

LINGUISTICS

FOURTH YEAR

LECTURE (1): SEMANTICS

ASST. PROF. MUSTAFA A. ADDULKAREEM (PHD)

KEY CONCEPTS

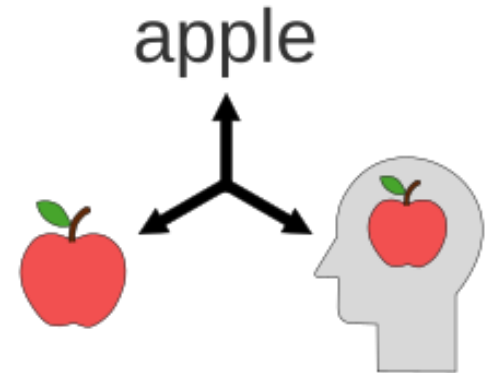
- **What is Semantics?**
- **Meaning and Types of Meaning**
- **Semantic Features**
- **Semantic Roles**
- **Lexical Relations**

WHAT IS SEMANTICS?

Semantics is the study of **literal meaning** of **words**, **phrases** and **sentences**.

It is concerned with **objective** or general meaning and avoids trying to account for **subjective** or local meaning.

Semantics concerns the relation between **language**, **world**, and **mental concepts**.



MEANING AND TYPES OF MEANING

Meaning is at the centre of the study of semantics

There are two basic types of meaning: **conceptual** and **associative**.

1. **Conceptual (denotative, logical, or cognitive) meaning** covers those **basic, essential components** of meaning that are conveyed by the literal use of a word. It refers to the **literal** or **dictionary meaning** of a word or phrase.

For example:

Some of the **basic components** of a word like **needle** in English might include **“thin, sharp, steel instrument.”** These components would be part of the **conceptual meaning** of **needle**.



MEANING AND TYPES OF MEANING

- 2. Associative meaning** refers to the **connections** or **associations** that people commonly make with a word or expression beyond its literal or denotative meaning. The meaning of a word is affected by the **context**, **background**, **time** and **the cultural realities** of the users of language.

For example:

The word **needle** might be associated with pain – **illness – blood – knitting.**

These associations **are not considered as a part of the conceptual meaning** of the word.



CONCEPTUAL AND ASSOCIATIVE MEANING: PRACTICAL SIDE

Example	Conceptual Meaning	Associative meaning
Home	A place where someone lives; a house or residence.	Warmth, comfort, family, safety, love.
Snake	A long, legless reptile that slithers.	Evil, danger, betrayal, sneakiness
Child	A young human being	Innocence, purity, joy, playfulness
Police	People who enforce the law and maintain public order.	Safety, authority, or (for some) fear, control.
Rose	A type of flower with petals and thorns	Love, romance, beauty, passion

SEMANTIC FEATURES

- **Semantic features** refer to the **characteristics** or **properties** of a word or phrase that contribute to its meaning. They help us to **differentiate** the meaning of **one word** in a language from **another**.
- Words are composed of **smaller meaning components**, which are combined to form different words.

The **presence** of the feature is denoted by **+** (**plus**) sign and **absence** by **-** (**minus**) sign.

	<i>table</i>	<i>horse</i>	<i>boy</i>	<i>man</i>	<i>girl</i>	<i>woman</i>
animate	-	+	+	+	+	+
human	-	-	+	+	+	+
female	-	-	-	-	+	+
adult	-	+	-	+	-	+

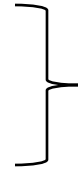
SEMANTIC FEATURES

How would explain the oddness in the following sentences?

➤ The hamburger ate the boy

➤ The table listens to the radio

➤ The horse is reading the newspaper



Syntax: well-formed

Semantics: odd

The oddness of these sentences **does not derive** from their **syntactic structure**, they have **well-formed structures**.

NP V NP

The hamburger ate the boy

The components of the conceptual meaning of the noun *hamburger* must be significantly different from those of the noun *boy*. By semantic features of the words, we determine which **noun** can be used as the **subject** of the verb *ate*.

The kind of noun that can be the subject of the verb *ate* must denote an entity that is capable of 'eating'.

i.e. **+animate** words are **capable of eating** and **-animate** words **are not**.

SEMANTIC FEATURES

The word **girl** involves the elements **[+ human, + female, - adult]**

Syntactic analysis + semantic features:

The _____ is reading the newspaper

N [+human]

The noun we need must be **able to read**

SEMANTIC FEATURES ANALYSIS

Identify the oddness in the following sentences:

1. The rock sang a song.
2. The child drank the blanket.
3. My car is pregnant.
4. The table laughed loudly.

SEMANTIC (THEMATIC) ROLES

- **Semantic roles** are used to indicate the role that a **noun phrase** (the participants of a clause) may play with respect to the **action** or **state**.
- Instead of thinking of words as ‘**containers**’ of meaning, we can look at the ‘**roles**’ they play.

