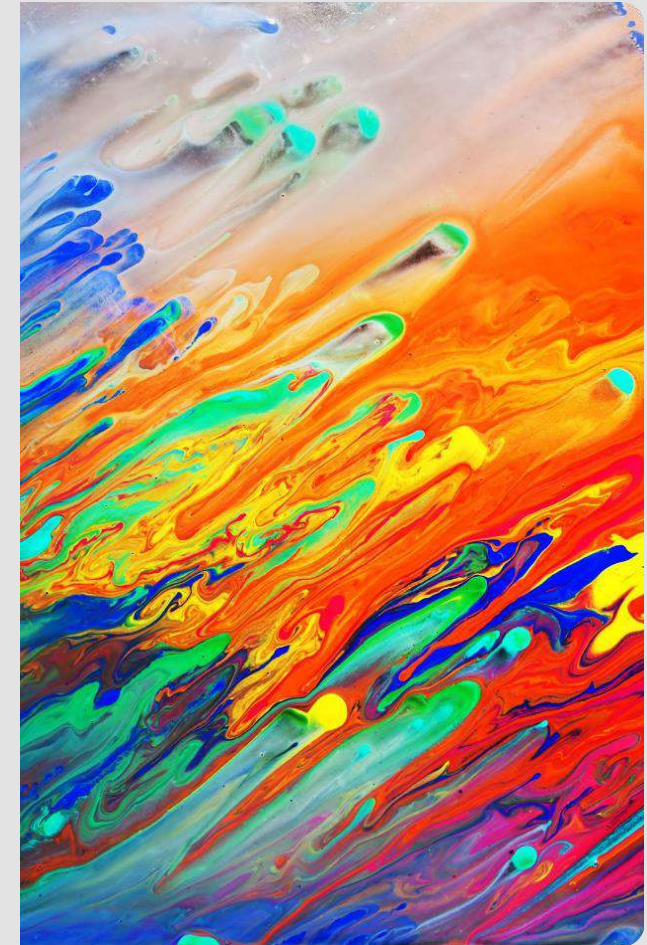


Module I. Lecture 2. Word Meaning



Plan

1. Referential approach to meaning
2. Functional approach to meaning
3. Relation between the two approaches

1. Referential approach to meaning

The referential approach seeks to formulate the essence of meaning by establishing the interdependence between words and things or concepts they denote. essential feature of this approach is that it distinguishes between the three components closely connected with meaning: the sound-form, and the actual referent, i. e. that part or that aspect of reality to which the linguistic sign refers.

The referential approach distinguishes between the three components connected with meaning: (1) the sound-form of the linguistic sign, (2) the concept underlying this sound-form and (3) the actual referent, that is the object of reality to which this linguistic sign refers. These relations may be schematically represented by the so-called “basic triangle”.

The meaning of a word denoting a concrete object is not identical with the underlying concept generalizing all the objects of this class. For example, the meaning of the word denoting the bird dove is not identical with the concept ‘bird’ as a class of objects to which a dove belongs.

The term «lexicology» is of Greek origin / from «lexis» - «word» and «logos» - «science»/ . Lexicology is the part of linguistics which deals with the vocabulary and characteristic features of words and word-groups. The term «vocabulary» is used to denote the system of words and word-groups that the language possesses.

The term «word» denotes the main lexical unit of a language resulting from the association of a group of sounds with a meaning. This unit is used in grammatical functions characteristic of it. It is the smallest unit of a language which can stand alone as a complete utterance.

The term «word-group» denotes a group of words which exists in the language as a ready-made unit, has the unity of meaning, the unity of syntactical function, e.g. the word-group «as loose as a goose» means «clumsy» and is used in a sentence as a predicative.

Lexicology can study the development of the vocabulary, the origin of words and word-groups, their semantic relations and the development of their sound form and meaning. In this case it is called historical lexicology. Another branch of lexicology is called descriptive and studies the vocabulary at a definite stage of its development.



Denotation vs Connotation

Denotation

Refers to the literal or dictionary definition of a word.

Connotation

Refers to the emotional or cultural associations attached to a word.

The Power of Connotation

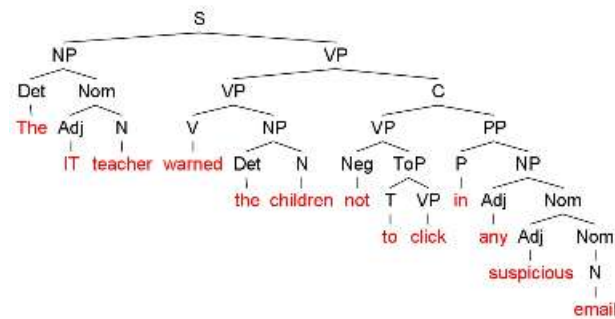
Connotation can heavily influence perception and interpretation, making it a valuable tool in advertising and communication.

