional Test**

*drôle*:       (a) amusing  
                 (b) peculiar

### **But!!!**

why not just say that these two meanings are vague differences, determined by context of one more general meaning?

For example, just like in French, English has a lexeme which covers the two “meanings”

*drôle*:       (a) funny

## **Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy**

It is very possible that we could write a better definition which covers both “meanings”

*drôle*: (a) something that contrasts with the norm to humorous, uncomfortable, or annoying effect

In this definition, you see the problem. This one definition covers all situations where it can be used.  
In one context:

(1) C’est un drôle de type celui-là. Il me regarde jamais quand il parle.

the lexeme *drole* could refer to a concept that makes the person laugh, uncomfortable or annoyed!!

Is this the meaning of the word or context or both that change?

.... the definitional test does not work

## **Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy**

### **Logical Test**

There exists a theory of semantics called Formal Semantics, which seeks to use Truth Value and Logic to describe language

If you can introduce a juxtaposition which does not make the sentence “untrue”, then you have two meanings.

For example:

- (1) This man is a minister (‘priest’), not a minister (‘politician’).
- (2) The exam paper was hard (‘difficult’), not hard (‘firm to the touch’).

### **BUT**

The problem is that many things which are clearly not polysemous pass this test:

- (3) He’s trying (‘going through the motions’) but he’s not trying (‘making a genuine effort’).
- (4) He’s an adult (‘mature’) but not an adult (‘legally adult’).



## **Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy**

### **Logical Test – Exercise**

In Groups, try to create a logical test for 2 senses of the preposition *over* and 2 senses of the adverb *over*

#### **Preposition**

The veil is over the face (in front of)

The ball is over the fence (behind)

The car is over the hill (beyond)

The bird is over her head (above)

The cloth is over the table (on)

I reached over the table (across)

I bend over (fold)

I roll over (turn)

He is over there (distance)

He said it over the weekend (during)

#### **Adverb**

The argument is over money (because)

He is over the problems (finish)

He said it over (again)

He is over this weekend (visiting)

It is over 10 minutes (more than)



## **Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy**

### **Linguistic Test**

We can add “and so is/are” to two propositions.  
If it sounds odd, then we can say that we have two meanings

For example

- (1) The quartet are playing, and so is Edith Piaf.
- (2) Real Madrid are playing and so are Manchester
- (3) ?? The quartet are playing, and so are Real Madrid.

BUT

*court* has two meanings

- court      a. courtyser
- b. aller vers

- (4) *Ahmed is courty Tina and a disaster*

## **Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy**

### **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?



## **Polysemy vs. Vagueness vs. Monosemy**

Many, if not most, linguists today believe that there is a continuum between true Polysemy and true Monosemy

Instead of polysemy *per se*, we can talk about semasiological variation

Modern methods of analysis permit us to see different meanings,  
not as reified discrete categories  
but as multidimensional clusterings of features

## **!! 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

## **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

Generalised - Literal extension

more or less the same concept

Contiguous - Metonymic Extension

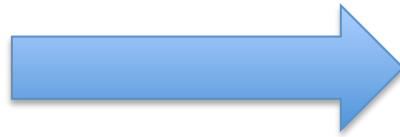
a subpart of the concept

Comparative - Metaphoric Extension

a concept that is similar to another concept

## Polysemic Sense Relations

Literal Extension (vagueness)  
The dog's chair



## Polysemic Sense Relations

Metonymic extension  
To chair the meeting





## Polysemic Sense Relations

Metaphoric extension  
He is the university chair



## Polysemic Sense Relations

Metaphoric-metonymic extension  
Be careful of etymology

The Faculty chair comes from Latin *catedra*  
not directly from *chair* that we sit on

Indeed, in many European languages, the word  
*catedra* is the word for faculty.



## **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



## **For next week**

There is more reading on line.

There is lots of reading at the beginning of this course, but it will stop soon.

The chapter on line now is a long one – but it will cover several weeks of classes

as the course becomes more practical ! :)

So, bear with me and have a go at the reading