The boy kicked the ball

- The sentence has **two participants**; Each has its **own role**.
- We can identify a small number of **semantic roles (thematic roles)** for these noun phrases.

- 1. Agent**
- 2. Theme**
- 3. Instrument**

- 4. Experiencer**
- 5. Location**
- 6. Source**
- 7. Goal**

SEMANTIC ROLES

Agent and Theme

1. **Agent** is the '**doer**' or instigator of the action denoted by the predicate. It often appears as the **subject** of an active sentence.
2. **Theme** is the entity that **undergoes** the action. It often appears as the **object** of the verb (in active sentences).

The boy kicked the ball.

- **Role 1: The boy** is **the agent**, as it is “**the entity that performs the action,**”
- **Role 2: The ball** is **the theme**, as it is “**the entity that is involved in or affected by the action,**”

The theme (the ball) can also be the entity that is **being described** –not performing an action

The ball was red.

The boy kicked the ball

The ball was red.

Agent

Theme

the entity that
performs the action

the entity that is
involved or affected by
the action

the entity that is simply
being described

the boy

the ball

the ball is red

SEMANTIC ROLES: AGENT AND THEME

- Although **agents** is typically **human**, and can be **nonhuman**. It should be **able to move**:
 - ❖ A natural force (**the wind** blew the ball away)
 - ❖ A machine (**A car** ran over the ball)
 - ❖ A creature (**The dog** caught the ball)
- The theme is typically **non-human**, but can be **human**, as in:
 - ❖ **The dog** chased **the boy**.
- The same physical entity can appear in two different semantic roles in the same sentence, as in:
 - **The boy** cut himself
 - **the boy** = **agent**
 - **himself** = **theme**

SEMANTIC ROLES: INSTRUMENT

- **Instrument** is the semantic role of an **inanimate thing** that is used by **an animate agent** to carry out the action
- The boy cut the rope **with an old razor / with a knife**.
- He drew the picture **with a pencil**.
- The artist painted the wall **with a brush**.
- The teacher wrote on the board **using a marker**.

The NP **an old razor, a pencil, and a knife** are being used in the semantic role of **instrument**.

SEMANTIC ROLES: EXPERIENCER

Experiencer is used to represent an entity as **the person who receives sensory** or emotional input, like **feeling**, **perception** or **state**.

If we **see**, **know** or **enjoy** something, we are **not really performing** an action (so, we are not agents). We are in the role of **experiencer**.

- **The boy feels** sad
- **Did you hear** that noise?
- **Susan heard** the song.
- **I cried**

The boy, You, Susan, and I = experiencer

that noise and **the song = theme**

SEMANTIC ROLES: AGENT VS EXPERIENCER

According to Ramchand, G.C. (2011),

- **Agent**: A participant which the meaning of the verb specifies as **doing** or **causing something**, possibly intentionally.
 - ❖ e.g. Subjects of **kill, eat, hit, smash, kick, watch**.
- **Experiencer**: A participant **who is characterised** as aware of something.
 - ❖ e.g. Subjects of **love, like, enjoy, smell, hear**

SEMANTIC ROLES

All these semantic roles are illustrated in the following scenario.

➤ Mary saw a fly on the wall.

Experiencer them location

➤ She borrowed a magazine from George

Agent theme source

➤ she hit the bug with the magazine.

Agent theme instrument

➤ She handed the magazine back to George

Agent theme goal

➤ "Gee thanks," said George

Agent

Extra examples:

➤ I took the pen from her and gave it to him

Agent theme source theme goal

➤ The door is big

theme

SEMANTIC ROLE ANALYSIS

The Lost Kitten

Liam found a tiny, shivering kitten under the old oak tree. He carefully picked it up with a soft towel. The little creature felt immediate warmth and safety. Liam carried the kitten home, where it finally found a family.

The Gift

Maria baked a cake for her grandmother. She mixed the ingredients in a large bowl using her mother's whisk. Her grandmother, sitting in her cozy kitchen, felt overwhelming joy when she saw the surprise.

ASSIGNMENT (1)...



**Analyze a text with no less than ten sentences
using different semantic roles**

LEXICAL RELATIONS

- Words cannot only be treated as “**containers**” of meaning, or as fulfilling “**roles**” in events, they can also have “**relationships**” with each other.
- **Lexical relations** refer to the **relationships** between the meanings of words or lexical items within a language.

