Introduction to Linguistics
Semantics 1: The meanings of language

Lexical Semantics

- semantics is about meaning
- dictionaries contain information about the meaning of words
- we store information about meaning in our mental lexicon, as part of each lexical entry
- sentences build meanings from the words they contain (compositionality)

Semantic Properties

	mammal	canine	feline	large	??
salmon					
dog	√	√			
cat	√		√		
German Shepherd	√	√		√	

- meanings may be broken down into collections of properties, e.g. [mammal], [canine], [large], etc.
- we may be more or less specific about a meaning
- these properties make up at least part of all content words
- perhaps also part of various function words
- you need enough properties to properly differentiate near synonyms, e.g. tall vs. high
- properties are not specific to any word class, but operate outside of the word class system
- thus, 'female' may be a property of a noun (lioness), a verb (give birth), or an adjective (pregnant)

Evidence for Semantic Properties

- 'speech errors' / 'slips of the tongue'
- the errors are usually related to the correct expression by means of various semantic properties
- 'bridge of the nose' → 'bridge of the neck' ('nose' and 'neck' are both body parts)
- 'he came too late' → 'he came to early' ('late' and 'early' both related to time)

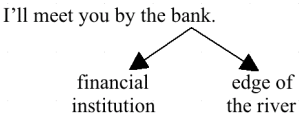
Semantic Properties and the Lexicon

	± mammal	± canine	± feline	± large
salmon	-	-	-	-
dog	+	+	-	-
cat	+	-	+	-

- represent semantic properties in the lexicon by the use of binary (±) features
- there may be overlap of features: dog, cat, and German Shepherd all have [+ mammal]
- other semantic features may include the distinction between count and mass nouns ([± count)
- in Korean, the specific classifier associated with each count noun

Homonyms and Polysemy

- words that sound the same but have different meanings are referred to as homonyms or homophones
- homophone: words that sound the same but are spelled differently, e.g. *tale* vs. *tail*
- homonym: words that are spelled the same and sound the same: e.g. $bear_V$ vs. $bear_N$



Synonyms

- words that have similar meanings, e.g. dog/canine, sofa/couch, draw/sketch, fatherly/paternal
- some synonyms may be dialectal variants, e.g. British *lift* or *lorry* versus North American *elevator* or *truck*
- others may be personal variants, e.g. *sofa* versus *couch*
- others may be speech level variants, e.g. *good morning* versus *hi*!

Synonyms in Syntax

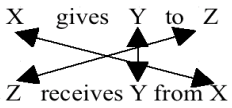
- some synonyms have different syntactic subcategorisation: e.g. *give* vs. *donate*:
- (1) I gave a book to the library — I donated a book to the library.
  I gave the library a book. — *I donated the library a book
- two sentences containing synonyms, but otherwise identical, are called ***paraphrases***

Antonyms

- words that mean the opposite, e.g. *hot* vs. *cold*
- typically such words share all of their semantic properties except for one
- the feature value of that one property will be the opposite: + or -
- different kinds of antonyms:
  - complementary: alive/dead present/absent awake/asleep
  - gradable: big/small hot/cold fast/slow

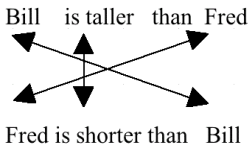
➢relational opposites: give/receive buy/sell

Relational Opposites



➢relational opposites have symmetrical meanings:

➢some comparative forms of gradable adjectives form relational opposites: taller vs. shorter



➢you can make antonyms in English using different morphemes, e.g.: in-, un-, non-

credible, decisive	incredible, indecisive
happy, believable	unhappy, unbelievable
fattening, trivial	non-fattening, non-trivial

Hyponyms

➢sets of related words, e.g. colour terms, may belong to a set of words sharing some feature

➢in such sets, one member acts as the more general term, e.g. 'colour'

➢hyponyms are the more specific cases related to the general term

➢thus, 'red' or 'yellow' are hyponyms of 'colour'; 'tiger' and 'lion' are hyponyms of 'feline'

Metonyms

➢use of one term to represent or signify a different one

➢selects an attribute of the object, e.g.

➢ The Crown = the Queen

The Whitehouse = the U.S. government

Retronyms

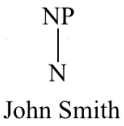
➢used to refer to words that were created subsequent to the original use of the term

➢e.g. *silent movie* when movies were all silent there was no need to add 'silent'

➢so the term was only created after the invention of talking movies

Proper Names

➢proper names refer to individuals; usually treated as definite, therefore, they have no modifiers



➢BUT: the late John Smith
the beautiful Marilyn Monroe
the former Mayor of New York
the Hague

Phrase and Sentence Meaning

➢***Principle of Compositionality***

The meaning of a phrase or sentence depends both on the meaning of its words and how those words are combined structurally

➢words may have more than one meaning: metaphor, homonymy, metonymy, etc.

➢structures may be ambiguous: 'visiting relatives can be a nuisance'

(1) a. They ran the bill up.
b. They ran up the bill.

(2) a. They put the light on.
b. They put on the light.

➢Compare these examples, where the structure varies but the meaning is basically the same, with:

(1) a. We will put him on a mask (respirator, dialysis machine, etc., also for medicine: put him on penicillin, morphine, tranquilizers, etc.)
b. We will put a mask (hat, tie, etc.) on him.
c. * We will put a respirator on him.
d. * We will put him on a hat.

➢even though the structure looks similar to 'run the bill up' vs. 'run up the bill' the meanings are definitely not the same!

➢'put X on someone' means put something (clothes, hat, tie, etc.) onto the person

➢'put someone on X' means to give the person some special medical treatment