

Introduction to Linguistics

Semantics 2 - The meanings of language

Phrasal Semantics

- the study of how word meanings combine to form phrase meanings
- noun-centered meaning and headedness
 - since the noun is the head of the NP, it is the element modified by the adjective in 'red balloon', 'large house', etc.
- various conditions on interpreting the semantics of phrases

Semantic properties of Adjectives

(4) Class of Adjective	Truth of 'An Adj X is an X'
good, red, large, ...	True
false, counterfeit, phoney, ...	False
alleged, purported, putative, ...	Undetermined

Compounds

- compounds have a special status
- meaning is not always obvious from the meanings of the parts: *strawberry*, *redneck*, *greenhouse*, etc.
- meanings of parts of compound may also be unclear: *cran* in *cranberry*, *luke* in *lukewarm*

Sense and Reference

- referent: the object or concept referred to (= extension)
- sense: special meaning, e.g. 'the first brick from the right': not just *any* brick (= intension)
- proper names typically only have reference, but no special meaning
- possible for two names to have the same referent: Superman and Clark Kent (do they differ in sense?)
- a proper name may have a sense, but no referent: the present King of France (there is no present King of France)

Verb-centered Meaning

- thematic roles: very important contribution to meaning: indicate the role or responsibility of each *argument*
- arguments include subjects, objects, indirect objects, etc.
- thematic roles are assigned by the verb: each verb has its own thematic structure

	Them.Role	Description	Example
a.	Agent	the doer or performer of an action	John made it
b.	Theme	the undergoer of the action	John made it
c.	Location	the site of the action	John made it in the house
d.	Goal	the target location	John put it in the house
e.	Source	the origin of an action	John moved it from the house
f.	Instrument	the tool or means used	John made it with a hammer
g.	Experiencer	the person who experiences	John heard it
h.	Cause	what causes something	The wind opened the door
i.	Possessor	the owner of something	The dog's tail is broken

Thematic Roles

- thematic roles are mainly independent of grammatical roles such as subject, object, etc.
- **Theta-assignment:** the process of assigning thematic (theta) roles
- **Theta-criterion:** a particular theta role can occur only once in a phrase:
 - a. * The boy opened the door with a key with a hammer. b. The boy opened the door with a key and a hammer.

Events and States

- events involve actions (kiss, eat, make); states involve descriptions (know, like, prefer)
- places restrictions on certain syntactic structures, such as passive, progressive, imperative, etc.
- affects the choice of adverbs such as *deliberately*, *intentionally*, etc.

	Event	State
Passive	Mary was kissed by John	?Oysters are liked by John
Progressive	John is kissing Mary	?John is knowing Mary
Imperative	Kiss Mary!	?Know Mary!

Animacy

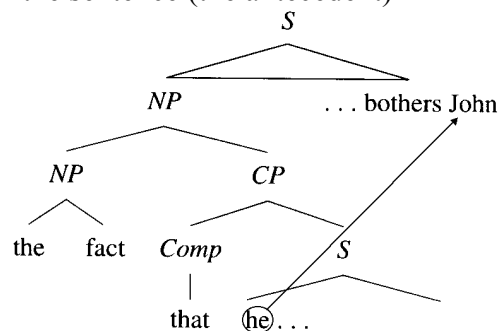
- whether something is alive or not
- may have consequences for the syntax:
 - a. the man's leg is broken b.? the leg of the man is broken
 - c.? the table's leg is broken d. the leg of the table is broken

Coreferentiality

- pronouns may refer back to something already mentioned in the sentence (antecedent)
 - a. John_i loves his_i mother
- they may also introduce something new: b. His_i mother loves John_j (someone else's mother)
- so, (a) is ambiguous: c. John_i loves his_j mother (someone else's mother)

Reflexives

- reflexive pronouns refer back to something already mentioned in the sentence (the antecedent)
 - a. Jane_i bit herself_i b.* Herself_i bit Jane_i
- the antecedent should precede the reflexive pronoun
- sometimes a pronoun can precede its referent:
 - a. The fact that he_{ij} is considered a genius bothers John_i
 - b. The fact that his_{ij} dog is considered a genius bothers John_i
- this is explained by the position of the reflexive pronoun



Anomaly

- sentences that are grammatical but don't make sense
 - Colorless green ideas sleep furiously (< Chomsky)
- uninterpretable: can't understand because the words are unknown
- Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' is a good example of this

Metaphor

- creative extension of concrete terms: the walls have ears, my new car is a lemon
- all languages probably make use of metaphor
- there is a cultural component, so a metaphor in one language may not work in another
 - sihk sei maau 'eat dead cat' = 'take responsibility for s.t. others did' (Cantonese)
 - eat crow = 'take responsibility for s.t. you did' (English)
 - 닭 잡아먹고 오리발 내민다 'not admit that you have done s.t.' (Korean)

Idioms

- Principle of Compositionality does not hold
- irregular meanings or structure or both: *kick the bucket, put up with someone, put your foot in your mouth, haul over the coals, give s.o. a piece of your mind, get s.t. off your chest, let your hair down, etc.*

Pragmatics

- Meaning in context: Two kinds of context: a. Linguistic context - preceding discourse
 - b. Situational context - knowledge of the world

Linguistic Context

- Discourse analysis: how speakers combine sentences into larger speech units: Pronouns
- Refer to individuals mentioned in the discourse
- Require 'binding' to antecedent: Articles
- Definite article indicates shared knowledge between speaker and hearer
- Indefinite article may be specific or non-specific: Helen wants to marry a college professor.

Situational Context

- Contextual knowledge: speaker, hearer, topic of discussion, facts about the world
- Maxims of conversation (from Grice):
 - 1. Quantity: say neither more nor less than required
 - 2. Relevance: be relevant
 - 3. Manner: be brief and orderly; avoid ambiguity and obscurity
 - 4. Quality: do not lie; do not make unsupported claims