☐ There are **several types** of **lexical relations**:

- 1. Synonymy**
- 2. Antonymy**
- 3. Hyponymy**
- 4. Prototypes**
- 5. Homophones**
- 6. Homonyms**
- 7. Polysemy**
- 8. Metonymy**
- 9. Collocations**

LEXICAL RELATIONS: SYNONYMY

Synonyms are **two or more words** with very **closely related meanings**. For example:

➤ **almost/nearly, big/large, broad/wide, buy/purchase, cab/taxi, car/automobile, couch/sofa, freedom/liberty**

➤ The idea of “**sameness**” of meaning used in discussing synonymy is not necessarily “**total sameness**.” There are many occasions when one word is **appropriate in a sentence**, but its synonym would be **odd** in others. For example, we can say interchangeably:

❖ What was his **answer**? ✓

❖ What was his **reply**? ✓

➤ **But are not** used interchangeably in the following occasions:

❖ Sandy had only one correct **answer** on the test. ✓

❖ Sandy had only one correct **reply** on the test. ✗

LEXICAL RELATIONS: SYNONYMY

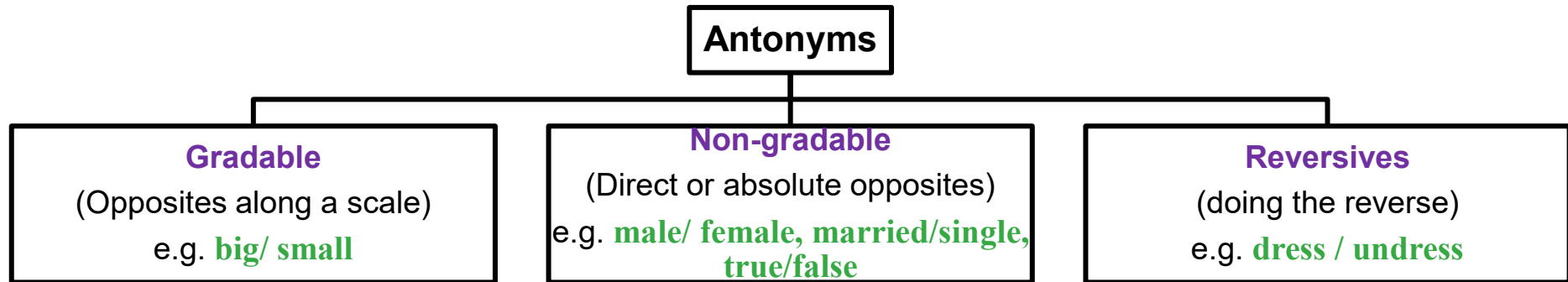
Synonymous forms may also differ in terms of **formal** versus **informal** uses. **For example,**

- My **father** purchased a **large** automobile. **(formal)**
- My **dad** bought a **big** car. **(casual or informal)**

The first sentence has virtually the same meaning as the second sentence, with four synonymous replacements. However, they differ in terms of formality.

LEXICAL RELATIONS: ANTONYMY

Antonyms are **two forms** with **opposite meanings**. For example, **alive/ dead, big/small, fast/slow, happy/sad, hot/cold, long/short, male/female, married/single, old/new, rich/ poor, true/false.**



1. Used in comparative or superlative forms

e.g. I'm **bigger** than you
A pony is **smaller** than horse

2. There are **intermediate values** (e.g., **warm, cool, medium**, etc.)

e.g. My car isn't **old** ≠ My car is **new**

1. Comparative constructions are not normally used.

e.g. dead ✓ deader ✗ more dead ✗

2. The relationship is either/or - not in degrees (If one is true, the other must be false)

e.g. My grandparents **aren't alive** = My grandparents **are dead**

Reversive expresses opposite processes or directions of change.

e.g. dress/undress - pack/ unpack

- One verb **reverses** the meaning of the other.
- Often involve **verbs of action or movement**.
- He **opened** the door, then **closed** it again.

LEXICAL RELATIONS: HYPONYMY

Hyponymy: when the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another. For example,

➤ animal/dog, dog/poodle, vegetable/carrot, flower/rose.