2. Functional approach to meaning

The functional approach maintains that the meaning of a linguistic unit may be studied only through its relation to other linguistic-units and not through its relation to either concept or referent. In a very simplified form this view may be illustrated by the following: we know, for instance, that the meaning of the two words move and movement is different because they function in speech differently.

The functional approach maintains that a linguistic study of meaning is the investigation of the relation of sign to sign only. In other words, they hold the view that the meaning of a linguistic unit may be studied only through its relation to either concept or referent. E.g.: We know that the meaning of the two words a step and to step is different because they function in speech differently. To step may be followed by an adverb, a step cannot, but it may be preceded by an adjective.

The Role of Syntax



Logical Semantics Example

- John laughed
- laughed' (j)
- Nobody laughed
- $\neg\exists x[\text{laughed}'(x)]$
- But this is just translation! What's semantic about that?



Word Order Matters

The position of a word within a sentence can alter its meaning, as seen in example of "the dog bit the man" vs "the man bit the dog".

Sentences as Logical Structures

The arrangement of words affects the underlying logic of the sentence, with sentences being used to make arguments, construct narratives and describe structures.

Words Collide in Syntactical Arrangements

The meaning of a sentence is created by a network of associations between words, where no single word can be understood in isolation.

Semantic Fields

1

Words Relate to Each Other

Words are grouped together according to their shared features or relationships, forming semantic fields like "colours", "animals" and "emotions".

2

Words Can Be Multifaceted

Some words can belong to more than one semantic field, with the meaning shifting depending on the context.

3

Semantic Fields are Dynamic

The boundaries and membership of a semantic field can shift over time, reflecting changes in culture and language use.

Semiotic Analysis

1

From Linguistics to Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, moving beyond the study of language to look at broader systems of communication.

2

Signs Everywhere

Everyday objects, gestures and images are all forms of signs, and can be analysed using semiotic methods.

3

Meaning-Making as Social Activity

The meaning of signs is created within a social and cultural context, highlighting the importance of using semiotic analysis to understand social meaning-making processes.

3. Relation between the two approaches

The difference between the lexical and the grammatical component of meaning is not to be sought in the difference of the concepts underlying the two types of meaning rather in the way they are conveyed. The concept of plurality, for example, may be expressed by the lexical meaning of the word plurality. It may also be expressed in the forms of different words irrespective of their lexical meaning (girls, boards).

The interrelation of the lexical and the grammatical meaning and the role played by each varies in different word classes and even in different groups of words within one and the same class. In some parts of speech the prevailing component is the grammatical type of meaning. The lexical meaning of prepositions is, as a rule, relatively vague (to think of somebody, independent of somebody, some of the students). The lexical meaning of some prepositions is however comparatively distinct (in, on, under the table).



The Power of Language

Language as a Tool for Power

Language can be used to reinforce power dynamics between groups, by attaching positive or negative associations to certain words.

Language Shapes Thought

The words we use affect the way we think and perceive situations, making it important to analyse how language reinforces or challenges power relations.

Challenging and Redefining Language

Inclusive language and other forms of linguistic activism can challenge the status quo and shift power balances in more equitable directions.

The Future of Word Meaning



Machines and Meaning

As artificial intelligence continues to develop, our relationship with language and meaning will change, as we rely on machines to navigate increasingly complex linguistic landscapes.



The Brain and Meaning

Advances in neuroscience will allow us to better understand how the brain processes and stores meaning, with implications for education and communication.



Culture and Meaning

The meaning of words is constantly evolving within a cultural context, with changes often reflected in literature and other forms of creative expression.

Vocabulary Expansion

1

Reading Widely

Reading is one of the best ways to expand your vocabulary, exposing you to new words and phrasing.

2

Engaging in Word Games

Word games like crossword puzzles, Scrabble, and Boggle can help improve your vocabulary in a fun and engaging way.

3

Deliberately Learning New Words

Practicing using new words in context and studying their definitions can help you integrate them into your vocabulary over time.

A top-down view of a desk with a white wooden surface. On the left, there is a small bouquet of green leaves with yellow flowers. Below it, a pair of black-rimmed glasses is placed. To the right of the glasses is a green ballpoint pen. In the center, an open spiral-bound notebook is shown. The left page of the notebook has the words "Thank You For Your Attention" written in a black, cursive script. The right page is blank and lined. The spiral binding is on the right side of the notebook.

Thank You
For Your
Attention