❖ “horse is a hyponym of animal” or “ant is a hyponym of insect”

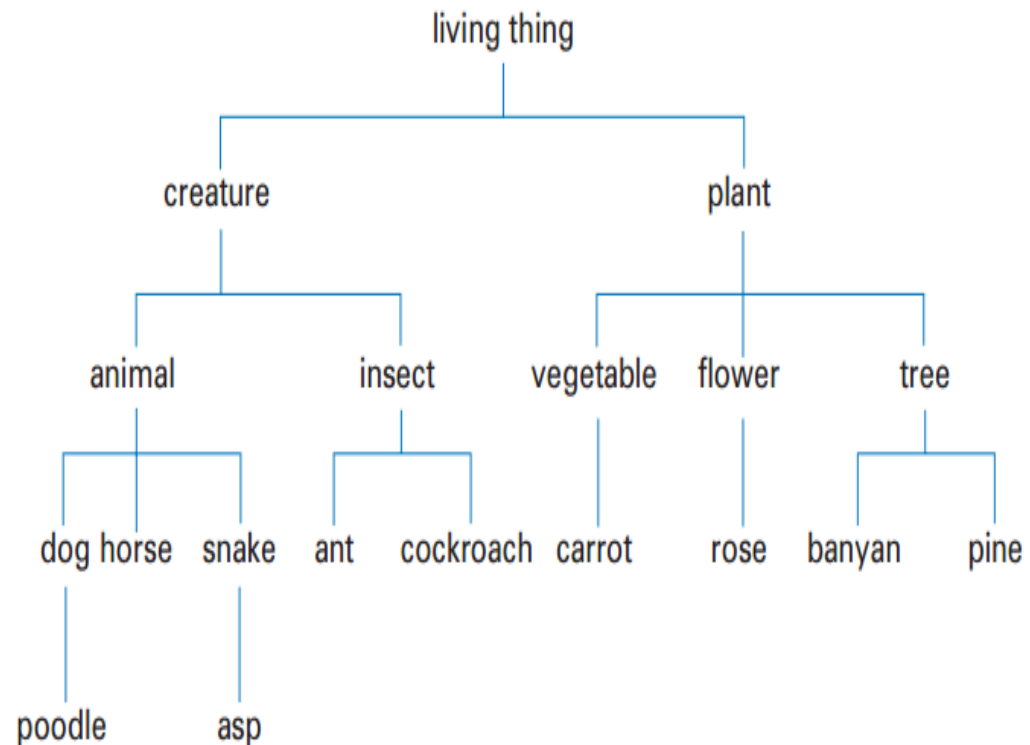
1. A **superordinate** is the higher level in the hierarchy. It at a given level can itself be a hyponym at a higher level.

2. **Co-hyponyms** are two or more words that share the same superordinate. For example,

✓ **Living thing** is superordinate for the co-hyponyms **creature** & **plant**

✓ **Creature** is superordinate for the co-hyponyms **animal** & **insect**, and so on

✓ This is described as a **hierarchical relationship**.



LEXICAL RELATIONS: HYPONYMY

The concept of “**inclusion**” involved in this relationship is the idea that if an object is a **rose**, then it is necessarily a **flower**, so the meaning of **flower** is **included** in the meaning of **rose**. Or, rose is a **hyponym** of flower.

The relationship of hyponymy = the concept of ‘**is kind of**’

➤ e.g. “**an asp is a kind of snake**”

It is not only words for “**things**” that are hyponyms. Words such as **punch**, **shoot** and **stab**, describing “**actions**,” can all be treated as **cohyponyms** of the **superordinate** term **injure**.

LEXICAL RELATIONS: PROTOTYPES

- **Prototype** is **the best or most typical example of a category** - the mental image that comes to mind when we think of a word or concept.
- Some members are **more representative of a category (closer to the prototype)**.
- Others are **less typical or peripheral members** of the same category.

Typicality	Birds	Description
Prototype	Robin, Sparrow	Small, can fly, have feathers, sing - match most “bird” features
Less typical	Penguin, Ostrich	Birds but don’t fly - deviate from the prototype
Borderline / Peripheral	Bat	Not a bird, but shares some similar features (flies, wings)

- Not all birds (like **canary, cormorant, dove, duck, flamingo, parrot, pelican** and **robin**) are equally good examples of the category “**bird**.”, although they are all **co-hyponyms** of the **superordinate bird**.
- Even native speakers of English might wonder if **ostrich** or **penguin** should be hyponyms of **bird** (technically they are), but have no trouble deciding about **sparrow** or **robin**. These last two are much closer to the prototype.

LEXICAL RELATIONS: HOMOPHONES AND HOMONYMS

- **Homophones:** Two or more words with different forms and the same pronunciation. For example,
 - ❖ Bare/bear, meat/meet, flour/flower, pail/pale, right/ write, hole/whole, to/too/two.
- **Homonyms:** the relationship between two or more words with exactly the same form and pronunciation, but have different or unrelated meaning. For example,

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ❖ bank (of a river) | bank (financial institution) |
| ❖ mole (on skin) | mole (small animal) |
| ❖ pupil (at school) | pupil (in the eye) |
| ❖ race (contest of speed) | race (ethnic group) |



LEXICAL RELATIONS: POLYSEMY

Polysemy: arises when **one form of a word** with **the same form and pronunciation** has **multiple meanings**, which are **related**. For example,

- **Head** (the object on top of your body) → **Head** (the person at the top of a company/ department)
- **Foot** = of person/ of bed/ of mountain
- **Run** = person does/ water does/ colors does.

Polysemy Vs. Homonymy

❑ **Homonymy** is an accidental similarity between two or more words.

Date = a thing we eat
Date = a point in time } **Homonymy**

To decide whether the word is **polysemy** or **homonymy**, it is often necessary to look at **the history of the word** to see whether the two meanings are historically related.

❑ **Polysemy** is not accidental, but related similarity.

Date = a point in time is **polysemous** in terms of:

1. a particular day and month (=on a letter)
 - The **date** on the letter was 30th August 1962.
 - What's today's **date**?
2. An arranged meeting (= an appointment)
 - Let's make a **date** to come over and visit.
3. A romantic meeting (=with someone we like)
 - I've got a **date** with Andrea tomorrow night.
4. A person (that person we like)
 - Can I bring my **date** to the party

LEXICAL RELATIONS: METONYMY

Metonymy: the use of the name of one thing for that of another with which it is closely associated. Making sense of such expressions often depends on context, background knowledge and inference.

1. A container-contents relation

- **Bottle/water** e.g. He drank the whole bottle. (i.e. he drank the liquid, not the glass)
- **Can/juice** e.g. boiling a kettle.

2. A whole-part relation (Meronymy)

- **Car/wheels** e.g. Nice wheels! Did you just buy that new car?
- **House/roof** e.g. They wanted to give every family a roof over their heads.
- **body/blood** e.g. The team needs some new blood if it is going to win next season.

3. Representative-symbol relation

- **King/crown** e.g. The crown announced new reforms for the country.
- **The President/ the White House** e.g. The White House has announced.

LEXICAL RELATIONS: COLLOCATION

- **Collocation:** a relationship between words that **frequently occur** together - they tend to occur in the **same situations** or **contexts**. **For example,**
 - ❑ **hammer/ nail** (You usually use a **hammer** with **nails**. So, when people think of a hammer, they often think of nails too)
 - ❑ **table/ chair**
 - ❑ **butter/ bread**
 - ❑ **needle/ thread**
 - ❑ **salt/ pepper**
 - ❑ **Break/ rule, break/promise, break/ heart**
- In recent years, the study of **which words occur together** and **their frequency** of cooccurrence has received a lot more attention in **corpus linguistics**.
- A **corpus** is a **large collection of texts**, **spoken** or **written**, typically stored as a **database** in a computer.

LEXICAL RELATIONS ANALYSIS

What is the basic lexical relation between each pair of words?

1. Sun / Son
2. Letter (alphabet) / Letter (message)
3. fruit → Apple
4. Smart / Clever
5. Salt / sugar
6. Bus → Vehicle
7. Rich / Poor
8. Hollywood → the American film
9. Paper (newspaper) / Paper (academic article)

Study questions

- 1 How is the term “prototype” used in semantics?
- 2 Using semantic features, how would you explain the oddness of these sentences?

(a) *The television drank my water.*

(b) *His dog writes poetry.*

- 3 Identify the semantic roles of the seven noun phrases in this sentence.

With her new golf club, Anne Marshall whacked the ball from the woods to the grassy area near the hole and she suddenly felt invincible.

- 4 What is the basic lexical relation between each pair of words listed here?

(a) *damp/moist*

(c) *furniture/table*

(e) *move/run*

(b) *deep/shallow*

(d) *married/single*

(f) *peace/piece*

- 5 Which of the following opposites are gradable, non-gradable, or reversive?

(a) *absent/present*

(c) *fail/pass*

(e) *fill it/empty it*

(b) *appear/disappear*

(d) *fair/unfair*

(f) *high/low*

- 6 Are these underlined words best described as examples of polysemy or metonymy?

(a) *The pen is mightier than the sword.*

(b) *I had to park on the shoulder of the road.*

(c) *Yes, I love those. I ate a whole box on Sunday!*

(d) *The bookstore has some new titles in linguistics.*

(e) *Computer chips created an important new technology.*

(f) *I'm going to sue your ass!*

ASSIGNMENT (2)...



**What are the similarities and differences
between metonymy and metaphor?**

Thanks